Dear Percussion Student,

The study of timpani is an important part of your development as a well-rounded percussionist. Timpani have existed for centuries and are commonly heard in concert halls, on television and movie soundtracks, and in popular music performances of many kinds.

Begin your timpani study once you are comfortable with the basics of percussion playing, including the performance of eighth and sixteenth notes. By completing this Mini-Method, you will be prepared to perform timpani parts for the final two Band Pieces in Tradition of Excellence, Book 1: See, the Conquering Hero Comes and Riverside March. These timpani parts are found on Mini-Method pages 11 and 12. (Note that these are the only two Mini-Method pages that can be played along with the music in Tradition of Excellence, Book 1.)

This Mini-Method is written for two medium-sized timpani, with bowl diameters of 25 or 26 inches and 28 or 29 inches. Many sets of timpani include three, four, or even five drums. For now, focus on using only two drums. As the music you play becomes more challenging, adding more drums will be necessary.

Learning to play timpani is fun and challenging, as it requires refined technical skills and a keen ear. This Mini-Method will give you the solid foundation you need to continue your timpani studies for many years to come.

Best wishes,

Bruce Pearson
Ryan Nowlin
Timpani (Timp.)

Set-Up

1) Set up the timpani so that the largest drum is on your left and the smallest drum is on your right. The pedals should point towards you. The drums should be close together without touching.

2) Place the music stand between the drums so that you can see both the music and your director. You may need to reposition the drums to allow for a comfortable sightline.

3) Be sure the mallets and pitch pipe are in easy reach by positioning a small table or flattened music stand covered with a soft cloth close by.

Mallet Grip

1) Hold the mallets as you do when playing mallet percussion, keeping your palms down. When playing timpani, this is referred to as German grip. Keep your hands relaxed, leaving a natural space between your first finger and thumb. An alternative “thumbs-up” grip, known as French grip, is also sometimes used when playing timpani.

2) Choose mallets appropriate for the music. For now, use medium, felt-covered mallets designed for general-purpose playing. If the felt has a seam, grip the mallets seam-side-up to avoid contact between the seam and the timpani heads.

Playing Position

1) Stand 8 to 12 inches from the drums with your feet comfortably apart and weight equally placed on each foot. Remove tension from your body. Alternatively, you may sit on a high stool.

2) Hold the mallets a few inches above and almost parallel to the timpani heads. Your forearms should be angled slightly downward with your palms facing down (unless you are using French Grip). Your elbows should be in line with but slightly away from the sides of your body.
Making a Sound

1) Using your wrist, and integrating your fingers and arm as needed, raise the head of the mallet 8 to 12 inches above the timpani head. Then, strike the head approximately 3 to 4 inches from the edge of the bowl using a relaxed motion (as if bouncing a ball). The mallet shaft should be approximately parallel to the floor at the moment of contact. Strive for a clear, round, rich sound.

2) Allow the mallet to return naturally to the height from which it started; try to not restrict the natural rebound motion.

3) Practice strokes at different volumes by changing your mallet height. Notice that when you begin a stroke lower, it will produce a softer sound. Always listen carefully to the sound you are creating.

4) When alternating strokes on the same drum, separate the mallets by 4 to 8 inches, equidistant from the rim (exact mallet placement depends on the size of the drum and the desired sound).

Tuning the Timpani

Timpani are pitched instruments. This requires you to tune the drums to certain notes whenever you play.

1) Choose the drum that has the note you want to play within its range.

2) Place your foot on that drum’s pedal. Be sure that the pedal is set so that there is as little tension on the head as possible, and the drum is playing its lowest possible note.

3) Quietly play the desired note on a pitch pipe. Listen carefully to the note, then hum or sing it.

4) Quietly strike the head once using the mallet or your middle finger, with your ear close to the drum. While the drum is still ringing, move the pedal smoothly until the desired note is reached. As you tune the drum, listen only—don’t continue to hum or sing the pitch.

5) Hum or sing the desired note again and check the tuning by tapping the head. If the pitch of the drum is below the note you are singing, keep increasing the tension until the desired note is reached. If the pitch of the drum is higher than the note you are singing, release all the tension and begin again with Step 3. You always want to tune up to a note.

6) If the timpani have tuning gauges, use them only as a basic reference. Use your ears to determine the correct pitch.

Care & Maintenance

1) When the drums become dusty or dirty, wipe them with a soft, clean cloth. Replace the heads when they become worn, dented, or punctured.

2) Cover the timpani or apply head protectors after you are finished playing. Do not use timpani as tables, even when they are covered.

3) When moving timpani, be sure the wheel locks are off and hold the timpani by the struts.

4) Store your mallets in a stick bag, along with your other sticks and beaters. Mark any seams in the heads of felt mallets with a colored pen to make it easy to avoid playing on those spots.
1. Right On  
- The printed note name “Eb” just above the bass clef indicates to which note the drum should be tuned to perform the music.
- Tune the smaller (25”/26”) drum to Eb using the tuning technique on Mini-Method page 3. Play the exercise with right hand only, then with left hand only. Listen carefully and make each stroke sound the same.

2. Left Field  
- Tune the larger (28”/29”) drum to Bb. Play the exercise with right hand only, then with left hand only. Strive to make each stroke sound the same.

3. Round Tones  
- Notice that this exercise has the note names “Bb, Eb” just above the bass clef. This means two pitches are needed to play this music. Multiple pitches are listed from lowest to highest.
- Listen to be sure your right and left hand strokes sound the same.

4. Dynamic Duo  
- Reduce the height from which you begin each stroke while playing the P section.

5. Eighth Note Energy  
- Listen as you play: Is the tone of each note clear, round, and rich?

6. Excellence in Ear Training  
- You need to be able to accurately hum or sing a pitch to tune timpani. Practice by playing each note below on a pitch pipe, then hum or sing it. Play the note again to check how you did. Concentrate on pitch accuracy rather than the quality of your voice.
  - a) C
  - b) Bb
  - c) Ab
  - d) F
  - e) E
  - f) B
  - g) F#
  - h) A
  - i) D
  - j) C
  - k) Eb
  - l) Db
  - m) G
  - n) Gb
7. Back and Forth
Moderato
F, B♭
\[ \text{\underline{\text{\textit{mf}}}} \]

8. Tricky Sticky
Allegro
F, B♭
\[ \text{\underline{\text{\textit{f}}}} \]

9. Accent Alley
Andante
F, B♭
\[ \text{\underline{\text{\textit{mf}}}} \]

10. Even Eighths
Moderato
B♭, E♭
\[ \text{\underline{\text{\textit{f}}}} \]

11. Lift Off
Andante
F
\[ \text{\underline{\text{\textit{p}}}} \]

12. Chop Builders

13. Excellence in Ear Training
a) B♭ b) F c) D♭ d) C♯ e) A f) E g) D h) A♭ i) B j) C k) G♭ l) E♭ m) G n) F♯

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**Timpani Technique**

**dampening** – technique used to stop the natural ring of an instrument after you strike it; dampening usually occurs on rests or at the end of a piece of music.

**timpani dampening** –
1) Strike the drum as you normally would, and allow the note to sustain for its full value.
2) If a rest follows the note, or if the note occurs at the end of the piece, dampen the drum by placing your middle, ring, and little fingers on the head. Your thumb and index finger should continue to hold the mallet.
3) Try to dampen in the same spot that you struck the head. Be sure that no extra sound is made when you place your fingers on the head. Rolling your fingers or using a sweeping motion may help.

### 14. Left Hand Dampening

> Play the notes with your right hand, and dampen with your left. Set aside your left mallet until you are comfortable dampening with a totally free hand, then dampen while holding a mallet.

**Andante**

![Left Hand Dampening]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>C, F</th>
<th>R (L)</th>
<th>R (L)</th>
<th>R (L)</th>
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<th>R R R (L)</th>
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### 15. Right Hand Dampening

> Play the notes with your left hand, and dampen with your right. At first, set aside your right mallet; once comfortable, dampen while holding a mallet.

**Andante**

![Right Hand Dampening]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>C, F</th>
<th>L L (R)</th>
<th>L (R)</th>
<th>L (R)</th>
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### 16. Double Duty

> Dampen on the rests and at the end using the same hand that strikes the drum. The first time, use your left hand; on the repeat, use your right.

**Moderato**

![Double Duty]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>F, C</th>
<th>L L R (R)</th>
<th>L R L</th>
<th>L L</th>
<th>L R</th>
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### 17. You Make the Call

> Timpani parts sometimes include rests even when dampening is not necessary or musically desirable, and you must use your ears to determine how long notes should ring. With this in mind, play the exercise three ways: 1) dampening on each rest; 2) dampening on whole and half rests only; 3) never dampening.

**Andante**

![You Make the Call]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bb, F</th>
<th>L L L R (R)</th>
<th>L R R (R)</th>
<th>L</th>
<th>L</th>
<th>L</th>
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18. Get Ready to Roll

Allegro

For the most sustained sound, separate your hands by several inches so that the mallets strike in different beating spots, equidistant from the collar.

19. Roll Call

Moderato

When playing louder, loosen your grip. In the measures with a fermata, adjust the speed of the roll to achieve the most sustained sound. At the end of each roll, dampen with whichever hand is most convenient.

20. Sweet Rolls

Andante

Play a single stroke at the end of each roll as shown by the note attached to the tie. Only the hand that begins and ends each roll is indicated.

21. Rolling Along

Andante

Be sure to use unmeasured strokes when rolling.

22. Roll Etude

Moderato

1) Strike the drum using relaxed, unmeasured, alternating single wrist/finger strokes.
2) Let the natural vibrations of the head create the sustained sound. In general, the lower the drum is tuned, the slower the roll strokes need to be. Likewise, softer rolls generally require less frequent strokes. Listen as you play and adjust the speed of the roll to obtain the best sound.
The most common intervals in timpani music are **perfect fourths** and **perfect fifths**.

**perfect fourth (P4)** — the distance between the first and fourth notes of a major scale; on the staff, there are four lines and spaces from the bottom note to the top note.

**perfect fifth (P5)** — the distance between the first and fifth notes of a major scale; on the staff, there are five lines and spaces from the bottom note to the top note.

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### 23. Perfect Fourth Fitness

Maestoso

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### 24. Perfect Fifth Fun

Moderato

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### 25. The Fifth Degree

Allegro

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### 26. Excellence in Theory

- Identify each interval as a perfect fourth (P4) or perfect fifth (P5).

- Draw a whole note above or below the written note as indicated. Remember to use accidentals as needed.

- Review the music for each *Timpani Mini-Method* exercise listed below, and identify whether the notes are a perfect fourth (P4) or a perfect fifth (P5) apart. Write your answers in the blanks.

  a) #3
  b) #7
  c) #10
  d) #14
  e) #16
  f) #17
  g) #22

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As you become more proficient at timpani tuning, you should use a pitch reference only when necessary. This requires that you identify intervals at sight and by ear:

1) Identify the notes you need to tune, then play only the lowest note on a pitch pipe. Hum or sing the note to yourself and tune the appropriate drum to that note.
2) Identify the interval between the note you just tuned and the next note. Hum or sing that interval by ear and tune the appropriate drum to that note.

For now, check your accuracy by comparing the notes you tune to the notes on a pitch pipe (you can skip this once you become more proficient.) If the timpani have tuning gauges, use them only as a basic reference. Use your ears to tune and check each note.

Remember, the most common intervals you will find in timpani music are perfect fourths and perfect fifths.

To help you hear a perfect fourth, hum/sing the first notes of *Here Comes the Bride* or *Amazing Grace*. The interval between these notes is a perfect fourth.

To help you hear a perfect fifth, hum/sing the first notes of *Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star* or the “Star Wars” Theme. The interval between these notes is a perfect fifth.

Memorize the sound of these intervals. There are other ways to identify intervals and apply them to tuning timpani, such as using scale degree relationships. You will learn these techniques as you continue your music studies.

### 27. Ear-resistible

Tune the timpani using the steps above. Be sure to observe the key signature. After tuning, play and sing the exercise to help you internalize the sound of the interval used.

### 28. Tuning Perfection

Before playing each exercise, tune using the steps above. Observe the key signatures. After tuning, play and sing.

### 29. Smooth and Sustained

Tune by ear before you play. As the rolls crescendo, use larger (higher) and faster strokes; as they decrescendo, use smaller (lower) and slower strokes. Strive for a gradual dynamic change.
staccato stroke – used when a clear, cleanly articulated sound is desired, even if staccato marks do not appear in the music.

1) Tighten your normal grip at the point where your thumb and index finger grasp the mallet. You may also tighten your other fingers around the mallet for a more extreme staccato effect.

2) Strike the head using fast, snappy strokes. Lift the mallet off the head quickly after each stroke, as if touching a hot stove. The sound created should be clean, pointed, and precise.

3) When playing alternating staccato strokes, strike the head in as close to the same spot as possible with each mallet for the cleanest articulation. Try using harder felt-covered mallets for the most articulate sound.

30. Staccato Strokes

- Practice staccato strokes first with your right hand only and then with your left hand only. Notice that even long notes can be played with staccato strokes.

31. Clean and Crisp

- Always tune by ear before you play.

32. Short and Sweet

- Use staccato strokes on all eighth notes and sixteenth notes in this exercise.

33. Snap To It

- Move your playing area closer to the center of the heads where they naturally ring less, and strike in as close to the same place as possible with each mallet. Try using harder mallets for the cleanest sound.

34. New Interpretations


35. You Make the Call!

- Sometimes when composers write staccatos in timpani parts, the effect they are looking for requires that you quickly dampen notes as well as, or instead of, using staccato strokes. Experiment with a combination of staccato strokes and dampening to create the most musical interpretation of this exercise. Also practice Moderato and Allegro. How does changing the tempo affect interpretation?
ternary form – music with three sections: Section A, followed by a contrasting Section B, then Section A again

trio – third theme in a march, typically a contrasting section

See, The Conquering Hero Comes
from “Judas Maccabaeus”

Judas Maccabaeus, composed in 1746, is one of Handel’s most famous oratorios. This piece majestically commemorates the title character’s victorious return from battle.

Use this timpani part along with the other percussion parts on page 34 of Tradition of Excellence, Book 1.

Concert Etiquette

Dress nicely for every performance. If no specific guidelines are given by your director, be sure to ask what is appropriate. When you look your best, the audience will more fully appreciate your playing or singing.
Riverside March

Moderato

Introduction

Section A

1st Theme

Section B

Trio

Closing

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