

Problem Solving for the Everyday Percussionist

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As percussionists, we are often asked to carry out tasks that present challenges to us as performers. Our job as professionals is to navigate these difficulties as though they were not a problem at all. This presentation will highlight different issues which we encounter in our everyday routines, as well as more specific topics in our repertoire.

I. General Considerations

A. Choosing Appropriate Mallets

1. Choosing the correct mallet for your instrument (Marimba, Vibes, Woodblock, etc.)
2. Can I use one mallet for multiple instruments?
 - a) Mallet demonstration - *Uno e trino* by Giorgio Battistelli
 - b) Mallet demonstration - *Suitcase Music* by Marrison Dipronio Dike (Double ended mallet/brush)

B. Tray Tables and Mallet Placement

1. Looking professional - Black towels and tray tables
2. Other things to consider
 - a) Using the instruments themselves - *Uno e trino* by Giorgio Battistelli
 - b) Mallet Transitions - *Five Scenes from the Snow Country* by Hans Werner Henze
 - (1) Make transitions seem as smooth as possible
 - (2) Mallets low to high
 - (3) Mallets moving from the middle to the outside

C. Instrument Placement

1. Optimizing your percussion setup in Band, Orchestral, and Chamber situations
 - a) Small setups for small instruments
 - b) Location - make sure the instruments played in each piece are located as closely as possible to each other to eliminate traveling long distances which could distract listeners
 - c) Print Extra Music - Do not carry music with you when walking from one instrument to another

- d) Ensure that instruments are in a location where they can easily be played while simultaneously watching the conductor (large ensemble) or communicating with other performers (chamber ensemble)
- e) Don't be afraid to experiment with multi-percussion set-ups to ensure that the instruments you play are near each other. Often this may mean working through the piece with different instrumental arrangements in order to select the arrangement that is most comfortable

D. Sheet Music

1. Size reduction - Shrinking your music down can help fit more music on a stand at a time
2. Mounting - It often helps to mount minimized music on black poster board (or something similar)
3. Sliding - Once your music is minimized and mounted, this can allow you to slide multiple pages at once and reduce the overall amount of page turns. Look for optimal moments where you rest in order to achieve the most successful slides.

II. Musical Examples: Overcoming Compositional Challenges

A. Karlheinz Stockhausen: *Vibra-Elufa*

1. Problem: Specific tempo changes every few beats
2. Solution: Create a click track

B. Iannis Xenakis - *Rebonds b*

1. Problem: Playing simultaneous rolls and ornamented rhythms on the wooden blocks
2. Solution: The left hand plays a mandolin roll while your right hand creates a ruff by rotating your hand inward

C. Giorgio Battistelli - *Il Libro Celibe*

1. Problem: The composer asks the performer to build a magical book which can be brought to life by leafing through the book's prepared pages
2. Solution - A wooden case must be built which can hold different pages which the artist must prepare. For example, earlier pages which consist of different types of paper must be bound together (I staple these pages together) and then connected to the inner binding of the book. Other pages are more abstract. The last page which is written for birdcalls presents a unique issue: How to perform birdcalls with only your hands. I use a combination of calls which either use friction to initiate their sound, or air. In the case of the latter, I have attached jewelry/watch cleaners in order to push air through these instruments.