

# Accessory Percussion Techniques

By Steve Hearn

## TRIANGLES

### Description and Selection

Triangles range in size between 4-12 inches. The average triangles measure 6-9 inches.

For a thinner, brighter sound, a smaller triangle may be a better choice (not necessarily for playing soft).

For a thicker, darker sound, a larger triangle may be a better choice (not necessarily for playing loud).

A selection of triangle beaters that vary in size (diameter) must be available.

Smaller triangle beaters are used for a brighter sound and for better articulation of certain rhythmic passages (not necessarily for playing soft passages). Whether soft or loud:

- Smaller = thinner/brighter texture
- Larger = thicker/darker texture

Triangle clips must easily clip to a music or triangle stand. (Clips found at a general hardware store work well).

String clip with a thin cord, preferably made of nylon (i.e. fishing line or spider wire-NOT string!).

Mount two individual loops, one slightly larger to act as a backup if the smaller hoop breaks.

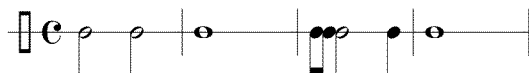
### Triangle Technique

Slow stroke = Dark/full timbre - rich attack

Fast stroke = Bright/thinner timbre - sharp attack

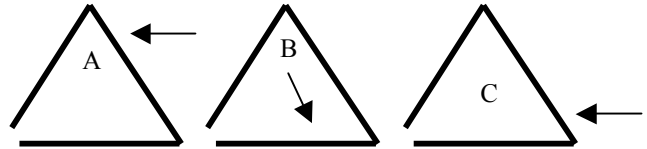
The thumb and first finger forms a letter "C" shape. Drop the clip and triangle into the "C" so the clip rests on top of the fingers.

Use this technique for slow to moderate rhythmic passages and long note values.



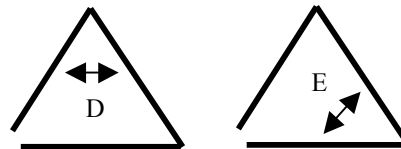
For a thin texture and less resonance, strike the triangle on the outside near the top (A). For a full

texture and resonance, strike the triangle on the inside of the base near the closed end (B) or on the outside near the bottom (C).



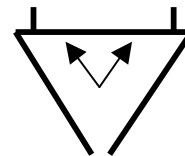
### Fast Rhythmic Passages (legato)

Place the beater inside the triangle and move back and forth between the two sides for a thin sound (D). Play between the base and the closed side of the triangle for a full sound (E).



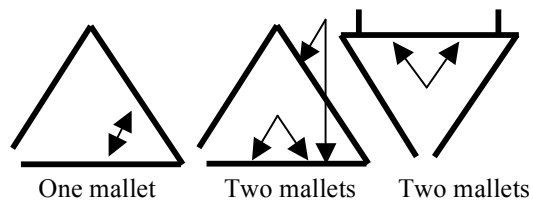
### Fast Rhythmic Passages (articulate)

Suspend the triangle from two clips with the closed side on top; play with a pair of matched beaters.



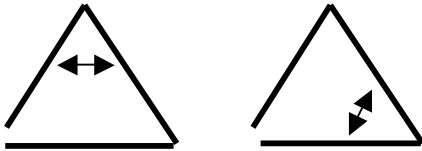
### Grace Notes

The most reliable method for playing grace notes is to use two matched beaters. Play on the base of the triangle if suspended from a clip and on the closed side if suspended from two clips. Use single strokes on all grace note figures.



## Rolls

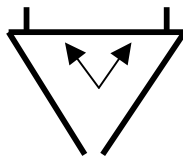
Hold the triangle as if playing single notes. Place the beater between the two sides at the top or between the base and the closed side. Move the beater back and forth to create a smooth, sustained sound.



Thin timbre

Full timbre

Suspend the triangle from two clips. Play on the closed side using a single stroke roll to create a smooth, sustained sound.



Using this method, roll on two suspended triangles to add color and complex texture.

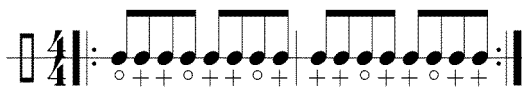
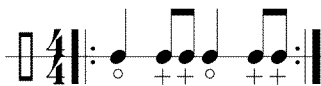
## Dampening

A general rule for dampening the triangle is to let everything ring unless there are obvious unison staccato notes. Listen and emulate the musical interpretation of the ensemble.



The triangle is dampened by squeezing the remaining three fingers of the holding hand into the heel of the hand.

Practice the following groove patterns using damping:



## TAMBOURINE

### Description and Selection

The tambourine is a hand drum with two different sounding parts: the head and the jingles. The head is calf or goat skin of medium thickness and stretched over the shell.

The standard tambourine size is about ten inches in diameter with a double row of jingles (preferably staggered).

The shell should be lightweight to allow easy movement and to permit an acceptable vibration.

Grip the tambourine with either hand. Place the thumb on the top rim and let the fingers curl around the shell under the head (like a baseball grip). Placing the thumb on the head produces a muffled timbre.

### Tambourine Techniques

Since speed and volume are restricted when playing with one hand, another technique must be devised. Tambourine techniques are affected greatly by different dynamics and tempos.

Loud and slow - hold the tambourine about shoulder level and play with the tips of the fingers near the edge for a thinner/bright timbre, off center for a full/darker timbre (bunch the fingers together and form a flat surface) or play with a closed fist off center for more accent.



**Soft and slow:** Rest the heel of the palm on the head of the tambourine (less head sound, think texture). Extend the fingers to the edge and strike alternating the point and middle fingers.

Or

Rest tambourine on leg thigh and muffle as needed with holding thumb while playing head.

Or

Rest tambourine on leg (head down) and play wood hoop for no head sound and a very crisp jingle timbre.



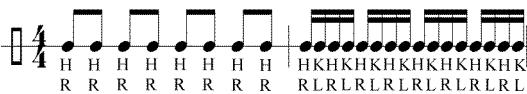
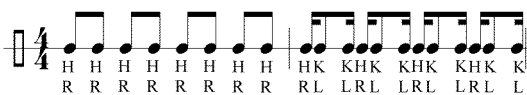
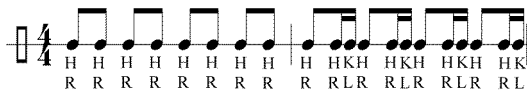
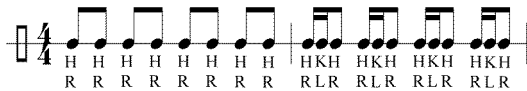
Fast and loud - 1) Hold the tambourine with the head facing down. Alternate back and forth between the knee and the group of fingers playing on the inside head. 2) Hold the tambourine with the head facing up. Alternate back and forth between the shell striking the knee and hand striking the head.

Fast and soft - lay the tambourine on the thigh or a padded trap table. For a crisp jingle timbre, face the head down and strike the wood hoop. For a fuller timbre, hold between your leg and gut, face the head up, and strike the head near the rim. Play with the fingers of both hands.

Use more fingers for louder passages.

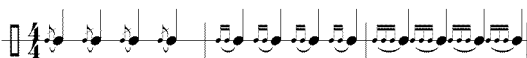
Use fewer fingers for softer passages.

H=hand K=knee L=left R=right



### Grace Notes

Fast and soft - hold the tambourine between your leg and gut, single stroke the grace notes.



Fast and loud - use the hand-knee technique to play the grace notes.

### Rolls

Common practice - start and stop the roll with a head tap according to ensemble articulation. Occasionally no head tap is necessary.

Shake roll - hold the tambourine in either hand, rotating the wrist in the same manner as the left hand traditional grip for snare drum. Simultaneously, add a slight forward/backward wrist motion in the same manner as matched grip to create a fluid circular motion.



Soft roll - 1) Hold the tambourine alongside the leg. Jingles should be light, bright, and delicate for extremely long rolls. 2) Hold between leg and gut at a 45 degree angle - this frees both hands to play rolls and articulate passages.

Loud roll - hold the tambourine in front at about eye level.

Extremely loud rolls - use two tambourines.

Thumb and finger rolls - move the thumb (or finger) along the edge of the tambourine. The rapid bouncing causes the jingles to vibrate. To get friction between the head and thumb (or finger), either dampen the finger or rub bass rosin or bee's wax on the head to create a sticky surface facilitating friction and the bouncing effect. This technique is used primarily for soft to medium loud short rolls.



When playing rolls that are part of a rhythmic passage, drop a finger, the heel, or the thumb to lightly tap the release. A larger (12") tambourine can be played for longer thumb rolls.

### CONCERT BASS DRUM Heads and Tuning

Standard sizes include 36" X 16" and 36" X 18".

Head material varies from (natural) calfskin to (man-made) plastic. Avoid clear or plastic heads. Most head manufacturers offer calfskin-like synthetic heads that offer a rich deep timbre.

Tune the playing head a ½ step, whole step, fourth or fifth below, the resonating head. (Resonate head is tuned higher than batter head). Ensure that the playing head is not floppy, so that it is articulate and resonant. Suggested batter head pitches are C, D, or E.

## Mallets

General beater - medium to large headed felt mallets: these produce a well-rounded, resonant tone.

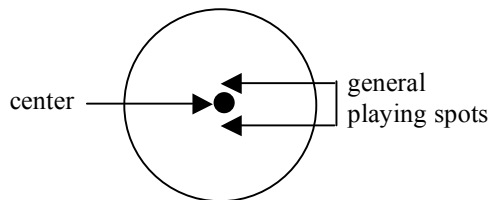
Rolling beaters (pair) - a matched set of beaters.

Large and small staccato beaters - less felt and a harder core; used for articulating rhythmic figures and sharper impact.

## Playing Area and Strokes

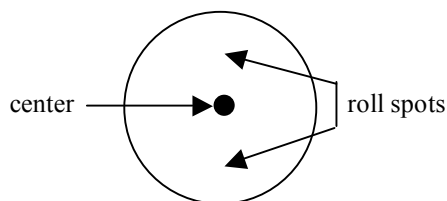
### General Playing Areas

Warm/full timbre and general playing spot = slightly off center.



The edge is used for special effects (thin sound and higher overtones).

1/3 the distance from the rim to the center is used for general loud and soft full bodied rolls.



The center of the head offers an extremely articulate attack. The closer the stroke to the center, the more articulate the note becomes.

## Proper Strokes

The general playing stroke is produced by the forearm and the wrist. Soft strokes are produced mostly by the wrist. Loud strokes are produced by adding the upper arm to the general stroke.

Keep the stroke smooth and in a continuous motion. Emulate the smooth motion of a basketball dribble. **Darker/full attack** = slower stroke speed. **Brighter/sharper attack** = faster stroke speed.

## Dampening and Muffling

To dampen is to stop the vibration of the head by exerting pressure with the hand, arm or knee. It is important how to dampen and when to dampen.

General dampening consists of tilting the bass drum, striking with the right hand, and dampening with the left hand. Dampening ranges from one finger-to-the entire hand-to the left forearm, while placed at the edge to the center of the head. (Muffling with the forearm creates a dark/rich muffled timbre).

A very staccato and dry timbre is achieved by muffling the batter head with the right hand (or right knee) and the resonant head with the left hand.

Very little muffling is usually required (left hand only on the batter side), and the left hand usually muffles between strokes to ensure the fullest/warmest tone is achieved.

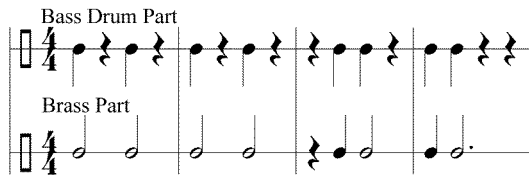
A towel laying on the head and attached to the BD rim with a clamp is often used when two handed articulate passages are needed.



Composers and arrangers are frequently not familiar with proper BD techniques and accurate notation. Thus, written note values are often not consistent with the rest of the ensemble.

Players must listen and interpret the written part to match ensemble articulations. Check the full

score for the proper note values, as shown below:



## **CYMBALS**

### **Crash Cymbals**

#### *Types*

A standard pair of crash cymbals is 17 or 18 inches in diameter and has a quick response to vibrations. These are generally used when a cymbal part has a combination of loud and soft strokes and rhythmic passages.

The French style cymbal features a bright/thinner timbre with quick response and fast decay. These cymbals are thin, have a bright attack and higher overtones.

The German style features a dark/thicker timbre with slower response and decay. These cymbals are thick and heavy.

A smaller pair of cymbals should be on hand in order to have better control during softer, more delicate passages. However, smaller cymbals create a thinner texture than larger cymbals.

#### *Grip*

The index finger and thumb curl around the strap nearest to the cymbal bell (fulcrum) and either:

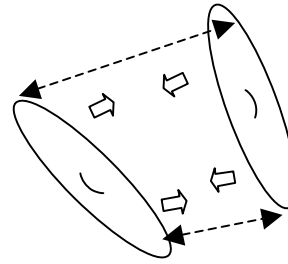
- (1) lay the middle and ring fingers in the strap with the pinky on the outside, or
- (2) lay the strap in the palm and wrap the other three fingers around the strap similar to a snare drum stick grip.

#### *Crash Cymbal Stroke*

Slow stroke = Dark/full timbre - rich attack

Fast stroke = Bright/thinner timbre - sharp attack  
Strike each cymbal slightly off center to avoid air pockets (no sound) and to initiate as many overtone vibrations as possible.

Right and Left cymbals: Tilt near a 45 degree angle, simultaneously, with equal velocity, strike together in a flam motion – edge near player first, then furthest from player.



#### *Loud, Fast, Repetitive Crashes*

Keep cymbals closer together with increased impact velocity – faster acceleration to impact.

#### *Soft Crashes*

Keep cymbals very close together to achieve a cymbal angle between 5-15 degrees.

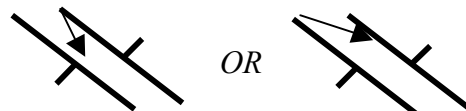
Separate the cymbals with the edge of the bottom cymbal above the edge of the top cymbal.

Drop the top cymbal by pushing downward with the thumb and forefinger and let the cymbals slightly sizzle as the top cymbal glides down the bottom cymbal.

Or

Drop the bottom cymbal onto the top cymbal and let the cymbals slightly sizzle as the bottom cymbal glides down the top cymbal.

Vary the sizzle length to create different crashing timbres.



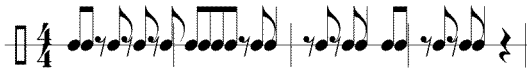
#### *Dampening*

Bring the cymbals into the upper part of the body and arms.



A forte-piano effect is accomplished by dampening only one cymbal.

The dampening rules for inconsistent written and sounding note values on bass drum also apply to cymbals. Some parts indicate a need to dampen, although the tempo and note values may not allow for this – listen to the ensemble!



## ***Suspended Cymbals***

### *Selection*

Suspended cymbals are usually thinner and lighter in weight than crash cymbals. The standard sizes, which respond very quickly when struck with a mallet, are usually 16” to 18” in diameter.

**Smaller cymbals** offer a thinner texture and respond quickly. Rapid response for crescendos and diminuendos.

**Larger cymbals** offer a thicker texture and deeper sustained sound.

Utilizing small and large cymbals simultaneously, even for one written note, offers multiple timbre nuances.

Suspend the cymbal with a strap from a boom or goose neck cymbal stand. This allows the cymbal to vibrate freely and eliminates stand noise and interference. (Note: The cymbal may also be placed on a regular cymbal stand by ensuring proper felts and rubber sleeves are used.)

### *Mallet Selection*

Rubber, soft wound yarn or cord mallets allow the cymbal to respond quickly and initiate fundamental and overtones.

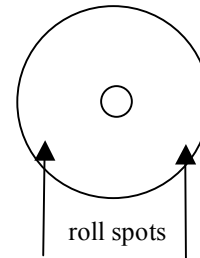
Other implements include snare drum sticks, triangle (metal) beaters, brushes, etc.

Rolls specified with sticks are played as a buzz roll on the outer edge of the cymbal.

## ***Playing Techniques***

Strokes are made on the edge of the cymbal unless otherwise specified in the score.

A roll is controlled by placing the mallets on the edge at approximately 4 and 8 o’clock.



The louder the roll – the slower the roll speed.

Additional effects call for different areas of the cymbal to be struck, scraped, or rubbed by triangle beaters, coins, a bass bow, etc. A sizzle effect is obtained by holding a thin triangle beater on the cymbal and then striking the cymbal with another mallet.

Muffling is used to articulate rhythmic figures.

For slow tempos, use one hand to muffle and one hand to play.

For fast tempos or when both hands are needed to play, use your midriff or another player's assistance to muffle.

## ***Bass Drum and Cymbal Attachment***

### *Cymbal Grip and Selection*

\*See Crash Cymbal Grip section.

For loud playing, use a larger cymbal on top.

For softer playing, use a smaller cymbal on top.

### *Dampening*

Bring the top cymbal into the chest and grab the attached cymbal with the right hand (BD beater in hand).

Dampen or muffle the bass drum with the right knee.