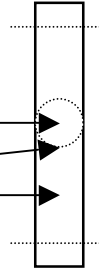


Marimba Techniques

by Steve Hearn

What Affects Tone, Color, and Articulation?

1. Choice of mallets and instrument
2. **VAP**
 1. **Velocity of mallet**----- (Kinetic Energy)
 - a. Velocity changes sound more than mass: $1/2MV^2 = \text{Energy}$
(Energy changes sound)
 2. **Angle of mallet**----- not the rebound after the stroke
 - a. **Focused** = core of mallet (elbow down)
 - b. **Unfocused/Veiled** = top of mallet (elbow up)
 3. **Placement of contact on bar**
 - a. **Center** = Full/Dark
 - b. **Off Center/Resonator Edge** = Medium Thin/Bright
 - c. **Between Node and Resonator Edge** = Thin/Very Bright
 - d. **On Node** = Very Thin/Super Bright



Memorization - KAVA

1. Kinetic – muscle memory / physical motion memory
 - a. Most dangerous – performance nerves directly affect muscle memory
2. Audio – hearing the music in your head (i.e. Dave Samuels, Gary Burton)
3. Visual – seeing the score/music in your head
 - a. Develop your photographic memory
4. Academic – 50% of practice time – Pencil Practice / Piece Analysis
 - a. Analysis – Form, Tonal, Rhythmical, Structural, Motivic, Thematic
 - b. “The only way to play music is to think like a composer”-Robert Van Sice
 - c. Think in figured bass

***All four must work together and simultaneously so each supports the other.**

Body Position

Mark in music where your body position is – i.e. where the left leg, right leg, and/or body center are. This helps create more consistent kinetic and visual memory.

Physical Line

1. The physical line is the straightest line possible, including the wrist and elbow, from the mallet head to the center of the chest.
2. While keeping weight centered in the hips, shift the majority of body weight to the right or left leg to produce the straightest line.
3. Keep the center of your weight behind your stroke to get the fullest sound possible.

Bowing

A bowing is equivalent to a motive or very short phrase. Like a violinist, a marimbist should learn phrases by grouping several notes into one motion to create a bowing rather than learning in a vertical one-note-at-a-time manner. Learn a piece bowing by bowing (motion by motion) rather than note by note.

General comments for all exercises; all items have equal importance:

1. Begin on natural bars to establish proper wrist and finger motion
2. Add chromatic sequence after the hands have learned proper position
 - a. This step adds full body motion
 - b. Pay close attention to the **LINE** of the upper body in relation to the hands and feet
3. Accuracy is a must
 - a. No wrong notes in exercises means less wrong notes in actual repertoire
4. Placement of mallet contact on bar – 4 choices
5. Angle of mallet stroke - Focused and Unfocused (Veiled) Timbre
6. Volume balance between RH and LH
 - a. Middle C as center, 1 and ½ octaves above and 1 octave below is the marimba's most resonant area
 - b. Thus, play notes above and below this area according to your desired balance
 1. Top 1 and ½ octaves need more velocity and a faster stroke-more whip of the wrist
 2. Bottom octave needs more velocity and a deeper stroke
7. Musical line (phrase)---Play exercises musically
 - a. While ascending-crescendo, descending-decrescendo
 - b. Invert and/or compose different musical lines

Exercises: mallet numbers = 1, 2, 3, 4 from left to right

1. All major and minor scales two octaves-two repetitions
 - a. 2, 3 1, 3 2, 4 for fun 1, 4
 - b. Keep carrier mallets (non striking) and striking mallets at a minor third to a perfect fourth interval distance apart
2. WHIP EX - Double stops: 3rds, 4ths, 5ths, octaves-**Keep A Continuous Motion**
 - a. Watch horizontal line-**the top of the thumb is closer to a 45 degree angle than a 90 degree angle**
 - b. On larger intervals, imagine a mallet in the center of the playing mallets to keep an even horizontal line
3. WHIP EX. With Interval Changes
 - a. "Pop" interval change on up stroke
 - b. Over exaggerate shift changes: if 80% motion gets the job done, extend to 100% movement
 1. Elbow really out-elbow next to body
 2. The elbow should be thrown from the stroke rebound
 - c. Ex. 1
 1. Right Hand Alone (Play natural notes first, then add chromatic progression)
 2. Left Hand Alone (Play natural notes first, then add chromatic progression)
 - d. Ex. 2 and Ex. 3 (Play natural notes first, then add chromatic progression)

The image displays three musical exercises on a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) in 4/4 time. Ex. 1 is a right-hand solo starting on middle C, playing a chromatic scale (C, C#, D, D#, E, E#, F, F#, G, G#, A, A#, B, B#, C) with a 'pop' interval change on the upstroke. Ex. 2 and Ex. 3 are double stops. Ex. 2 features a chromatic progression in the right hand (C, C#, D, D#, E, E#, F, F#, G, G#, A, A#, B, B#, C) while the left hand plays a constant bass line (C, F, C, F). Ex. 3 features a chromatic progression in the left hand (C, B, B#, A, A#, G, G#, F, F#, E, E#, D, D#, C) while the right hand plays a constant bass line (C, F, C, F). The word 'etc' is written below the first measure of the bass line in Ex. 1.

4. Arpeggios: mallet sequence 123, 234 up and 432, 321 down
 - a. Practice both major and minor keys
 - b. Begin with natural keys – once comfortable, expand to chromatic arpeggios
 - c. Play block chords first in order to practice correct intervals
 - d. Once correct intervals are achieved, begin mallet sequence alternating strokes
 - e. Accent mallets 2, 3
 - f. No accents, add longer phrases-**BOWING**

5. Top beginning exercises from Leigh Howard Stevens *Method of Movement for Marimba*
 - a. Double Vertical: read pp. 32-33; ex: 162-170, 202-206, 207-210, 271
advanced ex: 241-242, 249-252, 257-262, 263-266-octave double stops
 - b. Independent: read pp. 26-29; ex: 1, 5, 29-31
 - c. Alternation: read pp. 30-31; ex: 50-63, 70-77, 134-145
 - d. Double Lateral: read pp. 32-34; ex: 279-294, 327-334

Etudes to Compliment Exercises

1. Paul Smadbeck (beginning)
 - a. Etude #1-small intervals and wrist motion, Etude #2-alternation, Etude #3-one hand rolls
2. Gordon Stout (intermediate) Etudes 1, 2, 3, 5 and 7

One Hand Roll

1. Begin with single strokes (3,3,3,3) and add the other mallet one stroke at a time
(3,4,3,3,...3,4,3,4,3,3,...)
2. Short bursts (3,4,3...3,4,3...3,4,3,4...3,4,3,4...) similar to drag rudiments
3. Long smooth roll with short burst (accelerando)
4. Begin roll in air-mallets move contrary to hand, drop to bars-mallets synchronize with fingers

Roll Speed (One of the marimba's beautiful features is the ability to sustain by rolling)

Roll = Vibrato

Roll speed is like a string instrument's vibrato. Changing the roll speed and type changes the articulation. You hear the strokes – it's part of the sound. All string instruments, vocalists, etc. put "stuff" (vibrato) in their 'roll' or long tone.

General Concepts

1. **Speed Up** for dissonance notes and to add intensity
2. **Slow Down** for consonance notes and to relax intensity
3. **Change Speed** constantly to create different **colors** and **intensity**
4. **Portamento** (A smooth uninterrupted glide in passing from one tone to another)
 - a. Slide between rolled notes for more connection
 - b. Softens interval changes
i.e. Soprano Kathleen Battle and cellist Yo-Yo Ma

Practice Concepts

1. Unison block chords with different rhythmic pulse (3's, 4's, 5's, 6's)
 2. Split block chords (alternate double stops) w/diff rhythmic pulse (3's, 4's, 5's, 6's)
- Triple Stroke Roll (i.e. mallets 1,2,3)—creates different roll effect than alternating strokes

Post Thought (By Robert van Sice)

1. Fact: Before age 11, the human ear is an open book. By age 11, the human ear has developed pitch recognition. After age 11, it is harder to learn pitch – one can only refine it.
2. Problem: Why do most percussionists learn snare drum first - at a time when children haven't developed their motor skills? We often miss the prime opportunity to develop pitch recognition and musicality.
3. Solution: We, as teachers and educators, need to flip the paradigm – TEACH and LEARN mallets and pitch first (or at least teach/learn them along with snare drum).