

A Dozen Things You Will Figure Out Sooner or Later

An assortment of advice about performance, logistics, and professionalism that one rarely sees printed.

- I. Seek out and eliminate weaknesses during practice, hide and avoid them by playing to your strengths during performances. For example: Practice snare drum technique to build both hands to an equal level. During performance, though, there's no rule that makes you alternate hands when playing it right handed will sound better.

- II. A rehearsal time means to be setup and ready to play the downbeat at that time. Do what you need to do to make that happen. Yes, a flute can fit in your pocket, and a clarinet player can walk in to rehearsal and be just as ready as you will be at the downbeat, but this is one of the trade off's you've accepted by choosing percussion. Enjoy the schlep.

- III. A Percussionist is expected to play everything. In the real working world, there is no such thing as a 'snare drummer' or a '2 mallet player'. It's fine to play any single instrument for personal enjoyment, but as soon as you venture into any sort of collegiate or professional realm, you will need to augment your skills.

- IV. Towels are your friends. Get cheap black bath and hand towels from Wal-Mart or Target for about \$7. They can create a 'silent' trap table out of music stands, the unused register of marimba/xylo, a timpano, or the lid of a glock case. (Why most brass players don't figure this out to prevent mute droppage noises is beyond me!) They're also good for dampening an over resonant bass drum (clip a small one to the rim and adjust the amount of hang), subito glock/crotale dampening, or for throwing over sympathetic instruments in extremely quiet situations (gong, timpani).

- V. Photocopy to avoid difficult page turns while performing (and rehearsing!). It's legal; just destroy the copy when you're done with it.

- VI. Get an adjustable lead pencil and use it. Keep it clipped to the lip of your stand. Mark in instrumental cues for extended rests, timpani tuning indications, unison instrumentations, rhythmic grouping indications in odd meters, and even mistakes to look out for. Sometimes circling a troubling part is all that you need to do to fix it. A quickly scribbled V.S. mark or a circle around an instrument change will save you a lot of trouble.

- VII. Dampening is a necessary part of your technique. For any instrument that has a measurable length of sustain, you are in control of when that sound can and should end. This includes Timpani, Glock, Chimes, Toms, cymbals, bass drum, or even a very 'live' snare drum.

- VIII. Cover all the parts. The vast majority of the time, it is generally possible to cover all the ensemble parts even when there are one or two fewer players than parts. Use items V and VI to help you out. Sometimes, a quick survey of other players might let you give the part to another available player in the section (this one is also handy when you simply don't have enough time to switch instruments). If you won't be there, get a sub. Your part's absence affects the balance of the entire ensemble. Let people know you'll be gone and find an able bodied person, paid if necessary, to fill in for you.
- IX. Be quiet back there! If you can hear the snare drum buzzing during a soft section of music, so can everyone else. Mark in where to turn off the snares, if needed (and do so when the sound made turning it off can be masked by the ensemble). This also applies to any extraneous noises that percussionists are more prone to making, including stick and instrument changes. Any audible sound could be perceived as part of the music (especially more 'modern' 20th century music).
- X. Ultimately, performing musicians survive on their abilities. Who your previous teacher was or where you studied is great for getting you in the door or landing an interview, but ultimately those things don't matter if you cannot produce.
- XI. Real musicians can read and improvise*. These two skills are the ultimate tests of a player's practical musicianship. They measure understanding of the inner workings of music. As for improvisation, it does take a concerted effort on its own to feel fully comfortable with playing over the chord changes of a jazz lead sheet. The context primarily referred to here is more stylistic and free improvisation.
- *Rote learning/memorization would be the third method of processing information that would be respectively important in more populist/folk types of music like ethnic percussion, rudimental drumming, and pop music.
- XII. "Don't Evaluate While You Participate." If you read the "Inner Game of Tennis" you'll know exactly what this means. This summarizes the performance where you're nailing everything but as soon as you say to yourself "hey, I haven't made a mistake yet!" you make an error. It is the self fulfilling prophecy. This is partly why the best performances are difficult to remember, and seem to fly by, while the bad ones seem to take forever.

