



# OSU MARCHING BAND PERCUSSION

A GUIDE TO TECHNIQUE

2015

# WELCOME TO THE OSU MARCHING BAND PERCUSSION SECTION

## THE APPROACH

The 2014, OSU percussion program, will be focusing on technique as it applies to the style and tradition of the ensemble but motivation to improve musicality and sound projection at a high level. Please take the time to read through the concepts in this packet. Some performers will find these concepts familiar and others will be learning them for the first time. Every performer is coming from a unique background and their approach to technique may be different than others. The goal is to play extremely musical and have a uniformed approach to the technique. We ask that you keep an open mind when reading through this packet. The technique mentioned in this packet will allow us to be uniformed in our approach but more importantly, create a quality of sound that will allow us to play musical within the entire ensemble.

The development of this technique may take time and hard work but maintaining a consistent practice schedule at home will allow us to progress at a much faster rate. We are only as good as our weakest member. Practicing often and pushing your hands is paramount for the development of the percussion program at OSU. We want you to have the need to be better for every rehearsal and performance situation. To achieve this it will take time, struggle, and dedication.

William James, American Philosopher once said, “Need and struggle are what excite and inspire us”. If you have the need and go through the struggle, you will excite and inspire those around you to be amazing.



# A MUSICAL APPROACH THROUGH SOUND PRODUCTION.

The foundation of consistent sound begins with control of each sound component within each basic stroke type. The exercises are meant to be a culmination of this work rather than a point of departure. We hope this packet provides new insight within your musical development and an opportunity for continued technical and musical growth.

You have spent a great deal of time in your musical career developing a technique, understanding complex rhythms, and integrating tempo control at various speeds. As percussionists we have played on drum sets, snare drums, marimbas, practice pads, and even our coffee table. How often do we think about our quality of sound we are producing? We spend so much time learning the latest exercises and pushing tempos, we cannot forget about the actual sound we produce on our instrument. We challenge you to be aware of your sound no matter what instrument you play. Practicing is no good if you are not practicing with a purpose. The purpose of great technique and great sound will allow you to play musical in all situations.

BEING AWARE OF THE FOLLOWING CONCEPTS WILL  
PREPARE YOU IN UNDERSTANDING AND DEVELOPING A  
GREAT SOUND WITHIN THE ENSEMBLE.

- **Duration** - Is the sound we produce “dry”...a short sound, or “wet”...a longer sustained sound? As a percussionist, much of this is affected by how open or closed we are in our grip. The tighter we grip the stick into the palm of our hand the

drier the sound becomes. As the implement is allowed to resonate, the duration of our sound will increase.

- **Timbre** - What is the tone color of the sound we produce? Is the sound “bright”, or “dark”. In most cases we are looking for a dark timbre to our sound, however it is important to know how to create both. Much of this can be controlled by how we transfer weight to the instrument and the velocity the implement is traveling. The faster the implement travels to the surface, the brighter and more articulate the sound becomes. Inversely, as we use more weight and less velocity, the sound will become proportionately darker. Within our playing we must be able to use different combinations of weight and velocity in order to control timbre and articulation.
- **Tone** - Tone should be one of our highest considerations regardless of your instrument. In general, strive to produce a sound that is characteristic of the instrument we are playing, with the fullest tone possible. We must first be aware of what a great characteristic sound is on our instrument and work to produce that at all times. We can learn a lot by listening to top musicians and ensembles around the country and paying attention to not only what sounds they are making but how they are making those sounds.
- **Consistency** - Strive to maintain an unchanging sound, note to note...or hand to hand. This incorporates all of the components above. Any change in duration, timbre, or tone should be a conscious decision and should be used as an expressive musical tool. This may be the single largest challenge a player faces. This also requires the most detailed listening. It is very important to not rely on “does it feel the same?” but really evaluate “does it sound the same?”.

# PRACTICING CORRECTLY IS KEY

As you prepare the information in this packet we encourage you to focus on the micro first and build that to the macro. Isolate stroke types and focus on the details of that specific stroke type before working through the entire exercise. As you encounter unfamiliar material, isolate the specific issue and work that issue until you feel completely comfortable with it. Once that is the case, begin to put it in context of a few measures to see if you can retain the detail within a larger passage of music. Understand that your development of this packet and your development as a player is a marathon, not a sprint. It is about detailed preparation and isolation of each piece in order to gain complete comfort over the whole. All elements: rhythm/ pulse, dynamic levels, consistency of sound, consistency of grip, flow of the stroke, and mental focus, must be accounted for in each portion of each exercise, and in each exercise as a whole. We encourage you to prepare on an instrument as much as possible. Drum pads are a great practice tool, however in order to prepare to perform, you must play as much as possible on an actual instrument. This also will allow you to truly focus on sound and feel, and build consistency on the instrument on which you will ultimately perform. Lastly, while the metronome is a huge element in preparation, we do not use a metronome in performance, so you must use it as a tool rather than building dependence on it to feel comfortable. Ultimately it must be your goal to prepare not to audition, but rather to perform. In today's technological world, use every resource available to you in order to be as detailed as possible in your preparation. This includes digital recorders, video recorders, and most importantly, other players around you that can listen and comment on your sound and performance. The best way to prepare to perform is to perform as often as possible.

The ability to use a metronome will be a key element in your technical progress. We will always set target tempos to

achieve for each exercise. Maintaining consistent pulse will be a huge part of your success. Maintaining proper technique while using a discerning ear at various tempos will allow you the flexibility to improve rapidly.

Another great tool is the use of pre recorded music. This year we will be introducing a new portion of the percussion program by having the drumline perform live with recorded music. The ability to maintain tempo control through exercises with pre recorded music will improve your tempo control, technique consistency, and push your listening skills greatly.



# MUSICAL DYNAMICS

WE WILL RELATE MARKED DYNAMIC LEVELS TO BE INTERPRETED BY SPECIFIC STROKE HEIGHTS IN ORDER TO MAINTAIN A CONSISTENT LOOK AND APPROACH TO OUR INSTRUMENT.

It is important that as you move between dynamic levels that you focus to maintain a consistent sound at all levels. In addition to correct heights, it is important to constantly listen and make sure that the dynamics are accurate in sound, not just accurate in height. That is, a *f* dynamic level should produce twice as much sound as a *mp* dynamic level. By focusing on the amount of sound being produced at each level (within the given height) we can make slight adjustments in stick velocity to produce the accurate dynamic and begin to build muscle memory within each of these dynamic levels.

<i>pp</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>mp</i>	<i>mf</i>	<i>f</i>
1.5"	3"	6"	9"	12"
Stroke height	Stroke height	Stroke height	Stroke height	Stroke height

WE MAY ALSO USE LARGER ARM STROKES TO PRODUCE BIGGER SOUNDS WITH A MORE AGGRESSIVE APPROACH.

*fff* = Stroke hinged from elbow (still contains wrist bend in addition to arm)

*ffff* = Stroke hinged from shoulder (contains minimal wrist bend)

We will also implement dynamic control within certain exercises. Traveling through the dynamic range on a consistent basis will allow us to gain the muscle memory we will need to play crescendos and decrescendos and maximize our musical touch. Feel free to experiment with 8's going from 1" to 12" strokes and from 12" to 1" strokes. You can also experiment with roll exercises and quicker "gear shifts" in dynamics. We will sometimes refer to switching gears in an effort to explain going to the next dynamic level. Being able to switch gears through multiple gears quickly will be an advance skill we will start to look at as the technique begins to conform throughout the ensemble.



## THE GRIP

Our ultimate goal for the OSUMB Percussion Section is to have a uniformed technique and a uniformed sound as an ensemble. attaining this may be a challenge for an ensemble of our size but everything centers around the grip of the stick or mallet.

We will start with the matched grip approach. For matched grip, the fulcrum should sit around a third of the way from the butt of the stick. When you establish the fulcrum on the stick, make sure the thumb and index finger are aligned and that the thumb is sitting directly in line with the stick. The common habit to fall into is letting the thumb drop, or roll, below the stick. Unfortunately allowing this to happen will inhibit you from having the control we will need at lower dynamic levels. Lacking that control will reduce our quality of sound we strive to get at the softer dynamics. When placing the stick in the palm of your hand make sure the butt of the stick comes out around the wrist bone. Another common occurrence will be to allow the stick to shift underneath the wrist, forcing you to have an unnatural upward rotation in the wrist. When looking at placing the rest of the fingers around the stick we want to picture a "cup" being created between the stick and the palm of the hand. The "cup" is a dominate force in

our sound and how it is created. This "cup" space will determine how much resonance we create in the stick and that will translate into resonance of the instrument. When the wrist is in a full extended position, there should be approximately an index fingers worth of space between the stick and the palm of the hand. This process will allow the stick to rebound freely and allow the stick to properly resonate creating an opportunity for a great quality of sound. The back three fingers play an important role and should remain in contact with the stick at all times. Be cognizant that the fingers do not squeeze the stick up into the palm of the hand. By doing this it will close the "cup" we have created in our grip to establish great technique and sound throughout the ensemble.

Now that the grip is established, simply allow your arms to naturally hang at your sides. Now ben from the elbow lifting the stick up to the playing surface of the drum. You want to create a natural playing position for your hands and alleviate any unnecessary tension in the shoulders or neck. The index knuckle will be on top and the hand will be slightly turned out from being completely flat. In dealing with some instruments( snare drum) we may have to position the elbow away from the body slightly to create a congruent angle between the left and right stick on the playing surface. The slight adjustment should come

from the elbow and allow the wrist and forearm to adjust naturally to that position. Using a mirror when establishing the match grip, and eventual stroke, will help consistency of our technique.

The traditional grip in the left hand is more of a natural position because of the way we angle our snare drums. We also use stands for our snare drums throughout the season which creates a conundrum for us technically. We will always have to adapt to our playing situations but here is a description of the technique if the drum was flat on a stand.

Again, we will begin with the fulcrum of the

**“No student ever attains very eminent success by simply doing what is required of him: it is the amount and excellence of what is over and above the required, that determines the greatness of ultimate distinction.”**

**Charles Kendall Adams**

grip which in this case will be the thumb hinge. The fulcrum should also sit about a

third of the way from the butt of the stick. The stick should be supported under the side of the thumb where the thumb joint joins the hand. This will be just behind the index knuckle joint. The stick should rest against the ring finger, just at the side of the finger nail. The index finger and middle finger should curl naturally around the stick but not add downward pressure against the stick. The pad of the thumb should rest against the index finger around the last knuckle. It is very important to not add downward pressure with the thumb into the index finger, or the middle finger, as that will choke the stick and inhibit rebound. This is one of the largest pitfalls we see as people develop traditional grip approach. The motion from the left hand should be completely rotational from the wrist with the motion generating from the thumb hinges where the stick is supported. It is important to build the rotation of the wrist and not allow the forearm to lift as the wrist rotates. It is also important to allow the elbow to move naturally as the wrist rotates, as to not freeze the motion in any way.

## THE APPROACH TO THE STROKE

There are many ways to approach the stroke for single and double strokes. In the OSUMB our primary focus will be a combination of weight and velocity. The percussionist must be very critical of each note they are producing on the instrument. The ability to focus your energy on listening as well as the stroke will insure you are taking the proper steps to achieve a consistent sound. The primary concept is to start at the top of the stroke and release the energy toward the head. We talk about throwing the stick toward the head as opposed to pushing the stick. We want to throw the stick toward the head and allow it to naturally rebound off of the head. If the technique is working you want to focus on a “continuous” motion to the stroke and wrist. This concept for the stroke will allow us to get a mrs resonate sound out of the drum. If the performer is getting a “harsh” sound from the instrument it is probably because they are “pushing” the stick as opposed to “throwing” the stick. As you throw the stick, think about all of that energy happening in the first third of the stroke motion. That is...in a 12 inch stroke, the energy happens in the top 3 inches of the stroke, and in a 3 inch stroke the energy happens in the top 1 inch of the stroke. We suggest starting with a 12 inch stroke to get a strong feeling for this concept and then work down through the smaller strokes. As you throw the stick, in a matched grip approach, be aware that the entire hand should be driving the stroke, not just the fulcrum. Think about throwing the entire hand and entire stick toward the surface,

rather than just the tip of the stick, or the front of the grip. In a traditional grip approach, the same concept applies. Be aware not to push the stick down with the index finger but rather throw the entire stick at the surface from the thumb hinge. While adding this velocity to the stroke, it is important to understand that you should allow the stick to rebound freely at all times and understand that the intent is never to play "hard" but rather to keep consistent energy behind the stroke. As you play strokes repeatedly, it is important to be aware of sound differences from stroke to stroke. Assuming that your height is consistent, the sound is the best way for you to compare the amount of velocity being used. Once you get comfortable with the sensation of the motion, focus solely on sound. It is this sound consistency that we are ultimately after. This will also help you to achieve a consistent sound quality through all dynamic levels. Understand that a consistent dynamic level and full sound are the priority! There are inevitable tendencies between different dynamics and stroke heights. Here are a few you should be aware of. As you play from a *ff* level, be sure that you are truly producing an *ff* sound. If the velocity is consistent with that of every other stroke, the dynamic will be accurate, however it becomes very easy to begin to "float" the stroke a bit and not get the full amount of sound capable from that level. At the *mp* level, be aware not to allow arm to creep into the motion. Also be careful not to begin to squeeze the stick at all. That tension in the grip will only create a choked sound and a loss in total sound produced. As you become comfortable with "throwing: the stick from the top of the stroke,

return to the tacet position to start the stroke. As you begin and end at the tacet position, it is advisable to periodically go back to the "top of the stroke" approach to compare sound. If you notice a harsher or more choke sound, that is generally a result of "stopping" the stick or closing the grip in order to return to tacet.

## ACCENTS AND TAPS

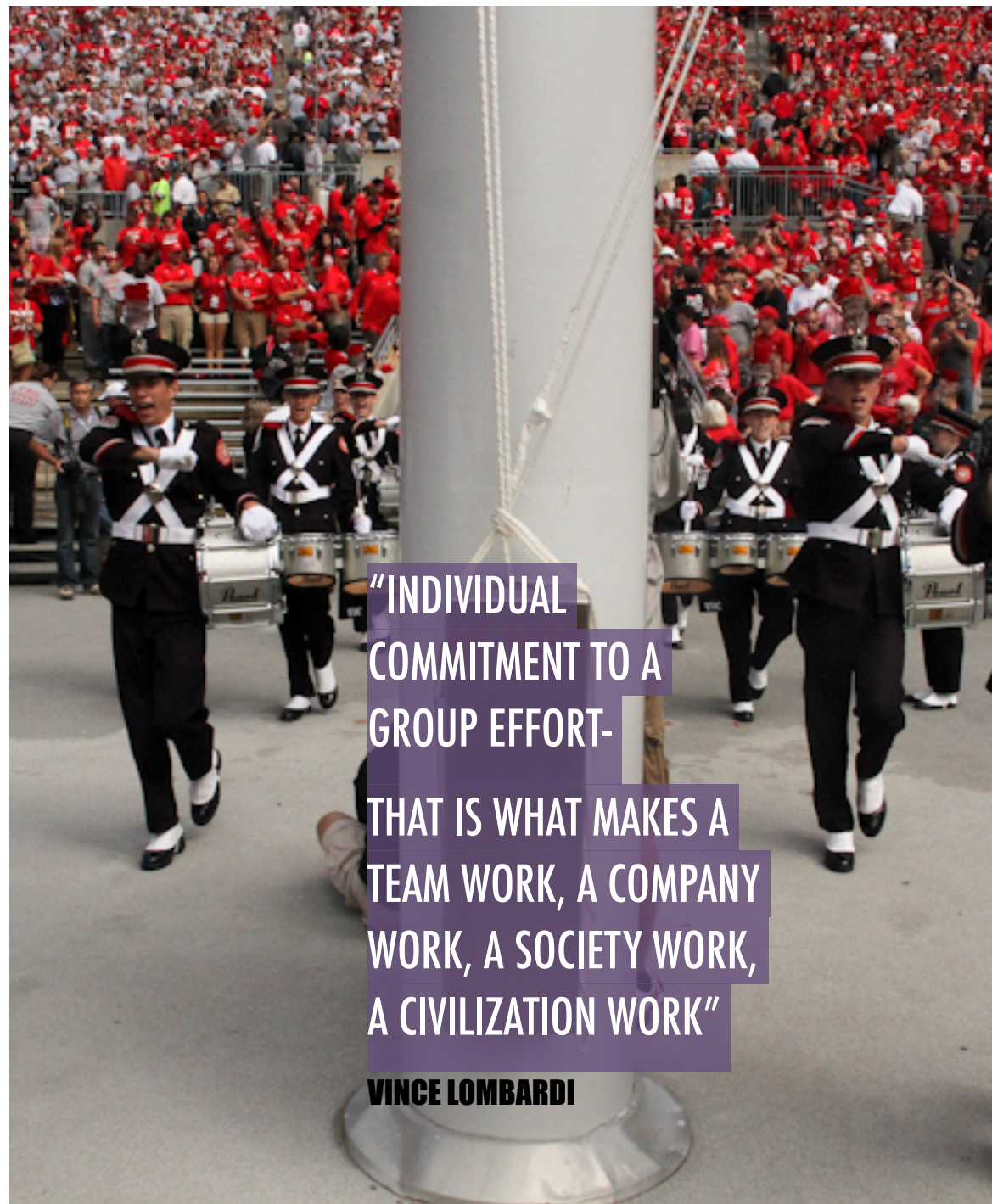
The philosophy of accents and taps consist of the initial stroke previously talked about but now we introduce the ability to "stop" the stick. When we "stop" the stick we are stopping the sticks motion to rest at the "tacet" position or return to a lower dynamic level. The "tacet" position should always be approximately 1" from the head. The important thing to remember is that the path in which the stick follows should never



change or be altered in anyway. This is the only part of the stroke that affects sound, and in order to produce a consistent sound quality (regardless or single stroke, double stroke, accent/tap, etc.) we must always approach the "down" motion in the stroke the same. This is one of the most difficult concepts for most developing percussionist to truly master, and must be a focus within all of the technical and musical work that you do. When approaching an accent to a tap level there are two parts you must focus on. First is that the accent level is precisely that..a level. It is not a change in stroke approach. An accent marked at *f* is merely a *f* stroke and should contain the same quantity of sound and velocity that would be produced from any other *f* stroke. Often accents become "over played" and are played harder or with more down stroke than other strokes. This produces a great inconsistency of sound. Secondly, you must allow the stroke to travel to the surface freely and not "grab on" or "squeeze" the stick on the way to the surface. In order to get the stick to "stop" at the correct height, be that a tacet position or lower dynamic level, you must control the rebound from the surface to stop the stick on the way up. This will allow each stroke to have the same fullness of sound and motion. Concentrate on maintaing the same quality of sound at the "*p*" level as you get at the "*f*" level. Again, by using a discerning ear while practicing you can rapidly improve your sound while improving your technique.

# UNDERSTANDING DOUBLE STROKE AND TRIPLE STROKE

As you approach your double stroke, it is important to understand that the principles and sound are exactly the same. Begin from the top of the stroke and work to get the second note of the double stroke to return completely to the level you began. In order to do this, you must focus on the second stroke always coming “up” out of the surface and not allow yourself to close your back fingers to produce the second stroke. As you close the back fingers two things will happen. First, the stroke will stop at the surface, not allowing the next stroke to be prepared and long terms making it very difficult to roll in extreme dynamic levels. Secondly, the second stroke will not have the same sound as the first, as it is being produced through a different motion and usually a different height. In order to help control the rebound, you are able to use slight pressure changes in your middle and ring finger to affect how the stick responds off the surface. As you begin to play double strokes at higher tempos, you will eventually need to begin to integrate some forearm into your stroke. By using this double approach, and working with the middle and ring finger pressure, you will be able to meld from a totally wrist based double stroke to one containing forearm with virtually no change in the grip and only a very slight sound difference. As you gain consistent control over the double stroke at a moderate tempo, work to go back and forth across tempos that require some forearm so you are able to compare the sensation within the hand as well as the sound being produced as you go back and forth. Once you have gotten comfortable with the “up stroke” necessary to produce the double stroke consistently, you can apply the same approach to the triple stroke. As with the double stroke, we want to use the rebound off the surface but work to produce and “up stroke” from the third note.



**“INDIVIDUAL  
COMMITMENT TO A  
GROUP EFFORT-  
THAT IS WHAT MAKES A  
TEAM WORK, A COMPANY  
WORK, A SOCIETY WORK,  
A CIVILIZATION WORK”**

**VINCE LOMBARDI**



WE SHOULD STRIVE TO HAVE A GOOD  
BALANCE BETWEEN MUSICALITY AND  
CONTENT.

As you invest time in your practice, it is important to remember that your approach to the single and double strokes, and the matching of those strokes hand to hand, are the single most fundamental piece in the sound you will produce as a percussionist. In addition to working through the exercises, you must be willing to isolate these stroke types to perfect the sound and motion. Ultimately, your ability to hear slight variances in sound from stroke to stroke will be the single greatest contributor to your improvement. In that way, you should become the strongest teacher you have. In order for that to happen you must first, and always, make the sound you are producing the priority.

## HAND AND STICK MOTION. . .FLOW

Hand and stick motion is extremely important when we produce longer rhythmic phrases. Stopping the stick through a rest and striking again a beat or two later may not always be the best choice. Instead, we will allow the stick to *Flow* during the rest. For example: If you have a quarter note on beat one, followed by a quarter rest on two, and another rhythm starting on beat 3, generally we would not stop the stick at tacet following beat one. We would allow the stick to rebound across the rest to eliminate the re-attack on beat 3. This approach significantly helps the flow of rhythmic time within a phrase. In the course of doing this we often end up carrying the stroke “higher” than the next indicated dynamic level. As we described in the Dynamics portion, it is about the amount of volume produced, rather than height of the stroke. With that in mind we can carry the stroke across the rest to 12” or even 15” and still make a Fortissimo entrance on beat 3 as long as we are aware of the dynamic we are choosing to produce. The idea of Flow is not just used across rests, but rather within any rhythmic structure or phrase that could possibly contain interruptions in hand motion. We use this approach throughout the percussion ensemble on a consistent basis.

# PHILOSOPHY AND EXPECTATIONS

The ability to perform on this national stage is a privilege and one that should be taken seriously. Every member of the percussion section must take responsibility for their role in this machine we call “Marching Band” at The Ohio State University. Once we begin our season, we are a family and we need to have some expectations as we move forward.

- Be on time
- Show up prepared
- Have a positive Attitude
- Show respect for others
- Take pride in your rehearsal space
- Respect our equipment

The goal should not be to simply maintain from year to year. We would like to keep building and pushing the playing levels year after year. The focus, drive, and attitude begins now. . .with you.

