



Athenaeum

Establishing, Preserving, Maintaining and
Upholding the Expectations, Traditions and
Framework of the Plano Drumline Program

By Michael Anthony Hernandez
and members of Plano Percussion and the Plano Drumline

A Perspective Look Back at Plano Percussion and the Plano Drumline

Ranjit Chima, Class of 03

At first glance, PSHS does seem to be a step up in personal responsibility. You fill out your class schedule thinking, "How in the world am I going to be able to do all that?!" The truth is, it IS a large amount of work. There are many time commitments that necessitate your attention in the 11th and 12 grades.

I wasn't sure that I would be able to maintain my academics at PSHS and still be a committed member of the drumline and band programs, and this caused me to pause before I tried out for drumline in 11th grade. I am VERY glad I chose to stick with it; drumline left me with an invaluable set of experiences that I will never forget.

Just so you know, my schedule necessitated about 2-4 hours of solid study each night (that is an average- some nights more, some nights less), but in all honesty, after immersing myself in a high-demand schedule, I learned the basics of time management VERY quickly. (Most schedules will probably not get any more rigorous than between 2-4 hours a night, unless you choose to take 7 classes.)

Time management at PSHS is absolutely critical, especially if you plan on taking some of the more challenging honors and AP level classes. However, you should not think that just because you are taking 2 or 3 AP classes that you will not have time to do anything but study. Nothing is further from the truth. Although probably you have not experienced the level of coursework required in an AP class, if you take things in small steps at a time and make sure that you stay on top of all your assignments and reading, you should be able to cope with it. At no point was the coursework unnecessarily excessive; it was only when I failed to stay on top of my stuff that I experienced real time crunches. That said, having drumline deadlines and band commitments not only provided me an outlet for enjoyment and a break from studying, but it also caused me to develop time management skills that are essential for success in college (as I am now finding out). Make no mistake: you will have to learn time management sooner or later. For me, drumming was a great way to force me to learn how to be a time-efficient student.

Time management at PSHS as well as anywhere else is all about learning where to give and take, where to concentrate your time, and prioritizing. Fortunately, these skills were all reinforced by the band and drumline program, which had its own set of deadlines and obligations for me to meet.

While in college you may not necessarily be able to directly apply the musical skills you acquire in drumline (for example, my school's drumline does not even remotely compare to Plano's), but at the end of the day you ARE left with an appreciation for strong performance, attention to detail, and a sense of dedication that can definitely be applied to future projects.

I currently am involved in several dance teams, musical jam groups, and other student organizations at my college. What I am beginning to find is that the leadership and people skills I developed while in the Plano Drumline continue to help me to this day. I really mean that because of my membership in the Plano Drumline, I have a much higher set of expectations than most people as to what constitutes excellence. The most important thing that the Plano Drumline taught me was the real meaning of dedication. Dedication is not simply the will to get from point A to point B. Real dedication is the will to get from point A to point B while exhibiting excellence.

If you have reservations about being able to maintain your academic schedule and do drumline at the same time, my advice to you is this: if you lack dedication, it will not matter whether you are in the drumline or not. You will need to be self-motivated and efficient to succeed no matter what course of study that you choose. Participation in the Drumline program will help you learn and/or refine many of the skills you need to be an effective student. Band and academics do not have to be mutually exclusive: participation in one can improve your performance in the other.

-Ranjit

PS. If you need more than this, I would certainly be glad to write more. Additionally, I would be willing to field individual emails from the students in case they have questions they want to ask me. You can give them 'rchima@gmail.com' as my email address.

Take it easy, Mike.

Rehearsal Etiquette

By Brian Schallenberg, Class of 05

Rehearsal is where the drumline is made or broken. You will quickly find out that Plano is like no other experience. This is true for all subject areas because your levels of work and expectation are raised. However, the difference between math class and the Plano Drumline is that you're part of a tightly woven group. Others, rather than just yourself, depend on you. We are all working for each other to make a great product, and rehearsal is where it happens. Now, let's lay the ground rules...

1. Constructive criticism is vital to any program, whether it be from the band directors, the instructors, or even your peers. Accept it, process it, and fix it. Additionally, rehearsal is the time to ask questions if you're unsure about a part. Don't wait for the first game or performance to say, "Oh yeah, umm, I didn't know how to play that."
2. If you're at attention, do not break. This protocol or etiquette is a key aspect of a mature Drumline. There will be a designated member who will call break. Until it is called, stay at attention.
3. Many times you will be given music and expected to learn it very quickly. To make the process easier, several things must be done. Place the music in sheet protectors in a black binder. Organization makes rehearsal more productive. Highlight your parts if the music has split parts. A major downfall of the battery is the infamous flip folder with drill team music. Let's put an end to that and get it taken care of correctly. Lastly, learn the music as fast as you can, and then faster. That makes the difference between fun rehearsals and rehearsals that drag along. And remember, what you "think" you know, you don't, because the marching drill has the amazing ability to make you forget. So yes, memorization is required in this program.
4. Follow all equipment protocols for every rehearsal. All equipment must be well kept and regardless of the situation must always be in top form. Unorganized equipment on the ground makes for disrespect of the group. Always have unworn equipment placed in a designated formation. Command respect.
5. Snare line and Tenor line: Each member must have a measuring stick at all times. The height system utilized in the Plano Drumline is not ambiguous; 6" means 6"
6. Battery equipment is never to be on the field, in a practice, at a rehearsal without its respective drum cover. Never.

7. Never allow yourself to play with inferior sticks, mallets, or implements. All implements need to be in good working condition.
8. Always have your drill cards handy. This doesn't mean, "Oh, it's in my band locker. I can run and go get it if you'd like." Have it on your person for every rehearsal.
9. Always be early, periodically on time, never late. Please have a reason if you're late or absent, not an excuse. Definitions: Reason- out of your control; Excuse – based on convenience.
10. Be smart about things. Failure to follow this rule damages the program's credibility and all that we're working towards. If you're unsure about whether or not a future action will be deemed inappropriate, don't do it. Ask an instructor or student leader for verification.

Enjoy what you're doing because it is part of something great. It's worth it!

Plano Drumline Performance Etiquette

By Brian Schallenberg, Class of 05

All the same rules for rehearsal apply to the performances, except for a few minor details.

1. For all performances, have your appropriate attire. If you don't, you will not perform. Your uniform should never look unprofessional; worn or on a hanger in your uniform bag. Secure suspenders. At Plano, a hat is no longer a hat. It is a shako. Never hang a shako from any kind of hook. Additionally, a plume is now a chicken. Don't ask for any explanation of the nomenclature. Penalty of death. When moving in the block or individually, shakos are to be held in the correct manner. This includes: Snares – On top of the drum after a performance or curled in your arm and upright before a performance, Tenors – On top of the drum 3 after a performance or on top of drum 3 shell before a performance, Bases and Cymbals – curled in your arm and upright before or after a performance, Pit – You all don't wear shakos. When in the warm up area, shakos are to be placed in front of you, in order, with your section. Wristbands need to be worn to properly secure the jacket sleeves.
2. Sticks and mallets need to be properly taped for every performance. Extra sticks are necessary because they will break when you least expect it. Everyone is responsible for attaining the agreed upon stick or mallet. Never enter a performance arena with inferior or unacceptably conditioned sticks, mallets or implements.
3. Every person is responsible for his or her own instrument and accessories. Remember, this year we have new Dynasty drums. With the new equipment, the expectation for upkeep, care, and responsibility will be even higher. Keep that in mind.
4. Practice and prepare on the bus ride over. This will mentally and physically warm you up for the task ahead. Stay focused, especially during warm-up. Disregard and ignore all distractions during this time.
5. You're going to be playing in front of many eyes. They not only watch you during the show, but also in the stands, warm-up area, parking lot, etc. Everything you do is a reflection of our program and tradition.
6. In the stands, set up quickly and be ready to stand at attention when called. Organize your uniform bag and shako box according to the rest of the drumline. Regardless of how well the football team may be doing, everyone loves cadences. Enjoy them, but it is not a time to forget cleanliness.
7. On the field, you're a statue, and nothing will faze you. Perform with pride, feel the energy, command the respect.

8. Play your best and stay focused on what you're doing. However, be prepared to adapt to changes. Nothing is ever perfect, how you problem solve and recover is equally important.

All performances will be enjoyable and organized if these rules are followed. Get ready, we'll play rain or shine.

Procedural Information

By Chelsea Conway, Class of 05

A. Afterschool Rehearsal

Wednesdays (4:30-7pm) will be competitive drumline show days for everyone involved. Monday, Tuesday, and Thursdays (4:30-6:30pm) will be full marching band rehearsals. All band members are expected to be ready in their assigned spots in the marching band basics block no later than 4:30pm at which point the band is called to attention. Anyone not at attention in the spot will be marked late and subject to a daily grade reduction. The front ensemble will have until 4:40 to have all of their equipment in position.

The key word, or phrase is: personal responsibility. Rehearsal is not a chance to learn your music for the first time. Music is passed out in advance for a reason. The directors cannot possibly catch every mistake, which is why you need to listen to student leadership and hold yourself accountable. Every problem has a solution, so if you mess up, fix it. Do not rely on others to do your job. Order of operations: 1. individual, 2. section, 3. group/ensemble.

Time is critical and should not be wasted. Take advantage of breaks to look ahead, fix a set, review musical trouble spots. Keep good attention to everything going on. Try not to "space-out." A true test of mental strength and character will occur when the temperature is hotter than ever and you are running on no sleep. Also, listen to the people helping you. They are there for your benefit, not their own. Give them the respect they deserve.

B. Game Day Procedure

1. Personal equipment is your responsibility. This would include drum, case, carrier, sticks, stands, mallets, keyboard equipment, accessories, uniform and bag, black socks, shoes, sashes, and shakos.
2. Everything listed in rule #1 should be in complete working condition. Inspect all equipment beforehand to be sure of this.
3. After school is let out, drums and cases should be delivered to the porch along with carriers and stands. If the instructor wishes to tune before loading, drums are to be placed on stands in a designated area. This could be the band hall or on the porch. The front ensemble equipment is moved to its designated truck-loading area. A checklist is required to make sure all equipment is loaded and makes it to the performance.
4. For battery members, always be on the field for call time early. Call time depends on how far away a game will be. This information will be written next to the band hall wall calendar. Being at call time early is the perfect opportunity to run over a set on the field or work on a move before performance. Take advantage of the early time. The front ensemble is expected to be working diligently with the loading crew making certain all equipment is loaded and properly secured. Once loaded and ready, pit members are to meet the band at the practice field for a sound system playback run through.
5. Things to have on the bus: uniform bag with jacket and sash, shako in its case, music, sticks or mallets, and a practice pad for snares and tenors. The bus ride is a good time to

warm-up you hands. It is a Plano Drumline tradition to never show up anywhere with cold hands. Use your time wisely.

6. Upon arrival, immediate unloading means more time for warm-up. Do not take your time to and from the equipment truck. Personal equipment responsibility is a must.

C. Home Game Warm-up

1. Unload buses and trucks
2. Take drum stands, uniform bags, and shako cases to the stadium stands. Front ensemble is gathering all equipment making ready for assembly after Pre-Game Festivities.
3. Jackets and shakos are to be correctly worn and a brief warm-up will commence.
4. The band is staged in the visitor side tunnel.
5. The band enters the field playing “Grandioso,” a cadence is played once as the band makes it the home side, roll off into “Grandioso” again.
6. Break formation to set up for pre-game activities
7. Perform Pre-Game
8. Game continues from there
9. Front Ensemble reports to loading area to assemble all needed items.

D. Away Game Warm-up

1. Unload buses and trucks. Pit equipment in its current state is organized in an assembly area to be determined.
2. Pending time allowed, a battery warm-up area will be designated and a quick warm up may or may not commence. This will be dependent upon travel time, etc. Keep your eyes and ears open.
3. The band enters the visitor stands. As members organize in the visitor’s stand block, once situated, the Plano Drumline (battery and front ensemble) is expected to fall into either informal or formal stance; to be determined.
4. After pre-game festivities end, the front ensemble reports to loading area to assemble all needed items.

E. During the Game

1. Performance etiquette will not be neglected.
2. Attention on directors or drum majors must be kept at all times so nothing is missed.
3. The conductors starting a stand tune will not wait for you to get ready to play; always be ready.
4. The ability to start and stop, play at a high level, and work as a well-oiled machine promotes professionalism and will demand respect from spectators and music enthusiasts.
5. Game time is not your opportunity to socialize with non-band buddies. Acknowledge their support of the Plano Band and return to the inner workings of the band/game experience.
6. The front ensemble utilizes the 1st quarter to make ready all of the pit equipment. Included in this is the moving of non-warm up instruments to an area close to the field entrance; to be determined.
7. The front ensemble will use the 1st quarter to play through music, work flow of exercises, review musical details, and create a mindset of professional performance.
8. The end of the 1st quarter signals the start of warm up. Plano Drumline battery members need to be ready to move when the signal is given. Keep your eyes on the play clock and allow yourself ample time to get ready for the end of the 1st quarter.
9. It is a Plano Percussion Policy to invite its younger, non-PSHS drumline members to the Plano Drumline warm-up experience at games. They know to be waiting for the drumline at the end of the 1st quarter. As role models, Plano Drumline members should conduct

themselves professionally and, given the chance, thank the younger members for showing their support by being there. Rest assured, you are role models, they want to be you.

Accept this responsibility seriously

10. Performance time: The crowd goes wild. Awesome show! Keep in mind, its okay to feel an incredible rush after you perform. Enjoy it, have fun; keep fun in good taste, but do have fun.
11. After game festivities: Loading Time – everyone has a responsibility to reload their own equipment or help organize instruments to allow loading crew to efficiently do their job.
12. Back at PSHS, equipment is unloaded and put away properly. No excuses. No one leaves until everything is in its place.

Cymbal Line Expectations

By Michael Telfer, Class of 05

The expectation is to always be on time and prepared at all rehearsals, games, and contests. This includes all marching band, drumline, and extra scheduled events. Cymbal players will be expected to have their required cymbals in their assigned cymbal bags along with their extra set of cymbal straps. The practice cymbals will be cleaned once a month and the performance cymbals the day before or day of every performance to ensure that they look and sound the best possible. Being respectful and attentive to the band directors, drumline instructor, technicians, drumline leadership and other players is expected of the cymbal line as well as the rest of the drumline. As a Plano Drumline Cymbal Player, each member is responsible for their own cymbals, cymbal bag, music binder, and all parts of their uniform. Never assume another player has taken care of your stuff. Members of the Plano Drumline will also always be the classiest and most respectful section of the Plano Band. When we are in warm-up formation, whether during a marching band practice or before a performance, there is no talking and all concentration must be on hitting your counts. After marching band practices, the drumline always marches off the practice field as a unit; we never walk off as a mob and as we're walking, talking is kept to a minimum.

Equipment Maintenance, Storage, and Facility Condition

By Kyle Herling, Class of 05

Maintaining the equipment is very important to keep the organization efficient because if we have nothing to play with or on, then it precludes this organization from achieving its goals. In association with the maintenance of the equipment comes the storage of the equipment. To make things easier on all the percussionists, PUT THINGS BACK WHERE THEY BELONG. New studio protocol was put in place in 2003, it is our job to uphold it. If you happen to run across something that is out of place, take the time to fix it because if you fix the small things then they won't turn into one massive, not-too-fun project.

Preparation

By Tavia Morra, Class of 06

Preparation is key for success in anything. How authors write their books, how speeches are performed, how anything gets done is through planning and preparation. This goes for any rehearsal in the Plano Percussion program.

The hardest thing, in my experience, has been to ignore that voice in the back of my head telling me to take a break or to push off my assignment till another time or day. It's a hard thing to ignore, but when it is ignored, work gets done and when work gets done it feels good.

The first step would be to recognize the times in which you can come in to prepare music for a rehearsal. Remember, rehearsals aren't the same thing as practices. Practicing is what you do at home; don't ever come to a rehearsal thinking that it's time to practice your music; you'll just be wasting your and everyone else's time. Some good times to practice are in the morning before school, during lunch, an off-period (if it is in your schedule), after school, or on your own time. That's plenty of time to prepare a piece of music. There's always time, but not always the drive. Ignore the fact that you're tired, or that you broke up with somebody, or whatever the reason. There are the things we want to do and the things we have to do. Do it no matter how much you might not want to, it's worth it and it feels good once it's done with.

Work on the music that is hardest first. If the music is hard, give it the time it deserves, but don't think that just because it's harder that you can blow off any other piece of music. Each note deserves just as much attention as any other note, just set your priorities straight. With that said, be sure to make any marks or suggestions in your music, practice it how it is supposed to sound, and come into rehearsal with it sounding exactly like how you want it to sound. Practice, practice, practice. Then practice some more. Did I mention to practice? Drill that riff or that scale into your head and hands till you can play it in your sleep. Once you have the music in your hands, then the fun starts.

A bonus that I got from working so hard on music is that the work ethic spread into my school work and any hobbies I did on my own. Having seen several shows, measures of music, and marching paths come together because of hard work helped me see that anything else I do requires the same amount of dedication and concentration.

Front Ensemble Protocol (All Drumline Members)

By M.

Please refer to “Procedural Information” by Conway.

Protocols

Important to the success of the front ensemble, especially in light of the fact that the section makes its return from a 1 year hiatus are: 1. personal preparedness, 2. Equipment Management, 3. Instrument Responsibilities, 4. Equipment Expectations.

Preparedness

The front ensemble approach at PSHS is one that places a lot of responsibility on the performer. The arrangements utilize both players and instruments to their fullest extent. A fully functional percussion ensemble, the “pit” at PSHS has a history of and is recognized for its innovative approach to traditional percussion performance, freely incorporating styles and techniques from around the world to create an ensemble within an ensemble.

Equipment

To respect your instrument is to respect yourself. All front ensemble equipment will be stored in its rightful place after every rehearsal or performance. Equipment storage will be established during summer camp and continued throughout the marching season. Every instrument is to be kept at peak working order. Initiative is required to avoid emergency repairs at performances. Be diligent in doing preventive maintenance on your instrument. Be cognoscente of all parts that may loosen due to movement or travel. The only students who are allowed to play during a rehearsal on the instruments are front ensemble personnel.

Instrument Responsibilities

All drumline members will have a “pit equipment” responsibility in order to expedite set up and tear down time at rehearsals. Drumline members are expected to fulfill their assigned duty. Duties include all instruments getting to and from the practice field. If the battery chooses to “Cadence Back,” after rehearsal, then it is the responsibility of those members to go back and get their assigned equipment and return it to its assigned place. Plan ahead and contact your section leader if you expect to not make it to rehearsal in time.

Equipment Expectations (Pit and Battery)

A list of equipment maintenance includes but not limited to: Functional keyboard cord, lubrication of keyboard percussion wheels, corrective maintenance of any keyboard percussion framework and bass drum rim paint scratches or chips, drumheads are playable, tunable, and able to withstand normal performance demand, battery tension rods are lubricated, cymbals are polished, all peripheral equipment, i.e. harnesses, carrier brackets, etc, are in working order and present, implements are in acceptable condition; replaced otherwise.

Front Ensemble Technique and Performance Manual

By M.

Preparation, presentation, and performance is of the utmost importance to achieve the level we strive to attain. Proper care and maintenance of the instruments, continually cleaning all the equipment, and looking the part of a professional musician are all part of the image we make for ourselves. For that reason, it is expected that the instruments and equipment look and sound superb at all times. Before any performance, all equipment must be cleaned thoroughly and tuned, accessory equipment accounted, and show implements gathered and in good performance condition.

The front ensemble is a percussion ensemble with a few idiomatic adjustments. Front ensemble members do not stand at attention with implements in a ready position like a battery. Our ready position involves good posture with hands relaxed and placed right over left in front of the body. If start of performance warrants, place implements at a ready in the left hand. Stay relaxed, look calm, portray sophisticated professionalism and be prepared to perform, problem solve, and commit to the music.

I. Good Posture

A. General Information

Feet are shoulder width apart, legs are relaxed, knees naturally bent and not locked. Rigidity will greatly inhibit your range of motion, so it is best to maintain your flexibility from the beginning and start forming good habits for any performance situation be it warm-up, rehearsal, or performance. Keep you back and neck straight and allow your arms to hang naturally at your side. There should be NO tension in your neck or shoulders. Stand with your chin up at all times and look down your nose to see the instrument. Do not hunch over to see the keys.

Avoid crossing your feet while playing and never stand with your feet crossed. In general, this also will inhibit your range of motion and prevent you from moving fluidly behind the instrument.

When moving from instrument to instrument, use large, graceful steps as opposed to shuffling with small steps. This approach will allow you to move faster, more graceful, and look less frantic. Golden rule: Professionalism at all times.

B. Specific Instruments

1. Vibraphone

Vibraphone players will utilize the instruments pedal with their dominant side. The toe, not the entire foot, is engaged onto the pedal at all times during playing. Efficiency and energy is a direct result of the pedaling technique. Keep your body weight evenly between both feet while using your toes for pedaling.

2. Marimba

Body positioning to a marimba is important in allowing flexibility and fluidity. There will be times when one foot may need to be

placed in front of the other to shift between the upper and lower areas of the instrument or make large lateral shifts behind the instrument. All motions must reflect efficiency, grace, and productivity towards the performance outcome.

3. Timpani

It is easy to hunch and form bad habits while sitting on a timpani stool. Sit up straight! It is a proven fact, the better your posture, the more attuned you are to the things around you. Good posture will also allow you to move around the pedals more easily as well as do your back and neck a favor.

Our posture and physical approach to the instrument will directly affect the effectiveness, musical and visual, of our performances. Everything we do must be professional, charismatic, and confident. There is no need for choreographed movements in the front ensemble. Visuals and over-the-top upper body movements to convey musical intent as well as other non-idiomatic, non-characteristic movements are not necessary and actually hinder the performance. Performers must look the part and move with the music naturally.

II. Two-Mallet Technique (keyboard percussion instruments; KPI)

Unlike a higher tensioned surface, no rebound exists on a KPI. Mallet technique therefore must address this fact and create a stroke style that reflects a technique allowing good sound quality, efficiency, stroke speed, and musical diversity.

A. Keyboard Percussion Fulcrum

The KPI fulcrum mainly incorporates thumb and middle, ring, and pinky fingers. Although the index finger is also used, it is not to the level of that of a snare drum fulcrum in which the index finger's functionality is high. The lessening of the index finger creates a movable fulcrum that travels from thumb/middle, thumb/ring, and thumb/pinky depending on the playing demand. The rationale for this is that a KPI player creates their own rebound off the instrument allowing more control of the mallets. The more of your hand is on the mallet, the more weight is distributed to the keyboard bar creating increased tone production. The minimizing of the snare drum-type fulcrum (thumb/index finger) onto the thinner mallet shaft keeps the hand from compacting and over squeezing while playing. The result is an enhanced tone quality from the KPI.

Tension is not kept in the back fingers, yet at the same time, all fingers remain on the mallet shaft at all times. In most cases, the back fingers serve as the major serving fulcrum. Hold mallets with approximately 2" of mallet shaft exposed out of the back of the hand.

The thumb/index finger relationship serves to aim the mallet. Squeezing here is not advised, as it will create excessive tension. The index finger is relaxed and slightly off the stick. Place the stick on the first joint of the index finger and set the thumb lightly on top. Minimal pressure is kept between the thumb and index finger. Tension here will produce a choked or forced sound by reducing the energy that goes into producing a stroke.

Verify that the thumbs of both hands are facing each other, similar to a snare drum grip in position only; not function. Timpani French grip hand positioning (more vertical) will cause mallet control loss therefore adversely affecting accuracy and tone production. Avoid this!

1. X and Y Axis

The basic stroke is always initiated from the wrist. The ratio of arm versus wrist usage fits nicely onto the points of a visual graphing solution. Wrist motion is plotted on the Y-axis (vertical motion), arm on the X-axis (horizontal motion). Y (wrist) controls approximately 95% of the stroke. While moving up and down the instrument, the arms as well as body positioning (X-axis) controls the rate of travel while the Y-axis is unaffected, creating good sounds.

III. Four-Mallet Technique (KPI)

The four major categories of four-mallet technique are: Traditional Cross Grip, Burton Grip, Musser Grip, Stevens Grip. A general description of the grips follows, for more detailed information, refer to: Method of Movement (MoM) by Leigh Howard Stevens. This is the authoritative reference on 4-mallet technique. (the following are excerpts from the MoM book)

A Traditional Cross Grip

the shafts of the mallets are crossed in the palm of the hand with the outside mallet shaft under the inside. The grip operates on a spring-tension principle with the ring and pinky fingers supplying the interval closing energy, and the thumb and index supplying the interval opening energy.

B. Burton Grip

The shafts of the mallets are crossed in the palm of the hand with the outside mallet shaft on the top of the inside. The grip operates on an axle-type pivot principle with the ring and pinky fingers supplying most of the interval opening and closing energy by pushing and pulling the shaft of the inner mallet.

C. Musser Grip

The shafts of the mallets are held in different sections of the hand with the inside mallet being controlled by the thumb and the index and middle fingers, and the outside mallet being controlled by the ring and pinky fingers. The grip operates basically on a horizontal pendulum principle with the interval opening and closing energy supplied in a number of different ways.

D. Stevens grip

is derived from the Musser grip but where the Musser grip operates on a horizontal pendulum principle, the Stevens grip generally operates from a vertical rotation principle. Superior, in-depth details about the Stevens Grip is found in the MoM book.

IV. General principles to follow with four-mallet technique

Keep all fingers relaxed at all times. Mallet strokes start from the wrist and not the arm. Keep the hands low to the instrument such that your knuckles almost touch the edges of the bars. Remain relaxed in grip and smooth in motion at all times. Just as an athlete prepares for his sport, a mallet player's conditioning is important. Developing muscles, stamina, technique, and control is symbiotic and very important in musical achievement.

V. Front Ensemble Preparatory Motion (Preps); Non-Stroke Inducing

Prior to beginning an exercise, musical segment, or performance, a common tempo will be established from a single tempo source. Typically, the section leader begins a two prep stroke motion followed by 2 preps by all members of the front ensemble. Variables in number of preps is discussed and implemented on a case-by-case basis. Preps reflect the musical mood or intent of the piece. Small, precise preps reflect a medium to fast tempo. Flowing, lyrical preps reflect a medium slow to slow tempo. With all preps, the hands and mallets are the only aspects that move. Avoid arm movement, body or head movement, or tapping of feet. Preps are utilized within the front ensemble to help with functionality, reinforcement, uniformity, and musical architecture. Basic rule: If you move together, you will play together.

VI. Stroke type

Strokes are relaxed in nature exerting weight through the keys, yet allowing the mallets to rebound off the keyboard. Wrist will be the primary source of stroke production. The stroke we implement is called the PISTON OR CYCLIC STROKE.

To correctly define the Piston or Cyclic Stroke, three considerations help define its usage: Consistency, Accuracy, Momentum.

A. Consistency

Strokes that utilize preparation (prep), lift (resurrection), or both (academic) are inefficient and waste motion. The mallet heads move farther than is necessary to accomplish a stroke. The Piston stroke efficiently moves the mallet because there is no preparation or lift that require additional energy.

B. Accuracy

Any percussion stroke has a minimum of two parts in which mistakes can happen: The part(s) that go up, and the part(s) that go down. Mistakes in the down portion are usually wrong note(s) being struck. Mistakes in the up portion happen when the mallet ascends to a position above a wrong note; horizontally miscalculated. There is no time to adjust as the mallet progresses to the resulting down portion. The Piston Stroke consolidates the preparation into the recovery of the previous stroke. This pre-positioning does not assure that the preparation will be horizontally and vertically correct, but if it is wrong, one has a chance to rectify the error.

C. Momentum

The Piston Stroke allows for no unnecessary stops or changes of direction. All motion after contact with the bar is in the service of the next stroke. The Piston Stroke starts at the correct height for the desired dynamic level and recovers only as high as is necessary for the next dynamic level.

Three simple rules:

1. Start the mallet at the proper height for the desired dynamic level. This insures that the mallets are always at the proper height for the desired dynamic level.
2. Do not stop the recovery of the mallet until it is at the proper height for that hand's next stroke. This insures that a maximum amount of time is left for mistake correction.
3. Do not raise the mallet past the proper height for that hand's next stroke. This insures that no distance or momentum energy is waster.

VII. Mallet Etiquette

A. Storage during Rehearsal or Performance

Mallet bags will be hung behind each instrument to allow for mallet switching. Establish a system for specific mallet location and keep it consistent. Oils found on hands will greatly decrease the life of a mallet; never handle mallet heads with hands. Store mallets in bags when not in use during a rehearsal. Do not drop them into resonator holes or slots in between mallet bars. If an especially quick mallet change is needed using a mallet bag is not conducive to success, then utilize a trap table.

B. Storage Away from Rehearsal or Performance

All mallets will be kept either in their respective mallet bags or mallet boxes in the percussion studio. No mallets are to be stored on the keyboard percussion instruments or in the bell table cabinet. Bells mallets are to be kept in their respective mallet bags and not in the bell case or bell table cabinet.

Practicing: Planning and Preparation

By Tavia Morra, Class of 2006

Preparation is key for success in anything. How authors write their books, how speeches are performed, how anything gets done is through planning and preparation. This goes for any rehearsal in the Plano Percussion program.

The hardest thing, in my experience, has been to ignore that voice in the back of my head telling me to take a break or to push off my assignment till another time or day. It's a hard thing to ignore, but when it is ignored, work gets done and when work gets done it feels good.

The first step would be to recognize the times in which you can come in to prepare music for a rehearsal. Remember, rehearsals aren't the same thing as practices. Practicing is what you do at home; don't ever come to a rehearsal thinking that it's time to practice your music; you'll just be wasting your and everyone else's time. Some good times to practice are in the morning before school, during lunch, an off-period (if it is in your schedule), after school, or on your own time. That's plenty of time to prepare a piece of music. There's always time, but not always the drive. Ignore the fact that you're tired, or that you broke up with somebody, or whatever the reason. There are the things we want to do and the things we have to do. Do it no matter how much you might not want to, it's worth it and it feels good once it's done with.

Work on the music that is hardest first. If the music is hard, give it the time it deserves, but don't think that just because it's harder that you can blow off any other piece of music. Each note deserves just as much attention as any other note, just set your priorities straight. With that said, be sure to make any marks or suggestions in your music, practice it how it is supposed to sound, and come into rehearsal with it sounding exactly like how you want it to sound. Practice, practice, practice. Then practice some more. Did I mention to practice? Drill that riff or that scale into your head and hands till you can play it in your sleep. Once you have the music in your hands, then the fun starts.

A bonus that I got from working so hard on music is that the work ethic spread into my school work and any hobbies I did on my own. Having seen several shows, measures of music, and marching paths come together because of hard work helped me see that anything else I do requires the same amount of dedication and concentration.

