



TOUCHPOINT

The Division of Education Newsletter

Conn-Selmer
DIVISION OF EDUCATION

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VOL. 1 • Issue 22 • December 2, 2013

A Note from Dr. Tim

Greetings. In this edition of *Touchpoint*, **Jim Catalano, Conn-Selmer Percussion Clinician and Artist**, discusses the instrumental needs to meet the ever-evolving demands put forth for beginning percussion students.



Beginning Mallet Percussion is Advancing to a New Concept *By Jim Catalano*

For several decades now we educate percussionists to have skills in mallet percussion as well as battery percussion. The best resource for young percussionists is piano lessons. This gives the student the foundation of melody, harmony, rhythm and music notation fundamentals before starting percussion. We also know that many students who choose percussion are primarily thinking of drums and the drum outfit. That is what students see on TV and it looks fun and simple. With the exposure of the front field ensemble in the marching band and the percussion ensemble, students are now more aware of marimbas, xylophones and vibes as part of the percussion section.

The educational bell kit in a bag with its 2.5 octave aluminum bells is usually the first introduction to playing notes and melody for the beginning percussionist. Sometimes the bell bars are even etched with note names to serve as a guide. While this may help in an introductory way to learn notes, it may not actually help beginning percussion students develop mallet instrument technique.

For the last several years a new mallet instrument platform has emerged with music educators and percussion instructors. This is the concept of a practice marimba. This instrument is generally three octaves in range and does not have resonators or a cart system with wheels. Instead, the marimba bar section of the frame sits on an x-frame style stand. The instruments are not heavy, easily transported and can be stored in space saving ways against a wall or even under a bed. The practice marimba is also affordably priced, making it a good entry to mallet percussion.

Practice marimbas are made with padauk bars instead of the more expensive rosewood bars or a heavy synthetic bar. Padauk keeps the weight down but still provides an acceptable wood sound experience for the student. Practice marimbas have

wide graduated bars at the low end with the bars narrowing as the scale rises. The width of the marimba bars match the same dimensions of the bars that a student would use on the marimba at school.

Since the bars are wider, like professional and school-owned marimbas, the student learns the correct spacing of the keyboard from the beginning. Therefore, the transition to professional and school marimbas is seamless. Another benefit of the practice marimba is the ability to execute rolls.

Mallet percussion has advanced at a fast rate over several decades. The demands on the mallet player to perform more complex music on marimba in band and percussion ensemble is becoming commonplace. That means the use of four mallets must be introduced earlier with young percussion students. The practice marimba lends itself well to executing four-mallet technique because of the graduated and wider bars.

The practice marimba can make a great marimba lab instrument in groups at school. However, the main idea behind this instrument is a personal use instrument for the student at home to practice and develop. It is best to contact your schools service music retailer to inquire about the practice marimba. Many dealers are adding the practice marimba into their rental pools for students to rent. In theory, the student should grow out of the three-octave practice marimba in a year or two and move on to a traditional 4.3 octave marimba with resonators and frame on wheels.

The practice marimba is not a destination, but of the learning journey as the mallet percussion student advances in technique and performance. It can make a difference in developing better percussionists.



Join **Gary Markham, Dr. Lowell Graham, Beth Sokolowski and Dr. Johanna Siebert** at the **Midwest Band and Orchestra Clinic** on December 19th and 20th, 2013 where they will be discussing current issues pertinent to music education leaders.

For more information about this opportunity, send inquiries to education@conn-selmer.com, attention: Music Administration Collaborative at Midwest

Our Next Issue Featuring:
An article by **Michael Kamphuis**, Managing Director for the Conn-Selmer Division of Education

In Our Last Issue:
Music Advocacy
by **Robert Floyd**
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