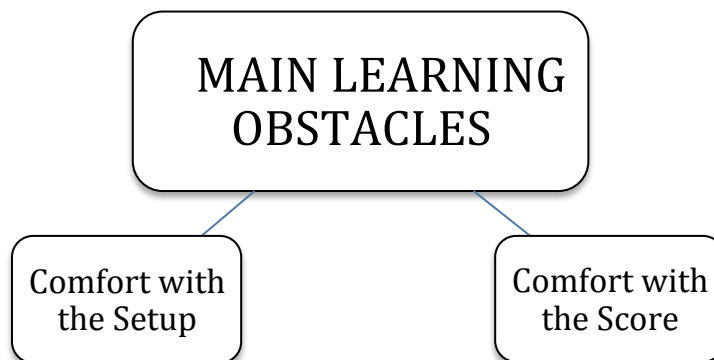


Method of Multi: Practice Strategies for Multi-Percussion Solos

Timothy Feerst

National Conference on Percussion Pedagogy 2019

Summary: This session will present a variety of strategies for practicing and preparing multi-percussion solos. With few exceptions, each multi-percussion solo has its own unique instrumentation, setup, and notation. Every percussionist, student and professional, learns each solo akin to learning a new instrument and clef. Because of this, multi-percussion, as an instrument discipline, is unable to have the same concrete curriculum fortitude like snare drum (*Developing Dexterity*), mallets (*Method of Movement*), or timpani (*Modern Method for Tympani*). This session is an attempt to remedy this situation by introducing practice strategies that are adaptive in nature, so that the core content of the strategies is the repertoire itself. The strategies are also diverse in order to address individual learning strengths, as well as provide opportunities for students to improve skills in their musicianship.



Two Major Learning Obstacles: When percussionists first learn a new multi-solo, there are two learning obstacles they must overcome.

The first is establishing **comfort with the setup**. Although we have a degree of proficiency on the individual instruments, they take on a new identity as part of a new collective instrument when they are part of a multi-percussion setup.

The second is establishing **comfort with the score**. With very few exceptions, no two multi-percussion scores have the same notation. In addition, as we already know, percussion notation in general is not universal. Therefore, every time we jump into a new multi-percussion solo, there is a learning curve involved to develop the necessary comfort with the score.

SETUP STRATEGIES

Title: Improvisation

Benefit: Creates an open-ended approach to develop familiarity with the setup; also improves individual artistic creativity

Description: This is self-explanatory. Simply approach the setup and play. The idea is to launch right into playing the setup without being pre-occupied with the notation of the score.

Suggestions: This is a great activity to do at the beginning of learning the solo. Starting the first few practice sessions with improvisation on the setup is recommended. To add another layer, improvise on the setup alongside a computerized rhythm section via apps like iReal Pro.

Title: Ideo-Kinetics on the Setup

Benefits: Develops fundamental muscle memory of the setup so as to increase visual focus on the score

Description: Based on Gordon Stout's excellent mallet workbook *Ideo-Kinetics*, select one instrument in the general middle of your setup, henceforth identified as the "rotation note." Create a simple mini-exercise that utilizes this rotation and one instrument and one instrument below. Play the exercise while having your eyes focused solely on the rotation note. As you progress, symmetrically increase the interval on both sides of the rotation note by moving to further outside instruments in the setup.

Suggestions: Spend considerable time on each interval in order to build the necessary muscle memory. If you hit the wrong instrument, do not stop and stay in that interval until the accuracy is consistent. Just as Gordon Stout suggests in his book, create your own exercises to add variety.

Title: The 1 and Around Cycle (The Marching Tenor Method)

Benefits: Strengthens confidence in playing the rhythmic content of the piece without the added variable of correct instrument placement

Description: Take a small musical passage from the solo and isolate it to one instrument. After playing the passage on one instrument, play the passage on the different instruments, as written.

Suggestions: It is recommended that you use this strategy in a cycle. An example would be 1-2 repetitions on one surface and then 1-2 repetitions as written. The number of repetitions can be increased or decreased at the discretion of the performer.

Title: Stick Control for Multi-Percussion

Benefits: Increases proficiency in executing musical passages in the solo with a variety of different sticking possibilities; also increases experience in arranging

Description: Take pages from George Lawrence Stone's *Stick Control* and arrange them for your setup.

Suggestions: The first page of *Stick Control* is highly recommended for this strategy, although the entire book (and others like it) can be applied. Using The 1 and Around Cycle routine can also be applied here.

SCORE STRATEGIES

Title: Color Identification of Setup Instruments

Benefits: Adds another visual layer of reading and retaining the new score notation

Description: Assign each instrument note a color. Next, attach a small, un-interfering piece of paper with the corresponding colors for each instrument.

Suggestions: This strategy is open-ended to a certain extent. The performer should feel free to modify this approach so that it works the best way possible for them.

Title: Record and Transcribe

Benefits: Gives opportunities to write in the language of the notation; also improves skills in dictation

Description: Record yourself playing a small, improvised phrase on the setup. Play back the recording and transcribe it using the notation of the score.

Suggestions: Do not over-burden yourself by playing improvised phrases that are too complex and/or rhythmically busy. The recorded phrases should be attainable enough to transcribe.

Title: Flashcards

Benefits: Increases speed in recalling the score's notation and symbols

Description: Create flashcards that have a single note from the score on one side and a diagram of your setup with that note's place in the setup clearly identified.

Suggestions: Much to the same way that flashcards can help beginners learn how to read music, this strategy can have a similar effect to learning the notation of the score. Right before each practice session is a good time to drill the flashcards. Going through the flashcards at home or away from the setup is also recommended.

Title: Mini-Etudes

Benefits: Gives opportunities to actively engage in the notation of the score; also increases skills and experience in composition

Description: Compose short etudes using the instruments and notation of the score and then play back your compositions.

Suggestions: Keep these etudes short and simple so that they require little to no practice to adequately perform.