

## **Safer Percussion Practices in the Concert Percussion Rehearsal**

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### **Preamble**

This document was constructed with the goal of presenting the ensemble director with guidance on making the face-to-face concert percussion rehearsal environment as safe as possible for students returning to this model of instruction during the current COVID-19 pandemic.

This document is not meant to circumvent or override guidelines provided by the CDC or by state or local public health departments.

This document is meant to reflect what we believe are best practices as of July 1, 2020. We recognize that research on COVID-19 and the novel coronavirus that causes the condition is ongoing and we hope to update and expand the document as new research and best practices are presented.

### **Introduction**

In the COVID-19 environment, new daily procedures regarding hand washing, hand sanitization, and instrument disinfection will need to be incorporated into the teaching and learning routine.

Now more than ever, students will need an engaged, knowledgeable, conscientious conductor to provide an organized rehearsal plan, detailed part assignments, and a unified rehearsal set up. This type of preparation now allows the educator to negotiate a public health issue in addition to providing a pathway to a more efficient rehearsal.

- An organized rehearsal plan lets students know exactly where to stand and plan their travel from place to place while maintaining proper social distancing.
- Detailed part assignments allow the students to handle only the instruments that they require and will allow for quick “contact tracing” of who was exposed to what instrument should a student test positive for the virus.
  - Part assignments should be arranged so that sharing of instruments is eliminated within pieces whenever possible.
    - This may mean acquiring and utilizing additional inventory where hand-held percussion is concerned.
- A unified rehearsal set up now not only lets students practice their performance “choreography,” but allows for quick disinfection of instruments at the conclusion of the rehearsal when necessary.

### **General Rehearsal Guidelines**

A probable safety benefit of percussion performance is that the players often only come in contact with their implements and not the actual instruments.

- Percussion students should be encouraged to use their own sticks and mallets and discouraged from community use or sharing.

Students should maintain proper hand washing protocols before and after rehearsal in order to keep the virus off of their personal sticks and mallets.

- In addition, hand sanitization stations should be located within the percussion section proper.

Because percussionists do not need to blow into their instrument to create sound, they should be encouraged to wear masks or other face coverings during the rehearsal process.

- Adherence to the CDC recommendations on masks or face coverings in public will help to inhibit transmission from aerosolized droplets as players move from station to station within the rehearsal.

If student equipment is to be stored in a common room, it should be done in such a way as to maintain distance or separation so as to avoid possible cross contamination.

- Avoid having students share cubby holes or lockers.
- Depending on the size of the section and rehearsal/storage space, it may be necessary to schedule student access to the percussion spaces to avoid congestion at entrance points or around shared spaces.

### **Guidelines for Setting Up the Rehearsal Space**

The following guidelines for setting up the rehearsal space should allow for quick disinfecting of equipment between rehearsals, and for possible “contact tracing” should a student or performer develop a case of COVID-19.

- It is recommended that the percussion rehearsal space be set up prior to student arrival in order to minimize the number of people that come into contact with the instruments and to help to keep the congestion around storage areas to a minimum.
- Instruments should be set up in such a manner as to allow for individual stations marked off at the recommended 6’ distance.
- Instruments such as woodblocks, tambourines, and triangles are recommended to be mounted in advance so as to limit handling and to help in “tracing” the use of the instruments.
  - This may mean acquiring additional hardware to facilitate the equipment.
- Students should leave the equipment set up at the end of rehearsal so that proper disinfecting can be performed before the next group arrives.
- If students are to be setting up their own equipment, then they should be asked to wash or sanitize their hands before and after handling shared equipment.

### **Guidelines for Specific Instruments Common in the Rehearsal Room:**

The following section of this document spells out guidelines for the instruments most commonly found in large ensemble rehearsal rooms.

- This by no means an exhaustive list and educators should feel empowered to apply these procedures to the specific instruments required by their performance literature.

**Snare Drum:**

- Students should avoid sharing implements if at all possible.
- They should also avoid touching the batter head or instrument itself any more than is absolutely necessary.
- Each player should be given time to properly wipe down the instrument at the end of their time playing it.
  - Special attention should be given to the snare strainer and top rim of the drum as these are the most likely points of contact.
- Similar procedures should be followed for other membranophones with similar performance practices (concert toms, tenor drums, field drums, etc.)

**Keyboard:**

- Students should avoid sharing implements if at all possible.
- Students should avoid making contact with the instrument via their hands.
- Since water and other cleaners can harm the bars, it again becomes imperative to adhere to handwashing and hand sanitizing protocols as students transition to and from these instruments.

**Timpani:**

- Students should avoid sharing implements if at all possible.
- Because players often make contact with the head of the timpano with their hands when tuning and muffling, the heads should be wiped down or otherwise disinfected as players transition to and from this instrument.

**Bass Drum:**

In addition to a selection of implements that are shared through the group, bass drum muffling is often executed by making contact with the drum via the hand or knee.

- Players should be provided with adequate opportunities to utilize hand sanitizer before and after performing on bass drum.
- Care should be taken to wipe down the mallet with a cleaning wipe between players and the mallet, head, stand, and shell at the end of rehearsal.

**Crash Cymbals:**

- In lieu of sharing crash cymbals through multiple students, it is possible to substitute suspended cymbals so that students are handling their own implements rather than sharing leather straps.

**Suspended Cymbal:**

Muffling techniques for suspended cymbal often involve the player making contact with the hand. To mitigate possible contamination:

- Players should be encouraged to wash and/or sanitize hands between rehearsal segments.
- The instrument itself may need to be wiped down after rehearsal segments.
- Players could be encouraged to control the duration of notes by pressing the mallets into the instrument at the end of rolls rather than by grabbing the instrument.

**Triangle:**

- Consideration should be given to leaving the instrument mounted on a stand rather than returned to a cabinet or other storage method. This allows for “contact tracing” the instrument between players and allows for wiping down the instrument between rehearsals.
- Care should be taken to wipe down the beater(s) with a cleaning wipe between players and the instrument and stand at the end of rehearsal.

**Tambourine:**

The traditional techniques of playing concert and orchestral tambourine necessitate copious touching by the players’ hands.

- Consideration should be given to substituting headless tambourines or mounted headed tambourines played with light snare drum sticks for the traditional concert model.
  - This allows the substitution of rudimental snare drum rolls for thumb/friction rolls and reduces contact with the instrument.
- Players should be encouraged to wash and/or sanitize hands between rehearsal segments.
- If utilizing headed tambourines, care should be taken to disinfect all of the surfaces the players come in contact with including head and shell.
  - Synthetic head tambourines can be safely disinfected with EPA recommended products. Natural skin heads could be wiped down with a 70% alcohol solution or light soap and water.

**Hand Drums**

In the short term, it is recommended that hand drums such as congas and bongos be played with sticks or mallets rather than the hands themselves.

If players do perform on the instruments with their hands, care should be taken to disinfect the instruments and the heads in between each player’s time at the instrument.

- For synthetic headed instruments, wiping down the instrument (including its hardware) with any common disinfectant product (such as Lysol or Clorox wipes) should suffice.
  - For those worried about cleaning natural skin instruments with abrasives, it may be necessary to have a cloth with alcohol on hand to facilitate wiping down the instrument. The CDC recommends a 70% alcohol solution for disinfecting touch screens, so something of that percentage should work here as well.

**Aerophones:**

- Because the coronavirus that causes COVID-19 can be spread via droplets, for the time being, the safest proposition would be to substitute an electronic or other equivalent for any type of whistle, bird call, or other sound that requires sound production via player-produced air and/or contact with the mouth of the player.

## **References for Educators:**

Centers for Disease Control COVID Landing Page:

- <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>

Environmental Protection Agency list of Disinfectants for Use Against SARS-Cov-2 (COVID-19)

- <https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-use-against-sars-cov-2-covid-19>

NAfME COVID Resources:

- <https://nafme.org/covid-19/>

NFHS Performing Arts COVID-19 Resources:

- <https://www.nfhs.org/articles/performing-arts-covid-19-resources/>

Yamaha, Inc. Guide to Disinfectant Safety

- [https://usa.yamaha.com/files/BRDADM149580\\_DisinfectionGuide-Drums\\_Percussion\\_f2ba28c551072ebaa22a8a19d204c77d.pdf](https://usa.yamaha.com/files/BRDADM149580_DisinfectionGuide-Drums_Percussion_f2ba28c551072ebaa22a8a19d204c77d.pdf)

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