

Selecting Solo Material For Grade School Percussionists

BY JEFF HOKE

As solo and ensemble season approaches, one challenge posed to private teachers and band directors is the selection of appropriate literature for the grade school percussionist. An appropriate selection of solo literature is one in which the concepts presented are familiar to the student but also represent the next logical step in the student's developmental process.

Though challenging students is a valid pursuit, educators must resist the urge to choose literature that is too advanced. Doing so runs the risk of "leap-frogging" concepts and creating an uncomfortable flow of information to students. Additionally, a student's band director and private teacher should communicate prior to a selection being made on the student's behalf. The input of both educators will result in a more thorough understanding of the present status of the student, more than either instructor is capable of providing individually.

The library of literature for the grade school percussionist is relatively small, and at times lacking musical elements crucial to the developing musician. To combat this problem I have established the following criteria, which has proven helpful in selecting appropriate literature for solo and ensemble performance.

SNARE DRUM SOLOS

A. Does the content of the piece present elements from each of the four rudimental categories (paradiddle, drag, roll, and flam)?

B. Is there an opportunity for the performer to display open-stroke, closed-stroke, and press rolls, as well as interpret the release of these rolls in both tied and untied examples?

C. Is change of timbre a characteristic of the piece? Playing on the rim, rimshots, stick shots, stick-on-stick playing, and the use of different locations on the head can serve as effective ways to increase the student's understanding of this concept.

D. Is the piece composed in such a way

as to present commonly used forms?

E. Are there opportunities for the student to display musical expression, both written and unwritten?

F. Is change of tempo and/or meter addressed?

G. Is the overall difficulty of the piece appropriate for the student?

MALLET KEYBOARD SOLOS

A. Is the instrumentation of the piece such that the student is able to gain access to the appropriate instrument for practice on a regular basis?

B. Does the piece call for two, three, or four mallets, and does the student possess the technical facility necessary to control what is called for?

C. Is the piece in a key that the student has previously studied or is prepared to study?

D. Are there melody lines in the piece to which students can relate and use as a tool to guide them to the next pitch?

E. Does the piece contain rolls (tied and untied), scale passages, thirds, arpeggios, and chords that encourage conversation about basic theory?

Also see applicable criteria under Snare Drum Solos.

TIMPANI SOLOS

A. How many timpani does the piece call for, and is the student able to practice on a quality set of timpani on a regular basis?

B. Does the piece call for any tuning changes? If so, has the student had the training necessary to accomplish these changes?

C. Are there opportunities for the student to display dampening and/or muting techniques?

D. Does the content of the piece allow the student to display interpretation of both tied and untied rolls?

E. Can both legato and staccato strokes be incorporated into the piece?

F. Are there passages that require the student to use cross-over sticking or double strokes from drum to drum?

Also see applicable criteria under Snare Drum Solos and Mallet Keyboard Solos.

CONCLUSION

A final consideration when selecting a piece for solo or ensemble performance is whether or not the piece is of interest to the student. Young students will practice and perform at a higher level if they enjoy the piece they are playing. Using the above criteria, and the input from the private teacher and band director, appropriate solo and ensemble material can be found for the grade school percussionist to meet both the immediate contest and festival needs as well as assist in the long-term development of the student's percussion skills.

Jeff Hoke earned his Bachelor of Arts degree at Augustana College and is a private percussion teacher, arranger/composer, adjudicator and clinician throughout the Midwest.

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SUBMITTING PROGRAMS

PAS members are invited to submit formal printed percussion solo and ensemble programs for inclusion in program listings.

Please include:

Venue (i.e., the name of the school)

Date of Performance

State & Country

Name of Performer or Ensemble (including director and any guest artists)

Composition Title

Composer Name (first and last)

Arranger Name & Publisher

Send information to Wilber England

3813 Laura Way,

Bloomington, IN 47401

E-mail: englandw@indiana.edu