

Fruitport Independent PIA 2023/2024 "Gunslinger" Packet Front Ensemble





Welcome

Marching Percussion is constantly evolving art and sport. This guide will serve as a foundation for high school through early college aged students to develop the fundamentals needed to excel in the activity. The concepts presented are not our own, rather they have been compiled and refined over 25 years of learning, teaching and growth in percussion studies with fantastic educators. Note that every percussion section approaches playing as an individual and ensemble differently, some more successfully than others, and every ensemble has technique definitions they choose based on their perceived overall success for the ensemble. Our goal is to provide each student with two things; First, a technique foundation that will serve them in future ensembles. Whether auditioning for a university's symphonic winds, a drum and bugle corp, or a jazz combo, students will develop an understanding of both the physical techniques used to produce quality sound, and an in-depth understanding of music interpretation and ensemble performance. Second, a love for percussion studies. We truly believe that if you don't enjoy what you're doing, you'll never reach your full potential. The staff will provide a learning environment that allows students to express themselves through art and physicality like no other activity can. And, we will have fun doing it!

Your Staff

Notes:

Executive Director: Tim Priest Ensemble Director: Nick Lootens

Dance, Body and Guard Coordinator: Sarah Jantz-Lootens

Visual Technician: Alexa Elkouri

Front Ensemble Coordinator: Makenzie 'Mak' Mattis

Front Ensemble Technician: Matt Leslie Battery Coordinator: Justin Sciullo Battery Technician: Erick Ramirez Battery Technician: Evan Sala Cymbal Technician: Olivia Muller

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How To Practice and How to Rehearse

Practice and rehearsal are very different things. Practice is for you as an individual to improve the specific aspects of your playing that are lacking. It should be limited to very specific portions of concepts and be conducted very methodically. Rehearsal is meant for performers to come together and work on broader, group concepts that you can't practice alone, like blend, form/function, uniformity, voicing, listening responsibilities etc. You must practice individually in order to have a foundation for which rehearsal can be successful. The staff expects every member to practice daily.

How to Practice

- **1. Make a plan.** Never practice without a very specific goal you'd like to achieve. Start with small goals (a single beat or measure isn't too small), focusing on basics and get more in-depth in later plans.
- **2. Focus.** Make sure to narrow your practice to only one idea at a time before combining concepts. Free yourself of distractions. Choose a place where you have appropriate space, equipment, time and isolation.
- **3. Write it down.** Document your plan and take notes as you go. Critique yourself. And refresh yourself on the previous session before your next. This packet has space specifically designed for those notes.
- **4. Time it.** Limit individual practice to 30 minutes. Start slowly and build. If you realize a change in sound quality or consistency of technique, stop, go back and start again. After 30 minutes, give your brain a break (at least 15 minutes). Start fresh and retain what you've learned.

How to Rehearse

- **1. Stay quiet.** Listen to what's being said by staff and internalize concepts. Listen to those playing around you, can you hear the inconsistencies the instructors are referencing? Do you understand where you fit in the sound? You will always learn more by listening and trying to understand than you ever will through speaking.
- **2. Stay Focused.** Do not turn rehearsal into practice. If you or a staff member notes a particular problem in your playing, attempt to make a change, write down a note, and practice that concept individually later. Your brain can only do so many things at one time. By focusing hard on your individual problems, you take away from the overall ensemble's chance for success.
- **3. Take criticism as a compliment.** If a staff member tells you you're doing something wrong, it is because they care about you and the ensemble's success. Don't be upset, or embarrassed, instead; MAKE A CHANGE! This may take multiple reps, multiple corrections, and multiple rehearsals. If you are practicing on your own as described above and have a great attitude, you will be successful!



Rehearsal Etiquette

- While a staff member is talking, you are not. There is no worse waste of time in a rehearsal than a staff member repeating themselves because you were talking. If you have a question, raise your hand
- Absolutely no co-teching. If you notice someone in your section playing something you
 believe to be incorrect, ask them how they are playing that section, or ask a staff
 member how a section should be played. Saying "You're playing that wrong" is not your
 job. Some exceptions may be made for section leaders
- If the center marimba is at set, you are also at set. The front ensemble is one unit.
- Bring your music with you to every rehearsal. Even after memorization, have it nearby for when it will be referenced by instructors.
- Bring a pencil to every rehearsal. It's expected that when you're given feedback that you
 write it into your music so you don't forget later. Many changes will likely be made in the
 music. Don't trust your brain to memorize every single one. This packet has room for
 notes as well.
- If possible, try to avoid asking to use the restroom unless it's an emergency and can't wait. You will get frequent bathroom/brain breaks every 45 minutes to an hour
- Bring a water bottle to every rehearsal. Stay hydrated before, during, and after rehearsals. Your safety and well being is our first priority. Consider bringing a light snack to rehearsal to eat during breaks.
- If a staff member is working with another section, it's expected that you remain quiet and use that time to review your music. There is no "hacking" while a staff member is working with another section or giving instruction.
- If given an instruction, it's expected that you give some sort of confirmation that you
 heard and understood what was told to you. A simple nod of your head or a "got it" is
 sufficient.
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Position of Attention

Relax: This is just as it sounds. When an instructor calls "relax" that's when you can take the time to put your mallets down, grab a drink of water, and await further instructions.

Standby:

- Feet are shoulder width apart
- Knees are relaxed and unlocked
- Shoulders are back and down, slightly puffing out chest
- Mallets/sticks are in hand down by your sides with a slight bend in the elbow
- Head is held high and confident
- Looking in towards center, awaiting call for set position

Set: Once set is called, members will look in towards the center to come up to playing position at the same time. Set position contains all the same characteristics as standby positions, but your mallets/sticks are in playing position.

<u>Posture</u>

Posture is an important and often overlooked facet of front ensemble performance. Proper posture allows for:

Less fatigue: If you're slouched over your instrument, more than likely you're putting strain on your muscles rather than your skeleton, which leads to soreness and fatigue. While maintaining proper posture, you allow your body to set itself like it was designed to, allowing for more endurance and versatility in performance.

Better technique: Properly aligning your body is important to ensure symmetry from both sides of your body, and allows for great flexibility to perform fast or sudden movements along your instrument.

Freer Respiration: Respiration is the fancy term for breathing. Proper torso alignment allows for your breathing mechanisms to function with less constriction and creates a smoother and less exhaustive intake of oxygen.



What does proper posture look like?

- Chin tilted slightly up and confident
- Shoulders back and down with chest puffing out
- Back straight
- Elbows slightly bent with arms by the seams of pants
- Slight bend to the knee, feet shoulder width apart
- While playing (especially on keyboards), aim to keep your body centered with your instrument to eliminate unnecessary and exhausting rotation of the body





Set Position

Set position is the final position of attention before the ensemble begins playing. Staff members call for set when they are about to prep the ensemble to begin playing a selected passage of music. After set is called, and prior to moving into playing position, all members should look in towards center marimba for them to move their mallets up to playing position. The ensemble should move to and arrive at playing position at the same exact time. When the ensemble doesn't move as a unit it looks extremely sloppy, so it's important to get into the habit of moving to and arriving in set position at the same time right off the bat.

What should you be doing in set positon?

- Looking towards center marimba awaiting their prep
- Listening for the tap off from the center snare (when applicable)
- Remain silent. This includes:
 - Talking
 - Hacking
 - Stick clicking (you should be subdividing tempo in your head, you don't need an auditory tempo unless a staff member plays it for you)



- Thinking through the passage of music, considering musical elements such as:
 - Dynamics
 - Tempo changes
 - Articulations
 - Phrasing
 - Balance within the ensemble
 - Common mistakes and how you plan to avoid them
 - The style of the music and how you will visually present yourself to the audience
- Subdividing micro and macro beats in your head
- Anticipating any mallet/stick changes
- Checking your posture
- Looking confident (sell it to your audience that you know what you're doing)

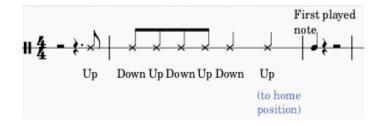
Prepping

Preps are small, discreet, and precise gestures performed at the established tempo by all members of the front ensemble before playing the first note.

Preps provide the following in the context of the front ensemble:

- Establish tempo
- Establish style
- Provide another layer of uniformity within the ensemble

The initial preps are provided by the center marimba player. Once set is called, all members of the ensemble should look in towards the center marimba. The center marimba player preps for 4 counts with an eighth note pickup. The rest of the ensemble will prep on beats 3 and 4. In notation, it looks like this:





The first 3 beats of the prep are done about an inch above your instrument. On beat 4, mallets/sticks will come up to the appropriate dynamic level of the first note.

Grip

General guidelines

Regardless of what grip is being utilized, you should:

- Relax. There is always going to be tension somewhere, but you want to avoid any unnecessary tension anywhere in your body
- Initiate your stroke primarily from the wrist. Follow the 90/10 rule. 90% of your stroke is going to come from your wrist, 10% will be from your arm. Focus on initiating from your wrist, the 10% from your arm will occur naturally
- Your wrists should have a natural bend. Do not rotate your wrist to be completely vertical
 or completely horizontal, they should be in a comfortable middle ground
- Avoid death grip. Your mallets are an extension of your hands and they should move just as naturally

Two Mallet Grip

- 1. Rest the shaft of your mallet on the first joint of your back three fingers.

 Allow 1/1.5 inches of the shaft to stick out from the bottom of your hand
- Wrap your back three fingers around the shaft of the mallet. You shouldn't be squeezing the shaft. Wrap your fingers just tight enough so that the mallet doesn't slip out of your fingers. Your index finger and thumb should be creating an "L" shape
- With your index finger, wrap it around the mallet so that the shaft is resting on the last joint of your index finger closest to your fingertips
- 4. Finally, place your thumb on the shaft of the mallet as if you were trying to create a capital "T" with your index finger and thumb



*Note that a majority of the energy of your stroke should be initiated by your back three fingers. Your index finger and thumb are merely there to support the mallet. You theoretically could play your instrument with only your back three fingers.



Four Mallet (Stevens) Grip

1. Inner mallet

- Take one mallet and place the bottom of the shaft into the middle of your palm
- b. Like with two mallet grip, rest the shaft of the mallet on the last joint in your index finger (closest to your fingertip)
- c. Wrap your middle finger around the shaft to create additional support for your mallet



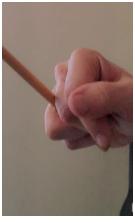


2. Outer mallet

- a. Rest the mallet on the first joints in your pinky and ring finger (closest to your palm). Allow 1-1.5 inches of the shaft of the mallet to stick out from the bottom of your hand
- b. Wrap your pinky and index finger around the shaft of the mallet enough to hold it in place. Your mallet should be between your ring finger and middle finger









Common Mistakes

- Avoid **curling** your fingers around your mallet. This creates tension and decreases note accuracy. This most often happens to your index finger
- Avoid **pointing** your fingers. This causes you to lose some control over the mallet, decreasing note accuracy and creates bad technique. Again, this most often happens to the index finger.
- Avoid turning your wrist too much in either direction. That creates a whole different technique which has its applications elsewhere, but not in this ensemble



Non-Mallet Grips

Matched (American) Grip

- 1. Place the stick in your palm
- 2. Wrap your index finger and thumb around the fulcrum point of the stick
 - a. The fulcrum point is the point on the stick where both sides are equally balanced
- 3. Curl your back three fingers around the stick for additional support
- 4. Have your wrists tilted at about a 45 degree angle. Like with mallet technique, your wrist should remain quite natural and comfortable
- 5. Initiate the stroke with primarily your wrist
- 6. Most common grip for drum playing (for the front ensemble's purpose)

French Grip

- 1. Place the stick in your palm
- 2. Wrap your index finger and thumb onto the shaft of the stick, just shy of the halfway point
- Curl your remaining fingers underneath the stick, leaving them loose enough that if your were to shave your mallets back in forth that the shaft of your stick could pinball between your palm and wrist
- 4. Turn your hands vertically so that your palms are facing each other
- 5. Tuck elbows towards your body
- 6. Allow your index finger and thumb to do most of the work here
- 7. This is the most common grip used in timpani playing



Piston Stroke

Bread and Butter

At the core of front ensemble keyboard playing is the piston stroke. Piston stroke gets its name as the fundamentals are very similar to a piston firing in a car; there's a strong attack from the starting position, and after firing it returns immediately back to its starting position. Most of the time, this will be the stroke you use while playing, however there may be some variations depending on the context of what music is being played.

As mentioned in the grip section, the piston stroke will be 90% wrist and 10% arm. Focus on initiating from your wrist, your arm movement will come naturally.

A term you'll hear in regards to piston stroke is the **home position**. The home position is how high your mallets float above the instrument, appropriate to the dynamic that you'll be playing once you strike the instrument. For example, if the note you were going to play is at a forte, your home position would be floating about 9 inches above the instrument.

How to Piston Stroke

- 1. Start in set position
- 2. In a swift and articulate motion, raise your mallets up to the home position the beat before you'll be striking the instrument (again, initiating from the wrist)
 - a. For example, if you begin playing on beat 1, you would have your mallets up to home position by beat 4 of the previous measure
- 3. Strike the instrument and immediately raise your mallets back up to home position.
 - a. A helpful analogy is to think of the note as a trampoline, and your mallets as someone jumping on a trampoline. Once you hit the surface you immediately come back up to where you began

General Piston Stroke Guidelines and Common Mistakes

As stated previously, the piston stroke should be one smooth and articulate motion; you
strike the instrument and it immediately goes back to home position. Avoid striking the
instrument and having the return to home position be its own separate entity. Think of
playing the instrument as a bounce rather than an attack followed by a return to home
position



- When a mallet is tacet (not playing), it should remain at home position ready to play.
 Having your mallet below home position will require you to spend unnecessary energy returning the mallet to home position, when it should have already been there in the first place
- Both mallets should play consistently at the same height. Be mindful of height discrepancies between your hands
- Know what mallet height you should be playing with, even while you're playing. The temptation of most is to lower your mallet heights as you play
- At louder dynamics such as fortissimmo and beyond, avoid the temptation to engage the stroke from your elbow rather than your wrist. This will decrease note accuracy, potentially damage the instrument, and will create a bad technique habit that will be difficult to break down the line

How to Strike your Instrument

Keyboards

Should be struck slightly off center to the center of the resonators by about a half inch.

Occasionally for accidentals (or black keys) there may be instances where it is appropriate to strike on the very edge of the bar if it isn't feasible to strike over the resonators.

No matter what, you should always AVOID striking the nodal points on the instrument. The nodal points are found where the string threads through the bar.

Cymbals (Rolls)

Think of the cymbal like a clock, with 12 o'clock located at the very front of the cymbal. Mallets should be placed at 3 o'clock and 9 o'clock at the very edge of the cymbal to allow the entire instrument to resonate.

Begin rolls fast and gradually slow down as you get louder. The goal isn't to hear the articulation of the mallet against the cymbal. Rather, you want the cymbal to consistently and smoothly resonate.



Cymbals (crash chokes)

Like with cymbal rolls, crash chokes should be struck with the mallet/stick on the edge of the cymbal. A crash choke should be short and articulate, so the cymbal should be dampened shortly after contact is made.

To choke a cymbal with less risk of injury, use your non-playing hand to squeeze the cymbal to stop the vibration. When squeezing, aim to let the palm of your hand dampen the vibration rather than your fingers.

Drums (Snare drum, toms, bongos, ect.)

Should be struck at 12 o'clock about 2-3 inches away from the rim to get the fullest sound out of the instrument (may vary based on the size of the drum). This includes concert snare drum, tom toms, floor drums, ect.

Bass Drum

The bass drum should be struck slightly off center, preferably towards 3 o'clock if we're still using our clock analogy. For normal strikes, keep your left hand hovering over the opposite drum head. This hand can muffle the instrument to achieve the desired note length.

For rolls, use two bass drum mallets and place them slightly off center, towards 12 o'clock and 6 o'clock. Like with cymbals, we aren't looking for an articulate sound while rolling, just enough to get the instrument to resonate.

Timpani

Timpani are played with French grip. This means that your wrists will be rotated vertically. Though the grip is different, how the instrument is struck shares similarities to the Piston Stroke. You'll want to strike the instrument and swiftly bring your mallet back up to home position to allow the timpani to resonate.

The desired playing area on the timpani is the opposite of the snare drum. Aim to play 3-4 inches away from the rim at 6 o'clock.



Dynamics/Mallet Heights and Stick Velocity

Inches denote how high the head/yarn of your mallet should be from your instrument.

• Pianissiissimo (ppp): less than 1 inch

Pianissimo (pp): 1-2 inches

• Piano (p): 2-3 inches

• Mezzo piano (mp): 3-4 inches

• Mezzo forte (mf): 5-6 inches

• Forte (f): 9 inches

• Fortissimo (ff): 12 inches

• Fortississimo (fff): 12 inches and beyond

*These are great general guidelines for dynamics in relation to mallet height. However there may be some fluctuation in height depending on musical context, musical role in the ensemble, ensemble balance/blend, and mallet hardness

Velocity

Velocity is how much force/energy is put into your stroke from your wrist. This shouldn't be confused with mallet height, which relates to how high from your instrument you strike.

Velocity influences the color, tone, and timbre that our instruments create. A harder velocity will create a more articulate and bright sound, where a softer velocity will create a more legato and dark sound. Dynamics don't necessarily influence how much velocity we put into our stroke. That is determined by the context of the music and what kind of sound we want to produce on our instruments.

*For general purposes, the amount of velocity you should put into your stroke should be similar to firmly knocking on a door



Grooving

Why groove?

Unlike in the battery, while playing in the front ensemble we don't get to use our feet to keep time. In lieu of using our feet, the front ensemble maintains pulse by grooving our upper bodies in time with the music we're playing. We also get the added benefit of being able to change our body language while grooving so that we can add another visual element to our performance.

How to groove

- 1. Upon tempo being established:
 - a. Begin subdividing the tempo in your head
 - b. Run through the first measure or two of music in your head before playing the first note
- 2. Start pulsing your head to the beat, maintaining body language with musical style (if the music is a flowing legato, smoothly and delicately pulse your head. If the musical style is aggressive, indicate the same in your body language)
- 3. When possible, look towards the center marimba and the players on either side of you to check that you're:
 - c. In time
 - d. Matching style
 - e. Keeping your fellow musicians accountable to pulse

"But grooving feels silly to do" - It only looks silly when there's the odd one out not doing it. A front ensemble that grooves together plays together, and looks a heck of a lot cooler.

Resources

- Drum stick technique:
 - Spencer Easton "How to Hold Drumsticks"
- Mallet technique:
 - Pulse Front Ensemble Packet 2018
- Timpani grip and technique:
 - Timpani FUNdamentals by Mark Dorr
- Everything cymbals:

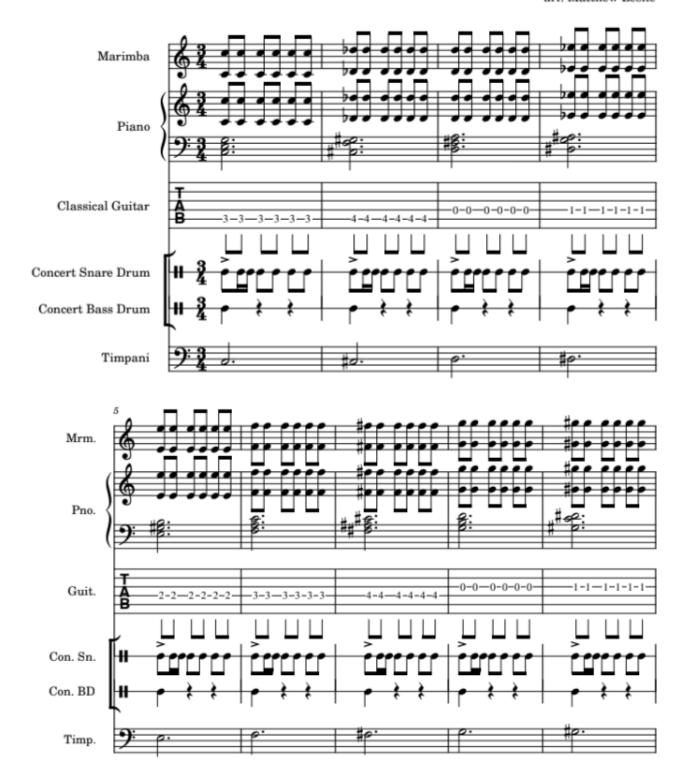


- Suspended Cymbal by Mark Dorr
- Great examples of front ensembles:
 - O Blue Devils 2017 -METAMORPH Marimba Head Cam Masato Kobayashi
 - Great example of grooving around the 0:50 mark
 - o 2022 Bluecoats | DCI Finals | Front Ensemble
 - o 2017 Blue Devils Front Ensemble Broken Arrow, OK Flight of the Bumblebee
 - AN INCREDIBLY uniform ensemble
- Resource on efficient practice:
 - o 10 Easy Ways To Optimize Your Music Practice- NPR

ther Terms:	



arr. Matthew Leslie









Lockjaw



Kronos









Double Verticals









Single Independent



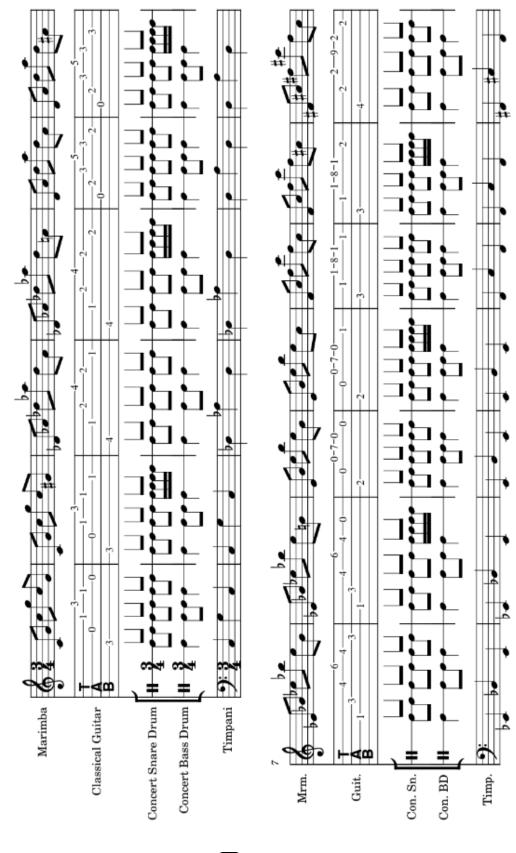








Single Alternating





Maderia River (Arranged for Front Ensemble)

Phillip Glass arr. Matthew Leslie , **6** öö ** io 6 ** 6 9 (SO) 0 ** 4 d **4** 1 3 9. Vibraphone 1 Marimba 3 Piano Marimba 2 Vibraphone 2 Concert Bass Drum Timpani Marimba 1 Electric Guitar



