

Preparing the Rutgers Youth Percussion Ensemble Audition

By Peter Saleh, Director – rev. July 2014

This article is to assist the preparation of anyone interested in auditioning for RYPE.

Why duets? Why not solos and reading like other auditions?

Solos are great to develop musicianship, technical skill, and confidence in performance and sight-reading ability is vital for serious musicians. Your RYPE audition will still contain a solo on what you feel is your best instrument, be it snare drum, marimba, or other percussion, but because we have more rehearsal time, audition reading is less crucial than your *part preparation*.

As music in small groups (chamber music) requires all of the players to be tuned in to what is going on, though, a duet is a great way to see how your listening and technical skills translate into a cohesive ensemble performance – in other words, can you play well with others?

There is no conductor in a duet, therefore you are provided with a score instead of parts so that you may be aware of what is going on in both parts at any given time; you and the second player are essentially sharing the responsibilities that conductors usually have - this is a vital skill to have in percussion ensemble and chamber music.

Set up for success:

- Since there will be no conductor, position your music stand as low as possible so that you can see your instruments and that your playing will be more precise.
- These pieces may be played from memory or read from the score.
- Ask your private teacher, band director, or a more experienced player for assistance.

Etude #1: The Multi-Percussion Duet

Playing along with a “taped” part is very common in chamber percussion. Much music has been written for percussion and tape and this duet is one way to get a taste of that style. It is also a way to play along with a dependable “second player” that will be accurate every time.

About the piece:

- It is written without any snare-specific technique, meaning that players who have more of a marimba and xylophone playing background won't need to develop snare drum rolls or advanced accent, double stroke, or flam techniques in order to play it.
- The audition etude has also been written for common drum set instruments found at any school. Because each part contain two surfaces, to work on the coordination, one may also practice on two practice pads.
- You may practice along with headphones or ear buds but during the audition you will play along with the track through a loudspeaker.
- The composer has *turned down* offers to publish so that this music may remain free to you!

Preparing your part:

- Listen to each track a few times to get the general feel of the duet – each track.
- Follow along in the score with the recordings.
- Choose which part you would like to play. Understand that if you have chosen the tom part, you will be playing along to the Snare/HH recording and vice versa.
- Sticking is up to you. If you have the skill to use double strokes and other relevant sticking patterns, you may do so, but it is suggested that alternate sticking on most passages be used in order to have the most control over your sound.
- *If playing the snare drum/hi-hat part:*
 - In order to avoid tangled arm positions, I suggest putting the hi-hat on the right and centered slightly in front of the snare drum.

- Position the snare drum a bit lower than you would normally do if you were playing concert snare drum alone in order to allow for freer side-to-side motion.
- Position a padded stick tray on your dominant side (most people's right) underneath your music stand with the brushes already opened and set to be picked up easily.
- Although the hi-hat pedal is not notated, the player will use it to execute open and closed notes.
- It will help the transition back to sticks at C if measure 28 is played one-handed, allowing the other hand to be free to help switch from brushes to sticks earlier.
- *If playing the tom-tom part:*
 - Two drums between 10"-14" in diameter and tuned about a third apart are ideal.
 - It is suggested to position the higher drum to the right.
 - Ensure both drums are set to the same height/angle (snare stands are good for this).
 - It is possible to use swizzle sticks; otherwise the stick tray holding your (timpani) mallets should be positioned in the same manner as the sd/hh player's.
 - When playing on the hoop, it is suggested to use the shoulder/neck of the stick.
 - Rolls may be single stroked, as on the recording, or they maybe be played with multiple bounce strokes (aka 'buzzes')
 - When playing the muted passages (marked by dots over the notes in mm 22-27), the hand doing the dampening should still be holding the second, unused stick.
 - It will help the transition back to sticks at C if measure 28 is performed with one hand, allowing the other hand to be free to help switch from mallets to sticks or to flip the swizzle sticks over earlier.

About the click track:

- As part of your preparation, try simply counting through all of the meter and subdivision changes to ensure that there is no guesswork.
- In addition to serving as a metronome, it is there to aid your rhythm. In particular, measures 12-18 and beat 2 of measure 24 include subdivisions to guide your playing.
- The click track is also modified to assist in tempo transitions. Specifically, mm 7-11 (the 3/8 measures), the second half of m19, and the first half of m29 are setup so that the changes make more sense.

Etude #2: Excerpt of Tigger Benford's "American Kriti"

- Listen to (and watch) performances by Exit 9 Percussion on YouTube and the composer on AllMusic.com to understand the style. In the audition, you will play along with a hand drum player (djembe, conga), similar to the Exit 9 performance.
- To play in the proper register, make sure you know where middle "C" is on your instrument. On a marimba, it is always 3 octaves down from the highest note.
- If you are not playing from memory, it will be important to position your music stand in the middle of the range of your part.
- Letter 'A' is played 4x. 'E' is played 3x. Note: 8vb means an octave lower and loco
- Though it is marked 200bpm, accuracy of pitch, rhythm, and meter is paramount. A slightly slower tempo is permitted to this end.
- The player should choose a sticking that allows this accuracy – minimize use of doubles in 8th note passages
- Choose mallets that are appropriate for the range of marimba you are playing. Medium hard yarn mallets or medium unwound rubber mallets work well, for example.
- The player can add phrasing in a musically appropriate way.