



YAMAHA

Educator Series

PERCUSSION



Vicki Peterson Jenks

Vicki Peterson Jenks is an artist/clinician representing Yamaha Band & Orchestral Division, Sabian Cymbals, Mike Balter Mallets and Vic Firth Snare Drum Sticks. Vicki is also the owner of Jenks Music Studio (Madison), Wisconsin's largest private percussion studio. Under Vicki's leadership, the Wisconsin Youth Symphony Orchestra Percussion Ensemble has performed at the prestigious Midwest International Band and Orchestra Clinic on three separate occasions and performed for "standing ovation" audiences in Great Britain, Western Europe, Japan and Taiwan. During the summer months, Vicki serves as percussion artist faculty member at the International Music Camp, (North Dakota), Birch Creek Music Performance Center, (Door County, Wisconsin), and U. W. Madison Summer Music Clinic. Vicki has also visited eastern and southern Africa to study djembe and marimba bands. Vicki was principal timpanist with the Wisconsin Chamber Orchestra for 21 years.

Practical Strategies for Teaching Beginning Mallet Instruments

By Vicki Peterson Jenks

The mallet family includes the xylophone, marimba, orchestra bells, vibraphone and chimes. The xylophone has roots in Africa. Today, bars are made of exotic hardwoods or synthetic materials. Synthetic bars are more durable, seldom need retuning and are cheaper than rosewood. The characteristic "crisp" xylophone sonority is enhanced with medium hard rubber or polyball mallets. Plastic mallets damage bars and must be avoided! Concert xylophones are three and a half octaves in range (F45- C88) and sound one octave higher than written. Due to its wide range and tonal warmth, the marimba is the most popular solo mallet instrument. It reinforces lower woodwinds, brass and strings while allowing two to three students to play simultaneously on one instrument. An array of rubber, cord or yarn mallets are utilized. Marimbas range from two and one half to five octaves with the four and one third octave (A25- C76) most commonly used. Marimbas sound as written.

Today's tempered steel orchestra bells feature two and one half octave range (F57 or G59- C88), sound two octaves higher than written and are played with rubber, plastic or brass mallets. Bells are soloistic and often double melodic passages. The vibraphone is the youngest mallet member and was introduced in 1916. Aluminum alloy bars stretch three octaves (F33- F69), sound as written, and are played with cord or yarn mallets. A foot pedal controls tone duration and variable motor speeds provide a subtle musical nuance. Chimes are vertically-suspended chrome tubes capped at the top. The caps, not the tubes, are struck. A one and one half octave set (C40- F57 or G59) with one and one half inch diameter tubes are most durable and sound best using acrylic (not rawhide) mallets.

The following physical aspects of playing mallet instruments are most efficiently learned by imitating the instructor. Invite student discovery using awareness-learning phrases such as "notice," "be aware," "imagine," "describe," etc. With the palm facing up, imagine holding a handful of popcorn, and place the mallet shaft between the first joint of index finger and the fleshy pad of the thumb. Curl remaining fingers around the shaft creating a "tube." Turn your hand over. Notice the thumb resting on the side of the mallet shaft and the index finger which is pointing downward. Also, notice the mallet being held with "relaxed control," two thirds of the distance from the mallet head.

Center yourself behind the instrument with your feet spread comfortably apart. Shift your lower torso back and forth as though awaiting a tennis serve. This athletic stance delivers the upper torso to the correct basic keyboard area. Relax elbows at your side and adjust your forearms so they are parallel to the floor. Use height adjustable instruments, or two-inch blocks of wood to ensure parallel forearm positioning. Your wrists supply basic motor power to accelerate the mallet heads to the bars. Their primary motion is "down-up" and is called the "piston stroke." The "piston stroke" doesn't waste energy as there are no unnecessary stops or directional changes. All motion after contact is in service of the next stroke. The "piston stroke" starts at the correct height for the desired dynamic and recovers only as high as it is necessary for the next dynamic. Keep your wrist and mallet level as close as possible to the keyboard to ensure accuracy! Remember: it is easier to hit a bull's eye at three inches than at six!



Vicki Peterson Jenks

Prior to beginning any formal exercises, it is advisable to get acquainted with the instrument. Here's an approach – pick out familiar melodies by ear, play just the upper bars using pentatonic improvisation; play thirds and fifths on the lower bars, try a simple C blues walking bass line, etc. Do not use sheet music until the instrument's "geography" is understood!

Preliminary Exercise 1



- a) R R R R R R R R R R R R R R R R
- b) L L L L L L L L L L L L L L L L
- c) R R R L L L L R R R R L L L L
- d) R L L R R L L R R L L R R L L
- e) R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L

Place Preliminary Exercises 1 & 2 and a pencil on the music stand directly in front of the bars to be played with the stand as low as possible. Establish a field of vision where mallets, bars, and music can be seen. After finding "G," use "hard vision" to play Exercise 1 with one hand. While staring at the pencil, switch hands and play the same exercise. Using "soft vision," shift your gaze up from the pencil to actual notation and play the next sticking variation. Pretending to look at the conductor, play another sticking. Finally, close your eyes and play the example again.

Preliminary Exercise 2 develops horizontal technique where you feel the **Preliminary Exercise 2**



distance between bars using kinesthetic and aural senses. To improve reading, I often enlarge music on oversized paper. Use multicolored highlighters to pinpoint identical phrases within the music. I suggest optometric visits regularly!

Here are some pointers for teaching homogeneous mallet classes:

1. Gather as many keyboards as possible. Include a piano, student bell kits and electronic instruments. Assemble triangles, tambourines, finger cymbals, wrist bells, wind chimes, mark trees, suspended cymbals, temple blocks and rain sticks.
2. Place everything in a circle (with you in the middle), or a 180 degree arc, or in parallel "streets" where "neighbors" (teams) face you on either side. Use a "musical chairs" concept where no one plays the same instrument for the entire class time. Teach holistic, total percussion musicianship from day one.
3. Vary lesson content with a mix of body percussion, dancing, singing, memorization, improvisation and reading. Incorporate TV jingles, pop, seasonal, patriotic, classical and multicultural folk music.
4. Feature your mallet ensemble at concerts by using special costuming, hats and props.
5. Teach pride of ownership by requiring that each student own three pairs of well-labeled mallets and a mallet bag.

Finally, there is a plethora of excellent beginning level mallet literature not limited to, but including these fine composers: Thomas Brown, Anthony Cirone, Randy Eyles, Sandy Feldstein, Murray Houllif, Ruth Jeanne, Arthur Lipner, James Moore, Mitchell Peters, William Schinstine and Garwood Whaley.

"Roll up your shirt sleeves" and dig into the WONDERFUL WORLD OF MAKING MUSIC WITH MALLETS!



Yamaha Corporation of America • Band & Orchestral Division
3445 East Paris Ave., SE • P.O. Box 899 • Grand Rapids, MI 49518-0899
www.yamahapercussion.com/band