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## BECOMING A BETTER ACCESSORY PERCUSSION INSTRUMENT PLAYER

There have been times over the years that I have mused on what life would be like if I had the luxury to invest all of my energy and practice time into the study of a single instrument the way that professional pianists and violinists do. As percussive musicians, most of us fight the good fight to maintain a performance ready technique on snare drum, mallets, and timpani, as well as drum set, congas, etc. Accessory instruments such as the tambourine and triangle are easy to relegate to the "last minute desperation" category of practice when a part comes up in orchestra, band, or percussion ensemble due to a perceived simplicity of technique. Sooner or later, a triangle or tambourine part will come along that will challenge you beyond your ability to "cram" your technique on these instruments.

The key to consistent technique and performance comfort, on any instrument, is regular, even habitual, contact with that instrument. Repetition is the insurance policy for any given technique on an instrument, and repetition requires some kind of method. There are numerous method books available for snare drum, mallets, timpani, and drum set. There are not so many books that deal with technical development on the accessory instruments. The skills required on triangle, tambourine and castanets are in fact very similar to those needed for snare drum performance. For this reason a good beginning or intermediate snare drum book can serve as an excellent method for accessory percussion instruments.

Two books in most percussionist's collection of methods are the George L. Stone's *Stick Control* and Ted Reed's *Progressive Steps to Syncopation*. Using these two books as daily method books for the accessory instruments will guarantee the development of a sound technical base on these instruments. Practicing is a creative art form, and the use of these two books will require a bit of adjustment to meet the specific needs of each accessory instrument. Here are a few simple tips to getting started when using these books.

+ Own your own accessory instruments. There have never been better accessory instruments being manufactured then are being made today so it is a good time to purchase them. It is difficult to develop a strong connection to an instrument that you don't own.

+ Add at least one of these instruments to your practice routine every day. You can rotate these instruments, practicing tambourine on the first day, triangle on day two and castanets on day three of a practice cycle.

+ Begin with obvious basic skills such as keeping steady time on simple note values and rhythmic patterns and keep the tempo slow and comfortable.

+ Choose one dynamic level to work with for each practice session rather than working on different dynamics within a single session. Repetition of dynamic level builds consistency in the same way as rhythmic repetition does.

*Stick Control* can provide very challenging material for technical growth when it is applied creatively to any of the accessory instruments. I have used the Stone book to strengthen the louder dynamic knee-fist technique by playing the right hand strokes with the articulating hand the left hand strokes on the knee. The same can be done with a single beater applied to different inner planes of the triangle. Ted Reed's book, *Syncopation*, can serve as an endless source for creative practice by applying various tempi and dynamics as well as converting the single note values to rolled note values.

I will conclude this brief article by stating that I promise you considerable technical growth in your ability to play the accessory percussion instruments by using the aforementioned books and practice tips. Explore your own method book collection to discover other inspired ways to strengthen your musicianship on these very important percussion instruments.