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Practical Tips: Transition from College to Professional *Part 1: Building an Instrument Inventory*

College is a time full of opportunity, personal growth, and access to percussion instruments. Making the transition from college to the professional world requires more than the acquisition of the diploma. There's no magic wand waved at commencement anointing divine professional status. This rite of passage from full-time student to full-time professional may be different for everyone, but includes one common denominator: a personal inventory of percussion instruments.

Consider what it is you plan to do. Will your career require a full inventory of instruments to practice on and cart about the city for performances? Will you have a school, church, or well-stocked ensemble affiliation willing to loan gear? If you plan to teach lessons, do you own the materials your teacher so kindly loaned to you throughout school?

One of the worst feelings imaginable is to turn down a well-paying gig of great repertoire with a quality ensemble because you cannot access the necessary instruments. Sometimes the call comes on short notice and you may not have the time to purchase or borrow the required instruments. While it's unusual to be expected to have the perfect spring coil on hand for a last minute performance of Luciano Berio's Folk Songs, there are certain instruments typically used and beneficial to have in your collection. Chances are, your future will include some form of "orchestral" and/or pit orchestra gigs. Owning at least one triangle, tambourine, woodblock, a pair of castanets with

machine, a concert snare, crash cymbals, suspended cymbal, and a large collection of sticks, mallets and beaters is essential to getting started. Many contracts involve cartage, and by owning the xylophone, not only might you be the one assigned to play Porgy and Bess, but you might be paid extra because you also provided the tam-tam, congas, and vibraphone for the rest of the program.

Most percussionists will benefit from owning a drum set. Regardless of your future game plan, owning a drum set guarantees a collection of drums, hardware, and cymbals that can be used in a variety of settings. Drum set toms can be repurposed as concert toms, an 18" crash cymbal can double as a concert suspended cymbal, and while you're saving for a high end orchestral snare drum, the stock drum set snare can be tuned appropriately for a large ensemble setting.

I'm grateful to have started my collection in the early days as a high school student and an undergraduate, purchasing numerous drums, tambourines, triangles, cymbals, a glockenspiel, and as many random instruments as I could afford. There are instruments, sticks, and mallets I use on a regular basis with a history including hundreds of performances in numerous states, and several countries. These personal heirlooms are especially important as they were bought in a time requiring a financial sacrifice.

It can be a struggle to perform multi-percussion works in the college environment. Keeping your setup intact from day to day without other students pilfering instruments for their own needs adds to wasted time resetting for each practice session. However, if the instruments in your setup are your

own, the setup can remain untouched. When preparing Psappha by Iannis Xenakis for a solo recital, it made sense to buy my own collection of woodblocks that would always be in my little corner of the practice room.

Consider the vehicle you will drive post-college. Can you transport a drum set, a four-octave xylophone, a chromatic set of almglocken, and a wind machine in your Honda Civic? I once moved to the top of an orchestral contractor's list because I always had room in my truck for the celeste along with a concert bass drum, glockenspiel, music stands, trap tables, and a hefty case of accessory instruments.

Choosing a living arrangement with the physical space to store your instruments, provides practice space, easy access for loading, and tolerant neighbors can be a challenge. A four-story walk-up with street parking can be difficult to overcome.

Keep an eye on eBay, Craigslist, and close-out specials. Even if there's nothing specific you need, a deal is a deal. Some of the most interesting instruments find their way onto resale sites and often the seller is in need of cash. When traveling, take a look at Craigslist, drop in on shops selling used instruments, and watch for estate sales to see if there is something of particular interest.

I live by the philosophy of making each purchase count. Buying high quality instruments the first time around is well worth the initial expense. The instruments you choose to play are an extension of yourself and reflect who you are as an artist. Additionally, high quality instruments last longer, require less maintenance, and will earn you more money in the long run.

As a graduate student spending considerable effort and finances flying about the country taking auditions, I was determined to make a lifetime investment of a high quality concert snare drum.

Not only could I prepare and perform solo repertoire and excerpts on the drum in college, but it fit comfortably beneath the seat in front of me on flights and added comfort and familiarity in auditions settings. My Black Swamp snare drum helped me win auditions, is the centerpiece of each lesson I teach, is my first choice in every chamber and orchestral performance, will be with me on the next audition, and certainly on stage for my next solo recital. This drum has more than paid for itself.

We as percussionists are lucky in the sense we can buy the instruments that make us sound great one investment at a time. These instruments distinguish us as performers and set us apart from others. So make a list. Develop a budget for long-term purchases and keep funds available for immediate opportunities. Make the building of your instrument collection a top priority. The sooner you begin the journey, the more pride you can take in your art, and the transition from student to professional can commence.

James Doyle is visiting assistant Professor of Music at Adams State College. He currently performs regularly with the San Juan Symphony, Music in the Mountains Festival, Medano Creek Quartet, Air National Guard Band of the Gulf Coast Big Band, Doyle/Kane Duo for flute and percussion, and several regional pop, folk, and world music artists.