



Joshua D. Smith

BSP Educator Network Member

How to Sabotage Your Triangle Sound

What's the big deal with a triangle? To the uninformed observer, it is simply a bent piece of metal you hit with something, right? I know professional percussionists talk at lengths about the importance of overtones, striking area, and even how to achieve musical nuance on this instrument, but for every bit of professional advice, there are countless ways you can effectively sabotage your efforts. For percussionists that want to ruin their triangle sound, be treated like an amateur, and lose gigs, here are some tips I have collected from my years of observation, both in the classroom and in performance halls.

THE CLAIM: Your triangle should be stable and sonically unaffected by the support string. With triangle, the more overtones, the better! Thick string will dampen your instrument and negate your sparkly and shimmery potential on the stage. True professionals use very thin string (thin fishing line is a great choice) and add a second string (bigger and lower hanging) as a safety net in case the original string snaps during a performance.

THE SABOTAGE: Don't plan ahead. Leave your good triangle clips at home. Simply grab whatever you can to wrap around the triangle so it can be hung on a music stand or bass drum lug nut. Suspending your triangle from a shoelace not only informs musicians of your Macgyver-like prowess, but also allows your triangle to spin while being struck, thereby giving you a moving target during your performance.



***TRY A BETTER
ALTERNATIVE***



THE CLAIM: To get your triangle to properly resonate, strike it with a beater that will not absorb any of the vibrations. Straight metal rods used as beaters produce a “click” or “tick” sound when striking a triangle, as the entire rod will vibrate. A better alternative is a beater with a large, heavy striking end mounted on a thin handle.

THE SABOTAGE: Go the easy route and use one of your drumsticks as a triangle beater, especially if it will get you out of the chore of setting up a padded trap table and switching implements during a rest. As an alternative, fashion a beater out of something that is heavy and made of metal, since metal on metal produces a louder sound. I even witnessed a performance where the percussionist used the ring on his hand to strike a triangle. For an added bonus, strike your instrument with a wrench or screw driver. By doing so, you can apply chips or micro-bends to your triangle, thereby permanently “tagging” it as your instrument; much more effective and permanent than using a marker to write your initials.



***TRY A BETTER
ALTERNATIVE***



THE CLAIM: Striking your triangle at a 45-degree angle will create an array of microscopic vibration bends and turns at a variety of angles. This collection of vibrating angles will elicit as many overtones from your triangle as possible, which is the ideal sound a professional percussionist wants to project. If you strike a triangle at a 90-degree angle, you run the risk of producing a sound that is close to a discernible pitch. When rolling on a triangle, angle your beater in a way that the back and forth repetitions will strike each side of the instrument at a 45-degree angle. With a little practice, your triangle rolls will sound better than you ever expected.

THE SABOTAGE: Think about right angles. If you strike your triangle at a 90-degree angle perpendicular to the instrument, it will vibrate the metal (at a microscopic level) in an open-closed fashion. If you strike your triangle at a 90-degree angle parallel to the instrument, it will create vibrations that are only side-to-side. Strive for a sound that is close to a specific pitch; obvious and uninhibited by all that “color” and “shimmer” professional percussionists talk about at dinner parties. For extra attention on the concert stage, chose a triangle that produces a pitch a half-step away from the key of the Wind Band or Orchestra selection being performed.



***TRY A BETTER
ALTERNATIVE***



is Lecturer of Music, Percussion in the Department of Music at the University Of Tennessee Martin in Martin, TN. Smith earned his Doctor of Musical Arts degree from the University of North Texas, a Master of Music Performance degree from James Madison University, and a Bachelor of Music in Music Education degree from the University of Kentucky.