

Other Percussion Instruments

The percussion family is without a doubt the largest and most varied collection of instruments in the world. There are various smaller percussion instruments, sometimes called “accessories” or “auxiliary percussion,” that are quite common in marching bands and drum corps. For the purposes of this book, these instruments have been categorized into three classes: **Accessory Percussion, Special Effects, and World Percussion.**

Accessory Percussion (listed alphabetically)

ANVIL (and related instruments)

The following instruments are known for their “aggressive” metallic sounds: anvils, brake drums, oxygen or propane tanks, railroad tracks, frying pans, Remo Spoxe, and metal pipes. In fact, a few hours at your local salvage yard or automotive wrecking facility will help you to unearth even more goodies that would fit nicely in this category. A fresh coat of paint will give them that fancy “store bought” look.

These instruments are typically played with very hard mallets (or even hammers) to achieve bright and piercing sounds. These instruments are also known for *destroying* very hard mallets (or even hammers)! In other words, you may not want to pull out your best xylophone mallets for the frying pan cadenza. On the gentler side, these instruments can create some very unique sounds when played with soft rubber or hard yarn mallets. For example, three to four brake drums of different sizes, played with soft mallets, can provide a wonderful nipple gong type sound. Experiment!



BELL TREE

When played with a hard xylophone mallet or brass mallet, the bell tree will provide a brilliant bell glissando effect. What’s great about this effect is that there is not too much sustain, in other words, it gets out of the way very quickly. This can be crucial in certain ensemble situations. Also, experiment with striking individual bells on the tree. This can be a great sound when definite pitches aren’t a concern.



COW BELLS

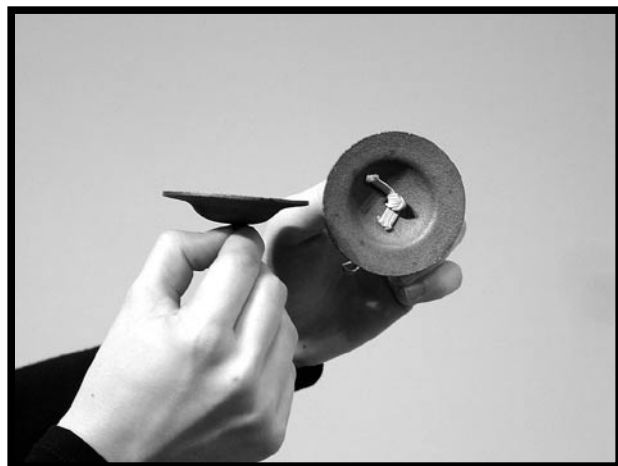
There are a zillion different types of cowbells on the market today: rock cowbells, songo bells, mambo bells, cha-cha bells. All have their place in different styles of music. Remember, when playing outside **tone means projection**. Try to find cowbells that have a bit of sustain and natural tone to them. Latin Percussion (LP) has what they call the “Salsa” line of cowbells. All of the models in this line have a beautiful tone and work well outdoors.



Cowbells can be played with any variety of drum stick. Experiment with playing on the mouth of the bell with the shoulder of the stick (left picture), or on top of the bell with the bead (right picture). You can create some great grooves by combining these two sounds.

FINGER CYMBALS

Finger cymbals can add a great flavor to some of the more “transparent” sections of your music. The key to getting a full sound out of these little cymbals is to strike them “edge to edge.” If you play them as if they were regular hand cymbals, flat surface to flat surface, you will get a less than desirable metallic, clunk sound. A single finger cymbal can also be mounted and struck with a triangle beater or several finger cymbals can be strung together and mounted. This “line” of finger cymbals can be shaken or scraped with a triangle beater. Good quality finger cymbals can be purchased from Zildjian in thick (high-pitched) or thin (low-pitched) models.



The basic tambourine stroke

Strike the tambourine near the edge with the fingertips of your free hand. Do not strike your free hand with the tambourine! Furthermore, don't whack the tambourine against your leg, hip, or any other object for that matter. The main goal of the basic tambourine stroke is to **create one sound**. If you are striking the tambourine against another surface, you will not only hear the sound of that impact, but you'll also hear the "upstroke" or motion of the tambourine. So, in general, try to keep the tambourine from moving any more than necessary.

For hearty sounds, make a **fist** and use the flat portion of your fingers to strike the head of the tambourine.



For very loud accents, strike the head with a **flat hand**. Since the hand is covering a lot of the head's surface you will get a nice "pop" sound without damaging the head.



For more delicate sounds, use the **fingertips**.

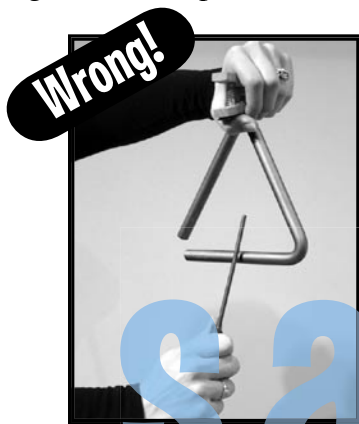
Based on the music being performed, you should experiment with striking the tambourine in different areas. At the very edge (over the frame), you'll find the sound to be quite "dry." If you strike the head an inch or so from the edge of the tambourine, you'll hear a little more tone.



Reminder: Keep the tambourine at an angle to avoid extraneous jingling between strokes!

As for the actual triangle, the **6-inch size** is a good place to start. Alan Abel and Neil Grover make outstanding triangles, which are highly recommended. Other sizes can add some great colors to your palette (4-inch or 9-inch). If you've spent a good amount of money on your triangle, you will want to play it with actual **triangle beaters** (as opposed to tension rods, drum keys, screwdrivers, drumsticks, or anything else you may find on the band room floor).

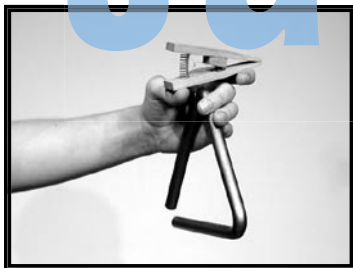
As for playing the instrument, we've all heard the story about holding the triangle up at eye-level so everyone can see you perform proudly. Not only does this allow people to see the instrument, but this will also allow you to **strike** the instrument correctly. The triangle should be struck at a 45 degree angle in order to get all of the overtones to "speak." If you strike the triangle "flat" to the playing surface, you will get a distinct pitch. This isn't what we're looking for in a triangle sound.



This is an example of a bad grip and improper playing angle.



Striking at an angle produces prettier overtones. Be sure the beater is very relaxed in your hand, this will help you avoid a "clanky" sound.



*The triangle can be **dampened** with the holding hand by tightening your fingers around the instrument.*

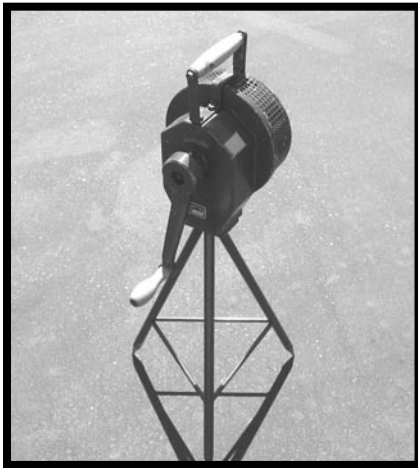
Rolls can be played by placing the beater inside the triangle and alternating between two sides of the instrument. If you roll between three sides of the triangle you are playing "dinner-time" style. This should be avoided unless you are performing on a dude ranch...then by all means, play this way.



Sometimes the performer does not have a free hand and has to **hang** the triangle. This is perfectly acceptable, but try to avoid hanging the triangle on a stand that will vibrate, like a music stand. Try using a small piece of ply wood mounted to a cymbal stand (as pictured here). This will also allow the performer to play fast passages with two beaters. Remember, the triangle still needs to be hung high enough for the performer to strike at the proper angle.

Special Effects (listed alphabetically)

AIR RAID SIREN



Air raid sirens come in two basic flavors: **electric** and good ol' fashioned **crank** style. When you write for this effect realize that it takes some time for the siren to get to its full volume. The time will vary depending on the type of siren you use. The siren will also take a bit of time to wind down. At the Vanguard, we throw a heavy packing blanket over the siren to cut down the volume during its wind down. We also have fun experimenting with placing the siren on different parts of the field. It will cut through no matter where you put it!

ALMGLOCKEN



Almglocken are a relative of the cowbell, but they are tuned to **specific pitches**. These bells have a rounded shape and usually have a gold-colored finish. They are sold in chromatic sets up to three octaves! Unlike the cowbell, these instruments are quite **fragile**. Because they are a tuned instrument, they can be banged *out* of tune very easily.

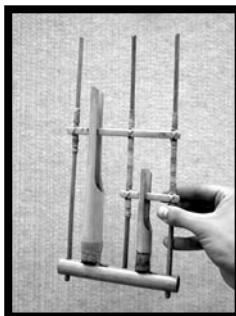
Almglocken should be played with a medium to soft rubber or yarn mallet. They should never be played with a drum stick!

You will have to build your own **rack** for the almglocken. Try to suspend the instruments from a pipe with metal ring fasteners or velcro. The mouth of the bell should face the ground. This will alleviate stress from the handle. Almglocken sound amazing when blended with any keyboard instrument.

ANKLUNG



A diatonic scale of anklung.

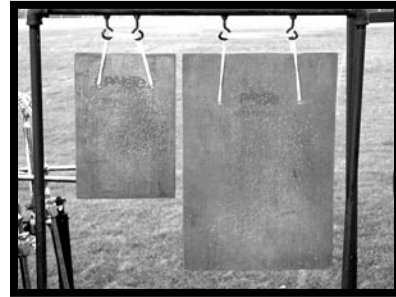


Individual anklung.

Originating from Indonesia, anklung are tuned, bamboo rattles which are traditionally used in gamelan music. These are usually sold in diatonic octaves (C to C). They are fragile and will require a case for travel, though they are an extremely unique sound!

BELL PLATE

Check out the opening of the 1987 Santa Clara Vanguard show, and you'll never forget the powerful sound of bell plates. Bell plates work well outdoors due to their extreme "cutting power." They can be struck with acrylic **hammers**, or if your eardrums are so daring, ball-peen hammers for that added "ice pick to the forehead." For your gentler moods, you can also experiment with softer **mallets** to get a subtle tuned gong effect. Paiste's "sound plates" are one popular version of this instrument.



CAR HORN

Car horns are a popular effect for many contemporary composers. Their most popular use is in Gershwin's *American in Paris*. There are a few basic types: klaxon horns, bulb horns, or battery operated electric horns with switches.

sample

CARILLON BELL

This bell means business. The carillon bell is essentially a church bell. It is very large, and made of cast bronze, with a **clapper** inside. **Don't** make the mistake of using a mallet or hammer on the outside of the bell as it may crack.



CHESTNUTS

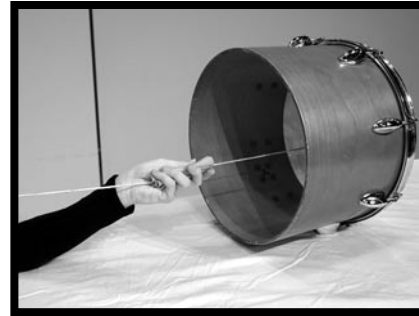
The shells of chestnuts can be "sewn" together to create a hand-held rattle. This can be shaken for a bamboo wind chime effect or you can gently tap the chestnuts on the shell or head of a drum (they sound great on the shell of a concert bass drum). Meinl Percussion makes a great synthetic substitution called "Birds." Birds consist of a string of hollow, hemisphere shaped, fiberglass shells. They project very well outdoors and can add a nice dash of atmospheric color in certain situations.



Meinl "birds" (laying down), and a cluster of chestnuts (being held).

LION'S ROAR

The lion's roar is a friction drum, similar to the Brazilian cuica. Essentially, the lion's roar is a single-headed tom tom (medium to large size) with a long string attached *through* the center of the head. The performer simply pulls a well-rosined piece of leather along the string to create the roar of the lion. Obviously the size of your lion will depend on the size and tuning of your drum.



MARCHING MACHINE

It's no mystery how this instrument got its name. One of the more "literal" effects, the marching machine is comprised of several wooden rods loosely suspended from ropes which attach to a square frame. The frame is then lowered in a sort of "rocking" fashion onto a hard surface, preferably a hollow box for added resonance. Check out the 1991 Santa Clara Vanguard, or the 1993 Cadets of Bergen County for two different versions of the same instrument.



This inexpensive marching machine was homemade using PVC pipe, wood, rope, and lots of drilling.

OCEAN DRUM

Ocean drums are simply tom toms filled with small ball bearings. When the drum is gently rotated the ball bearings roll around on the head creating the sound of waves on the beach. The effect is beautiful, but not powerful enough to cut through an ensemble. Ocean drums can be used when the band scoring is very thin or if sound reinforcement is used (microphone and speaker). There are a few manufacturers that make a good quality ocean drum, or wave drum, but they are quite simple to make.



POP GUN

Not much explanation needed here. If anything, some people may be surprised to know that this instrument is called for every now and then. For a while, Vic Firth Inc., made a very reliable pop gun with a great sound that never failed to "pop"! If you can find one of those, they're great!