

TEXAS BANDMASTERS ASSOCIATION

BEGINNER INSTRUCTION SERIES



SNARE DRUM

**DANNY PRADO
CLINICIAN**

**49TH ANNUAL CLINIC
SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS
1996**

Foreword

The Texas Bandmasters Association for the second year continues to sponsor a series of clinics on beginning instrumental teaching methods, presented by some of Texas' premier music educators during the 1996 TBA Convention in San Antonio, Texas. These master teachers, chosen from the ranks of superior music educators in the State, represent a wide diversity in geographic location, as well as, in teaching situations.

A session will be presented on six band instruments with a companion handout. In this handout, you will find teaching methods, and classroom organizational skills which are used successfully in today's schools.

We acknowledge the efforts of the clinicians who prepared these booklets and, who also presented a clinic session. In addition we acknowledge Jim **Hagood**, TBA Immediate Past President, whose vision provided us with the many benefits we gain through this series of clinics. Jim **Hagood's** foresight, and diligent efforts in laying out the ground work for these series is very much appreciated.

This series is respectfully dedicated to the legions of band directors who have gone before us and who have built the music education program that is unique in history: TEXAS' BANDS. Representing the best of this tradition was the 1990 President of TBA, the late Malcolm Helm, whose example and teaching inspired and challenged all of us.

Bob Brandenberger, President, Texas Bandmasters Association

DANNY PRADO

A 1968 graduate of **Hemphill** High School, Danny Prado received his Bachelor of Music Education from Stephen F. Austin State University in Nacogdoches in 1972. He began his teaching career in Jacksonville, Texas before moving into the Hurst-Eules-Bedford ISD, where he taught first at Eules Junior High then Bedford Junior High for the next seventeen years. In 1989 he assumed his present teaching position in the Grapevine-Colleyville ISD at Grapevine High School. Mr. Prado received his Master of Arts Degree from Texas Woman's University in 1993. He has conducted All-Region Bands, Honor Groups, workshops, and clinics throughout the state. Mr. Prado has served on the U.I.L. Music Advisory Committee and is presently Region V TMEA Secretary. He is a member of TMEA, TBA, TMAA, IAJE, and Phi Beta Mu.

Beginning Snare Drum

Superior snare drum technique is essential for the beginning percussionist to develop as it is the basic instrument for all other percussion instruments and techniques. Poor snare drum technique will result in poor keyboard, bass drum, timpani, drum set, triangle, etc., performance. However, most of your beginning percussion students are not attracted to the bell kit. They want to play **DRUMS!!!** I believe very strongly that a beginning percussionist should develop their snare drum execution before moving to the other percussion instruments. One of the strongest statements to bolster this belief came for the great Louie **Bellson** at a TBA clinic some years ago. His massive double bass kit was set up on the stage and after his introduction, he came on and sat down and played this kit with unbelievable delivery and musicianship. After his two minute solo was over, and the crowd was near the riot stage, Mr. **Bellson** asked the crowd (the front two rows were filled with young students) if they would like to be able to play in this manner. After a rousing “**YES**” from the crowd, **Bellson** walked over to a 15” field drum on a stand next to the mike, and proceeded to play a single stroke roll in the traditional open and closed method. This performance was even more intimidating than the drum set solo. After finishing the last tap, he turned to the audience and said : “If you want to play drum set, you have to be able to play this instrument (pointing to the single drum) first!!” The point is clear regarding snare drum approach being the main axis of the percussion family.

One of the first steps in developing a student’s snare drum method is to make sure the student is suited for the percussion field. We “drummers” have many times been exiled to non-musical ideas and conversations. How many times have you heard or been guilty of this yourself? “ I don’t think this kid is going to be able to play anything. I guess I’ll just put him/her on drums”. You must monitor this instrument for appropriateness just as you oversee any of the other instruments or you will be blessed with beginning drummers who will be very disenchanting and we all know what happens to frustrated beginners on any instrument. **THEY QUIT!** So you must make the commitment to make sure the instrument suits the student.

An evaluation I have used for years is this:

(1) Have the student pat his foot with you at about 72 beats per minute. **(THE FOOT PAT MUST REMAIN STEADY IN ALL OF THE FOLLOWING EXERCISES)**. Make sure the student’s foot pat is exactly with you and your foot. Ask the beginner a question. Ask another. If the foot pat stays relatively steady during this conversation, this will indicate some internalization and coordination.

(2) Have the student tap one hand on his leg with the foot pat on the beat. Next, tap the other hand, then alternate the hands. It is not necessary to tap the hands on the same leg, whatever the student is comfortable with is fine.

(3) Have the pupil tap a down and up pattern (eighth notes) with one hand while the foot pat remains the same. Next, use the other hand, then alternate the hands.

(4) This step, I believe, is the most important and if the student is competent here, there is no reason he should not develop into a superb percussionist. Explain that the foot pat will remain constant and the same, but the hand tap will only sound on the upbeat. Demonstrate this and let the student hear and see it. Have the pupil attempt this with each hand, then alternate the hands.

(5) The next two steps are additional steps that you can add, but are not mandatory as the others are. Have the student tap a triplet pattern with each hand then alternate.

(6) Have the student tap a sixteenth note pattern with each hand then alternate.

Using this exercise, I have found that most students capable of this do not encounter any trouble grasping other snare drum concepts.

After you have established your beginning percussion students, what equipment do you purchase or rent? There are several options and only you as the director are able to determine what is the best for your particular environment and setting.

(1) It is important for each beginning student to purchase a stick bag with a pair of snare drum sticks, a pair of general purpose timpani mallets and a pair of keyboard mallets, This will be the basis of their collection as they start their percussion studies, It also puts them closer to the price range and logistics echelon of the other band students who are also procuring and storing their instrument. Assign each beginner a bin or storage area just as you would everyone else, put the name of the student on the bag with a permanent marker and mark **ALL** of their sticks, otherwise they won't have any of these by the second week. (Blane Womble has a great storage idea at Colleyville Middle School. He uses a cap or hat rack and hangs the bags in the percussion area of the band hall).

(2) Along with this stick bag you will need a practice pad, metronome, and stand for the pad. Over the years, I have found certain pads and stands to be better than others, however, you will need to make this decision yourself.

(3) You will need to decide on whether or not to include a set of bells in this purchase or not. Mr. Glen Fugett's excellent handout from the 1995 TBA Beginner Instruction Series recommends a bell kit of some type.

(4) A decision must also be made on whether to include an entry level snare drum with this kit. Over the years, I found this to be a waste of parents' money; the student will rarely play this instrument, and the major future purchases for a percussionist is usually a drum set (with a snare drum) or the acquiring of a mallet instrument.

Now that we have instruments, you need to decide on the type of drum stick you think the students should have. Not all students have the same size hands, but I feel that there is rarely enough disparity in the students hands to justify an alternate model stick for some students. A stick that I have very good luck with is a stick about 16 $\frac{7}{16}$ " in length with a rounded tip. I like the weight and length as it is long enough for the students to control, not too heavy and has a great bounce. The stick needs to be cut from good wood to insure longevity.

Now that the student is ready to play, what book or books do you use?

(1) If you are fortunate enough to have your beginning percussion class separate from the other beginner classes, you are in business. There is an abundance of material for you to sort through to decide what is best.

(a) Elementary Drum Method by Roy Burns. This book has some great repetitive 4 and 8 measure drill that is so critical in developing good style. The pictures in it are not very good, but there are some very good basic exercises. This would be an excellent book to use if your class is in with other instruments as all of the exercises are 4 and 8 measure phrases.

(b) A Fresh Approach to the Snare Drum by Mark Wessels. In **my** opinion, this is **one of the very best books on the market.** It contains great concepts, great explanations, great pictures, and really good exercises. Mr. Wessels' latest edition also reinforces these exercises with more supplementary pages.

(c) Another very good book is the Alfred Drum Method

(d) The percussion books that are in your beginner series (Essential Elements. Division of the Beat, Ed Sueta) will suffice if you use supplementary materials with different exercises.

Once you have established your materials, go to the nuts and bolts,

FULCRUMS, LEVERS, HINGES, ETC.

(1) There are generally three accepted areas of development here: arms; wrists; fingers. Probably the two most neglected areas are the arm motion and the finger control. Of these two, the most overlooked is probably the arm. The arm must be developed in order to develop a smooth transition and technique in multiple percussion, timpani, drum set, and quads (tenors). The down and up motions as well as the side to side technique must be developed. This technique must be monitored very carefully as it can produce tension. I usually do not mention this fulcrum until the wrist and finger development is introduced and some mastery of the two techniques has come about. I try not to stress the arm movement without making sure the wrist and fingers are used in conjunction with it.

2. The wrists are very important in the technical development of snare drum. In developing the right hand, attempt a very relaxed stroke similar to bouncing a basketball on the floor. Do this without the stick in place and then after the grip has been introduced, attempt the same motion with the stick in place. For traditional left hand development, (do not develop this technique until you have established the entire grip) think of turning a door knob to the left or pouring a cup of water out.

3. Finger development is one of the most important procedures to learn in beginning percussion. If this finger control is not ingrained in the beginning year, it is very difficult or impossible to develop this concept at a later date. Start the training of this finger rebound process immediately after the first stages of the grip are developed.

GRIP

Now to answer the question of whether to use matched grip or the traditional grip. Depending on your situation, the high school director may be adamant about using one or the other for the visual effect on the marching drum line. This seems a bit absurd to stipulate a particular grip for anything other than what is best for the students performance. If that in fact is a real issue, then use the matched grip students on bass drum, tenors, cymbals, or pit and use the traditional grip on the snare line.

Matched Grip

A little bit of history here. Up until the sixties, most beginning snare drum students in this country were taught with the traditional grip and simply changed over to the matched for other percussion performances. With the British Rock & Roll Invasion, students were inundated with TV shows featuring dozens of popular musical groups with drummers who “**couldn’t even hold their sticks right!!**” Many of us are ashamed to admit that at one time we were responsible for those quotes, even though we are great fans of many of those groups and percussionists. In defense of those “invading” drummers, they were simply emulating the grip of the British and European classical percussionists they had seen. These orchestral percussionists had been using matched grip for years before the British pop groups were ever formed. With the matched grip influence invading the country, many percussion educators and band directors begin to question the validity of the traditional grip. This became a huge issue in the late sixties and into the seventies and still remains somewhat of one, although we have managed to resolve most of the hostilities. My opinion regarding the grips is: It does not make any difference, but the mistake most non-percussionists (and some of us percussionists) make in teaching any grip is: **ignoring the weak hand!** All students will have a weak hand and since most of us are right handed, the left hand is generally the weak limb. You must monitor the left hand in all grips as one of the biggest problems encountered in judging hundreds of young snare drummers over the years, is the poorly developed weak hand, regardless of grip! In short, monitor the grip every day, every minute and **do not assume that matched grip will automatically solve your beginning drummers’ technical problems.**

Teaching the matched grip:

(1) Ask the student to hold the stick between the top part of the thumb and the index finger about four inches from the butt of the stick.

(2) Curl the other fingers around the stick but make sure all of the fingers are relaxed and the back fingers do not squeeze the stick. Squeezing will cause tenseness and tension is the culprit of almost all of poor snare drum technique.

Another step used is for the student to:

(1) Turn their left hand palm up.

(2) Place the stick in the hand, hold the stick naturally, and turn their hand palm down. This will often work but only if you are monitoring the thumb (which I prefer to be parallel with the stick).

(3) Have the student begin striking the pad (see rebound exercise on supplement sheet), watching for the rebound, and making sure the second, third, and little finger are all contributing to the bounce of the stick

Teaching traditional grip:

(1) Start out with one stick and hold the left arm and hand straight out but relaxed and palm down.

(2) Have the student place the stick between the thumb and the hand deep into the fleshy part. With this same position, try to “waggle” the stick with the thumb in a pendulum or metronome action keeping the palm down and level.

(3) As the students practice this, they will periodically have to push the stick back into the fleshy part as it will have a tendency to move out. You will need to return to this exercise on a daily basis for several weeks to reinforce the relaxation and thumb control this requires. As you move this stroke to the pad, have the students play at their own speed while monitoring their individual progress with this hand.

(3) Move this stroke to the pad, and allow the students to play at their own speed while monitoring their individual progress with this hand.

(4) Keep the wrist movement to a minimum while maintaining the palm in a “shake hand position”. Work to get a very high, even bounce. You will need to watch for too much wrist and arm movement in this technique and the students will need to move the stick back into the hand constantly. Monitor the students to insure there is enough room toward the butt of the stick. The closer the hand is to the end, the less control the student will have. The purpose of this exercise is to get the students to feel, understand, and control the rebound of the stick. How do you know? It is kind of like a golf swing, hitting a baseball, or any physical skill, you can “feel it”! Once you have it, it does not go away. Stay with this technique for as much as six weeks or more depending on the level of the individual student . In this manner, you can individualize within the class. If one student is ready for the next level, by all means let them go on. If other students have not yet grasped the concept, you can continue to observe these students.

The next step in the development of the left hand is the placement of the left index finger on the stick. This must be inspected very carefully as this step is the most important aspect of the left hand development. Hopefully, the student has attained the high, even, controlled bounce by using mostly the thumb.

(1) Have the student begin to lightly place a **very relaxed** index finger across the stick touching the thumb between the first and second joint of the index finger (closer to the second joint) continuing the bounce exercises the student has already begun. These exercises will need to be at a faster tempo as the skill will materialize earlier with a faster bounce.

(2) Monitor the index finger to check for tension and to make sure the finger is not inhibiting the bounce but controlling the height and speed. The student will also begin to encounter more wrist movement as this is developed. It is very important that the student understand and “feel” the control as the only finger that touches the stick is the index finger.

(5) Constant monitoring of the “shake hand” position is a must for each student while remembering: **Relaxation is the key in all snare drum technique!** You will need to devote a separate section of your class time to develop this technique as combining this step with your rhythmic reading and hand alternation will result in bad habits.

(6) The final step in the traditional left hand grip is the placement of the third and fourth fingers.

(7) Place the stick on the ring finger between the first and second joints and let the little finger curve naturally under it. Make sure the fingers do not touch the palm. Lastly, position a very relaxed middle finger over the top of the stick. This finger will rarely be used except as a “control stop” for extremely high bounce or loud volume sections. Continue with the “waggle” exercise and observe that the “waggle” is now much more controlled and contained. The hands and fingers must still be very relaxed. Continue with the bounce exercises and monitor each student in order that the third finger will only touch when lifting the stick to start a new pattern with this finger acting as a cushion and maintaining elasticity. Once this step is completed, you now have a traditional grip.

As with any other teaching concept, you will need to go back to “step A” and review each one of the steps, refine and reinforce daily to ensure complete relaxation and control.

STROKES

There are five main strokes that are necessary to develop outstanding snare drum technique: (1) downstroke; (2) upstroke; (3) tap; (4) buzz stroke; and (5) double or bounce stroke.

(1) The downstroke is made by striking the head and keeping the tip of the stick about an inch from the pad. The student must prevent the natural rebound of the stick by slightly squeezing the fingers at the moment of impact. I try to use a combination of the arm, wrist and finger control without calling too much attention to it. I find out that usually the less I say, the less complicated I make it, the more successful the student is.

(2) The tap is a very soft wrist stroke without any arm fulcrum while keeping the fingers very relaxed. Keep tip 1 to 2 inches from the head.

(3) The upstroke is a combination of a tap, wrist and arm with the stick immediately moving therefore setting the stick for a downstroke.

(4) The buzz stroke is produced by striking the head with the tip of the stick and keeping the tip on the head with pressure from the first finger to produce the bounce. As the stick begins to bounce, relax the first finger (and all fingers) to continue the bounce. Practice "holding" the buzz out for as long as possible with each hand. As the buzz progresses, begin faster tempos and subdivisions (quarters, eighths, sixteenths).

(5) The double stroke is one of the most ignored strokes in snare drumming. This stroke is **essential** in developing strong rudimental snare drum technique. Try playing groups of four sixteenths with each hand, then two sixteenths on each down beat to develop the bounce and finger control you need.

RUDIMENTS OR NOT??

At one time in the sixties and early seventies, there was a very pessimistic attitude toward rudimental development and rudimental drumming. The mentality toward this type of performance seemed to indicate it was never used in orchestral, jazz, or legitimate wind playing and technique could be easily developed using other materials. I feel that the development of rudiments and the bounce (double stroke, finger stroke, etc.) is the most important training you can give a beginning snare drum student. Beginning instrumental technique for any instrument is dependent on fundamental scale development and this instrument is no exception. The drum corps movement along with the drumming tradition maintained by our military marching bands (cadences, rudimental solos, open stroke rolls in marches, etc.) has saved this technique and brought our beginning snare drum approach back to focus on this all important development.

THE PROBLEM RUDIMENT

The most misplayed drum rudiment is the flam. I mention this problem on 98% of the student comment sheets at every solo & ensemble contest I judge.

Key points in flam development

(1) The flam is a combination of an up stroke and a down stroke.

(2) The first left stroke (up) is played about one inch from the head very softly and then the stick is lifted up where it becomes a prep for the oncoming down stroke (left).

(3) The right hand makes a very firm down stroke and remains one inch above the head becoming the prep stroke for the soft up stroke with the right hand. Move the sticks at the same time as the stick which is lower will strike the head first softly, with the downstroke following much louder producing the correct sound. This technique must be constantly monitored to avoid "flat flams" (sticks striking the head at the same time). This is a valid technique for drum set development but should not be mentioned or attempted at this stage.

(4) One of the best ways to supplement the study of this rudiment is to practice a variation of the paradiddle. (See Supplemental Sheet)

As mentioned earlier, the development of the bounce and finger control is a must for the beginning student and the beginner year is the only time you will be able to monitor the students on an individual level. Mastery of the the strokes (down, up, tap, buzz, double) is the primary concern at this stage of development, not speed.

SNARE DRUM SOLO SELECTION

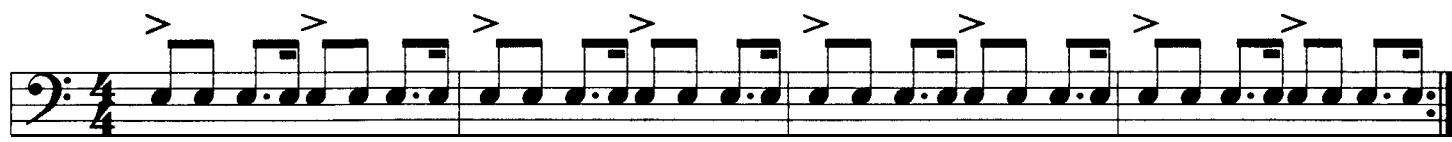
One suggestion I would like to make is that all first and second (maybe even ~~third~~ year snare drum solos be very rudimentally oriented. This is imperative for development of the technique needed for the other percussion instruments. It is also important for the student to development musical phrasing and rudimental training establishes this sense better than any other rhythmical application. A good practice is to have students involved in writing and playing their own solos (eight to sixteen measures) during the last few weeks of school. The students should arrange and repeat rudiments while the instructor monitors the fourth and eighth measure for closure and phrasing.

CONCLUSION

Beginning percussion students must perfect snare drum basics before attempting other percussion instruments. Most percussion students gain their mallet knowledge from prior or simultaneous KEYBOARD TRAINING, not necessarily the performance of mallet percussion instruments. Without the keyboard knowledge, the snare technique is useless, but keyboard knowledge is even more of a waste if the student has no vehicle in which to release it . It is nearly impossible to develop an **all-**around percussionist who is lacking in early and methodical rudimental training. This is so essential in the early stages and unachievable in later years of performing. Have your students observe as many professionals, university performers, local pros, live bands ~~as~~ possible. Purchase some of the many rudimental training videos that are on the market, introduce them to the internet, (or more likely, have them introduce you to it) start a Percussive Arts Society Club in your school, have them subscribe to Modern Drummer magazine (this is available at area book stores, pick up (or order), the many color percussion catalogs of the different percussion companies and use them as motivational awards for achievement in your beginning classes. The availability of percussion related information is endless these days, and you must be responsible for making yourself and your students aware of it.

ONE OF THE MAIN COMPONENTS OF A MASTER TEACHER IS THE GATHERING AND SHARING OF INFORMATION!

FLAMDEVELOPMENTUSINGPARADIDDLECONCEPT



Musical notation for Flam Development exercise. The notation is on a bass clef staff in 4/4 time. It consists of four measures of music. Each measure contains a sequence of eighth notes. The first two notes of each measure are accented (>). The notes are: Measure 1: R, L, R, L, R, L, L, L; Measure 2: R, L, R, R, L, R, L, L; Measure 3: R, L, R, R, L, R, L, L; Measure 4: R, L, R, R, L, R, L, L.

RLR RLR L L R L R RL RL L R LR RL RL L R L RRLRLL
DUTUDUTU etc.

Start this technique very slow, monitor the down, up and tap strokes making sure all strokes other than the accented strokes are played at a much softer level.

BOUNCEORREBOUNDEXERCISE



Musical notation for Bounce or Rebound exercise. The notation is on a bass clef staff in 4/4 time. It consists of four measures of music. Each measure contains a sequence of eighth notes. The notes are: Measure 1: R, R, R, R, R, R, R, R; Measure 2: L, L, L, L, L, L, L, L; Measure 3: R, R, R, R, R, R, R, R; Measure 4: L, L, L, L, L, L, L, L.

R R RRR RRR L L LL L LL L R RRRR RRR L LL LL LLL

Let each student attempt this exercise at their own tempo. All of the class may try this at the same time and you are able to monitor and help the students who are having trouble. Insist that the footpat is accurate. Make sure the fingers are working and the stick is bouncing.