

# McNeil Percussion



# Handbook

# **Equipment**

## **School-owned Equipment**

Every studio member is responsible for all percussion equipment and its condition. Every school-owned percussion instrument is considered “checked-out” to every percussion student. We must observe the responsibility that comes with shared use of this expensive equipment. If you notice a maintenance issue, report it to Mr. Champagne immediately. If the directors determine the damage is more than normal wear and tear, one or several members may be held financially responsible.

The best way to ensure the longevity of our equipment is to make sure that it is properly stored and secured after every use. This applies to every member of every ensemble for every practice or performance. If there are studio members in attendance of another ensemble’s concert, it is common courtesy to stay and pack up/move that equipment. Make every effort to keep instruments covered and locked away. If you pass a practice room, double check to see if it is locked. If you find someone in a room, ask if they belong and alert a director. Do not assume a stranger has permission to use facilities/equipment. Do not use percussion equipment as furniture or tables, and instruct non-percussionists of this importance as well. Keep percussion spaces clean at all times, no food or drink is allowed in any of the practice spaces.

## **Personal Equipment**

Every percussion student is required to own the following. It is wise to put your name on all of these items:

1. A 3-ring binder with sheet protectors, a pencil pouch, and several working pencils
2. A small spiral notebook for assignments and practice logs
3. A metronome (Dr. Beat) or metronome app (‘Tempo’ by Frozen Ape)
4. A black hand towel on which to rest mallets during rehearsal
5. One pair of concert snare Sticks (Vic Firth SD1 or similar)
6. Two pair of marimba mallets (Innovative IP240 or similar)
7. One pair of xylophone mallets (Innovative IP902 or similar)
8. One pair of timpani mallets (Innovative CT-3 or similar)
9. One Kratt MK2 pitch pipe for tuning timpani
10. One stick bag large enough to hold all of these items

Percussionists are required to obtain a locker at the beginning of each school year. Your personal gear must be stored in this locker when not in a rehearsal. Do not leave your personal gear in a rehearsal space.

## **Marching sticks**

Bass drum and front ensemble mallets will be provided to all members of those sections. Snare and tenor drummers are expected to purchase and maintain their own marching sticks. It is recommended that these players purchase two sets so they have a backup pair when the first set breaks.

Snare – Innovative FS-PR Paul Rennick series  
Tenors – Innovative TS-TJ Tim Jackson series

Drumline members will be responsible for having their sticks completely taped with 3M white electrical tape for every performance. It is the player's responsibility to replace lost or broken sticks as the season progresses. This applies to front ensemble as well.

## **Ensembles**

### **Marching Band**

Marching band is a required for-credit ensemble for all percussionists. It meets within the assigned double-blocked class time during the school day and from 4:45 – 7:15 pm on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays during marching season; as well as from 8:00-8:30 am on football game days. The drumline and front ensemble perform at all McNeil football games, pep rallies, marching competitions, and drumline competitions, as well as select basketball games in the spring. Auditions are held in the spring for both battery (drumline) and front ensemble (keyboard percussion).

### **Concert Bands**

Percussionists are required to participate in one of the three for-credit concert ensembles: Wind Ensemble, Wind Symphony, and Symphonic Band. These ensembles meet during their double blocked class time (1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, or 3<sup>rd</sup> period) with Symphonic Band members scheduling 8<sup>th</sup> period in the spring as their Percussion Methods course. The concert ensembles perform at the winter and spring concerts, UIL contest and sight-reading, and the graduation ceremony. Auditions are held at the end of marching season and are comprised of sections of that year's region band music.

## **Percussion Ensemble**

The percussion ensemble is a required group for all members of the studio that focuses on chamber music written for our medium. Performances include the winter and spring concerts, UIL Solo and Ensemble competition, and the Night of Percussion. There will be three sections of the group that align with the student's concert ensemble (Wind Ensemble, Wind Symphony, Symphonic Band). In the fall, each section will meet on a different weekday morning from 7:30-8:30 am, while in the spring students will be pulled from their concert ensemble class for percussion ensemble rehearsal.

## **Orchestra**

The Symphony Orchestra is combined group of strings, winds, and percussion that competes in UIL concert and sight-reading every spring. Orchestra meets in the band hall one morning a week from 7:30-8:30 am after marching season finishes. This ensemble is elective and open to members of Wind Ensemble and Wind Symphony who express interest to the directors. There are also several opportunities for percussionists to play with the orchestra program during their concert season should they require percussion parts covered on certain pieces. These will be assigned by a director

## **Choir**

Just like with orchestra, there are several opportunities for percussionists to play with the choir program during their concert season should they require percussion parts covered on certain pieces. Again, these will be assigned by a director.

## **Jazz Band**

The McNeil Jazz Band is another elective ensemble that utilizes drum set, Latin, keyboards, and auxiliary percussion in the rhythm section. Performances include the winter and spring concerts, as well as a jazz competition season in the spring. Jazz auditions are typically the last week of the marching season, with rehearsals beginning the following week on Monday and Thursday afternoons from 4:30-6:00 pm.

## **Attendance**

Posted rehearsal times are an indication of when practice begins, not when players are expected to arrive. Please make every effort to arrive to each rehearsal early enough to move equipment, setup gear, and warm up for rehearsal to start on time. Unless coming from another class, aim to arrive at least 15 minutes early to every call time. The acceptable window for notice of

absence or tardiness is 24 hours, which remains at the directors' discretion to excuse. If you are sick the day of a practice or performance, please email the band staff as soon as you can – definitely before the event begins. Failure to arrive on time or at all for dress rehearsals and game day run-throughs may result in forfeiture of playing for said competition or concert. Please stay up to date with the charms calendar and make every effort to avoid scheduling doctor's visits, vacations, etc. that conflict with the posted band schedule. Do not be a burden to your peers or your directors by failing to learn this invaluable life lesson. Please refer to the band/school handbook for tardy and unexcused absence policies. The directors understand band may not be your only extra-curricular and we will work with coaches and moderators to share your time equitably.

## **Rehearsal Preparation**

It is the player's responsibility, regardless of the ensemble, to come prepared for every rehearsal. This means that all parts are learned, correct instruments are chosen, and correct setups are ready to go. Practice is what happens between rehearsals. It is unprofessional and a burden on the other members of the ensemble/director whose time is now wasted. If you lose your music, consult a librarian immediately, not during the beginning of a class. If you require help learning your music, ask an upperclassman or Mr. Champagne before your next rehearsal.

## **How to practice**

### **Practicing with a plan/setting goals**

Practicing with a plan or goal is crucial to your development as a percussionist. Having a plan allows you to be methodical and smart about your approach. This approach leads to efficiency. The more efficient you are at practicing, the quicker you will advance through tougher music. Here is an example of having a solid practice plan or goal.

#### **Week of 8/21-8/25      Goal: Paradiddles**

Monday: one hour of paradiddles 60-84bpm (up 4 beats every 10 min)

Tuesday: one hour of paradiddles 84-108bpm

Wednesday: 108-132bpm

Thursday: 132-156bpm

Friday: 156-180bpm

Keep a practice journal in your spiral assignment notebook. Writing things down will keep you organized. Seeing your progress in writing will help you realize your improvement. Playing slow at first in the most important step. You'll be amazed at how much better your control will be and how much of a better overall player you will become.

### **Practicing those things you can't play perfectly**

It is very easy to play things that feel good and sound good. At your level, you should be disciplined enough to play things you can't play perfectly. Make everything you play sound perfect and feel good! Your job is to be a master of all motions at all tempos, so practicing things you don't feel completely comfortable with is key. Play things slow, off the left, etc, whatever you can do to expand your control.

### **Practicing on a drum**

A practice pad/keyboard does not give you the same feel as the real thing. There is no substitute for the experience you will gain practicing on a drum versus a practice pad – no exceptions. Always try to play on the school owned instruments whenever possible.

### **Practicing with a metronome**

Tempo control is crucial as a percussionist and is probably the single most important trait a performer can bring to the table. There is simply no substitute for practicing with a metronome. Keep it fresh by practicing to a half-time feel. Try putting the metronome in the upbeat and keep a constant, steady pulse. Experiment. Tempo control is everything!

### **Practicing in front of a mirror**

Practicing with correct posture/grip/control is crucial to your development. Practicing in front of a mirror allows the performer to observe and fix any discrepancies of heights, motion, weird facial tweaks, etc. Take a dry erase marker and draw lines for heights or correct motion on the mirror. While practicing, keep your sticks touching these lines consistently. This works great for 4-mallet technique.

When practicing in front of a mirror ask yourself the following:

- Are my heights correct?
- Are the stick paths correct?
- Are there any extra motions (shoulder ticks, elbow motion)
- Is my body symmetrical?
- Do I look relaxed?

## **Constantly evaluating quality of sound/efficiency/tempo/control**

When you practice, you should constantly evaluate how you feel and look. You should critique how you sound. Does it sound good? Does it flow? Are the sticks resonating at all times? Does it sound relaxed? Am I breathing calmly and evenly when I play? Is her tension in my back? Shoulders? Arms Wrists? So I sound like I am “owning” the music? Constant self-evaluation is important in your development as a percussionist. If something isn’t right, you have the tools to diagnose the problem, find a solution, and fix it.

## **Keeping time as you practice**

Keeping time with your body is important for feeling solid time. As a percussionist it is your responsibility to maintain solid time no matter the situation. By moving your feet, nodding your head, moving your hips, etc. in time, you are essentially tying tempo to muscle memory and can put it on the back burner while you focus on the music, technique, etc. You must feel time exactly on the beat. No exceptions.

## **Private Lessons**

Private lessons are highly encouraged in this program and are not to be confused with tutorials or “extra help.” As music educators, we rely heavily on the differentiated instruction private teachers can provide. It is never too early or too late to enroll with a professional musician to maximize achievement and assure placement in the top ensembles in high school. Financial assistance is available upon request. Our private lesson teacher for percussion is:

Tyler Dempsey  
(512) 961-9883  
rhythmolif@aol.com

## **Auditions and Competitions**

Over the course of the academic year, there are several mandatory placement auditions for different ensembles in the band program, as well as elective (but heavily encouraged) interscholastic competitions that provide a wealth of musical merit and growth for the individual. It is not the intention of the band staff or contest staff to put overwhelming pressure on players; performance anxiety is normal, but it should not get out of control. These auditions are simply the best way to make sure everyone is receiving the correct instruction for their ability level and not a definitive ranking of best to worst. Any negative comments toward another player based on their performance or results will be met with harsh consequences.

## **Concert Ensembles**

Auditions are held at the end of marching season and are comprised of shortened sections of that year's region band music. These include selections on 2 and 4 mallet marimba, snare drum, timpani, and sight-reading. This music is made available the first week of August. Members auditioning for Wind Ensemble or Wind Symphony must successfully prepare and participate in a region 26 band audition to be considered for either ensemble.

## **Region Band**

Region band is the first phase of the TMEA All-State Band audition process. It is typically held the first weekend in December and lasts two days due to the breadth of the literature and the number of players auditioning. The repertoire includes advanced level 2 and 4 mallet, snare, and timpani pieces. This music comes out the last week of July and students are highly encouraged to start early, take private lessons, and seek feedback from directors on a consistent basis to have the best chance. Students making the region band will be invited to participate in a clinic with a master musician and perform in a concert playing challenging music. Should a student advance to the Area round, they will play the same material for a different judge the first week of January. Advancing from there, the State round will take place at the TMEA convention in February.

## **Jazz Band**

Jazz auditions will be taken from the region jazz band audition selections. The process will include playing a prepared piece with audio accompaniment, styles, and sight-reading.

## **Solo and Ensemble Competition**

The solo and ensemble contest is typically held at the end of February and is required of every student in the percussion program. Each student will be assigned a solo as well as a piece or two from percussion ensemble before winter break. Students will be able to perform their selections up to three times. The first is at the recital night, which serves as a dress rehearsal for the contest. The second is at the solo and ensemble contest itself, and the third will be at the annual Night of Percussion.

## **Marching Band**

Auditions for marching band take place shortly after UIL Contest and Sight-Reading in April. The audition packet for battery and front ensemble is given out about a month beforehand, which coincides with several audition camps designed to prepare players for the audition. While there are a limited number of battery spots, there is no cap on the members in front ensemble.

## **Behavior**

The conduct of percussionists at all functions is a direct reflection on the McNeil Band program and McNeil High School as a whole. This includes all rehearsals, warm ups, and performances as individuals and as a group. It is important that the exemplary reputation of the band and percussion studio not be tarnished by the misconduct of its members. Remember that everything we do is observed and noted by fellow percussionists, McNeil students, parents and alumni, as well as the faculty and administration. It is crucial that we set and maintain a level of professionalism while exemplifying musicianship. Therefore the following guidelines should be noted:

Members of the percussion studio will not express foul language, obscene gestures, or disrespectful acts toward an outside individual or each other, regardless of the emotion of the moment.

Members of the percussion studio will respect the chain of command of student leadership, be it a Drum Captain, Drum Major, Section Leader, Principal Player, etc.

Abuse of percussion equipment in any way or form is strictly prohibited. If abuse is apparent, the student will be held responsible for that equipment and its replacement or repair as deemed necessary by the directors. This includes school owned mallets, heads, accessories, and electronics.

## **Eligibility**

It is the responsibility of every member of the percussion studio to consistently check and maintain his or her academic eligibility. While this is obviously important for every member of the band program, it is absolutely essential for percussion because there are no alternates or second chairs in the percussion section of an ensemble. It is a massive undertaking and huge burden on the other members of an ensemble to fill the gap left by ineligibility. The directors implore you to stay on top of your grades and seek help when needed.

## **Golden Rules of Percussion**

THOU SHALT NOT HACK (play during inappropriate times)

IF YOU OPEN IT, CLOSE IT

IF YOU TURN IT ON, TURN IT OFF

IF YOU UNLOCK IT, LOCK IT

IF YOU BREAK SOMETHING, ADMIT IT

IF YOU CAN'T FIX IT, CALL SOMEONE WHO CAN

IF YOU BORROW IT, RETURN IT

IF YOU VALUE IT, TAKE CARE OF IT

IF YOU MAKE A MESS, CLEAN IT UP

IF YOU MOVE IT, PUT IT BACK

IF IT BELONGS TO SOMEONE ELSE, GET PERMISSION TO USE IT

IF YOU DON'T KNOW HOW IT WORKS, LEAVE IT ALONE