BEGINNER PERCUSSION LESSONS

DRUMMERS EVERYWHERE ARE GOING TO HATE ME

By Ryan Meeboer

PURPOSE:

- Introduce all students to percussion and give them an opportunity to try it out
- Assess which students have the abilities to be a class/band percussionist (possibly audition for the role, since it's a key component to a successful class)

MATERIALS:

- set of sticks/student
- floor/buckets/drum pads (any surface teachers can tolerate the noise)
- Metronome
- sheet music with display (easiest)
- optional speaker (for added volume)
- optional play along tracks with exercises

STEP 1: Proper Technique

Teach proper standard grip of the stick: no pointy fingers, thumb along the stick, index finger perpendicular to the stick, relaxed grip with remaining fingers, shoulders relaxed, elbows 90 degrees, turn the wrist to have palms to the floor, let the stick bounce off the surface (not held down)

- Allow students to randomly drum using wrist only and controlling the volume. The teacher can circulate and correct mistakes.

STEP 2: Teach Quarter Notes by Rote

- Turn on the metronome (around 100BPM) and have students keep a beat with one hand only (right). Once they can control that, try with the other hand. Then alternate every four beats, then two, then one.

STEP 3: Teach Quarter Notes and Rests by Notation

- Practice reading quarter notes as they do the above. If displaying music on a screen, the teacher can point to the notes as the students play so students can learn how to follow the music as they play (their eyes move to the next 'symbol' (quarter note) every time the metronome ticks. For each note, students alternate hands (R L R L etc).
- Start adding quarter rests (following patterns helps). The technique for 'playing a rest' is for students to hit the air (or an invisible drum) using the hand that would hit the note, if it were there. For example, if the rhythm is Q Q Q R, then the hands play R L R (L) *bracketed hand indicates an air hit. For Q Q R R, the hand pattern is R L (R) (L). I find that this concept has the students keep the beat more consistent and ensures that they hold the rest for the correct amount of time because they are literally playing a quarter note in the air. Ideally, we want them to play without a metronome blasting in their ear, so they need a strategy to maintain the tempo.
- Practice a variety of rhythms that use quarter notes and rests. If resources allow, hand out a 'worksheet' and have the students indicate the hand patterns and then have them practice the rhythms (possible assessment or evaluation opportunity).
- If resources allow, have students play a variety of rhythms/songs along with play along tracks. For example, Essential Elements has the Essential Elements Online Library filled with play along track to the method book (students love this).

STEP 4: Teach Eighth Notes by Rote

- Moving into eighth notes, the hand technique changes. What I have found to be helpful is to have the student play all quarter notes and rests with their right hand, in order to mimic the cymbal playing on a drum kit. For eight notes, the right hand always plays the first and the left, the second. This way, the right hand consistently keeps a steady beat, hitting at the same time as the metronome.
- To practice, have the metronome play and have students keep a steady beat with their right hand. Once that is accomplished, have them move to one measure of quarter notes, followed by one measure of eighth notes and alternate. The right hand should stay consistent with the metronome (beginners tend to rush the eighth notes). The sticking pattern for this should be R R R R RL RL RL RL, etc. Once they can control the speed of the eighth notes, then move on to reading notation.

NOTE: I often compare this method to how a guitar player would strum their guitar: Downwards on the beat and upwards on the off beat. D D D D DU DU DU DU, etc.

Step 5: Teach Eighth Notes by Notation

- Much like the quarter notes and rests, start with rhythmic patterns. Don't include rests in any of the patterns until they 'master' the new technique. Students hit with the right hand for a quarter note and right-left for two eighth notes. For example, start with the rhythm: Q Q EE Q. The hand pattern will be R R RL R. Beginners tend to rush the eighth notes, so it's important to have the metronome playing while practising so they keep the right hand consistent with the beat. Practice a variety of patterns. As an extension, you can have the students create their own patterns (this is always fun).
- When ready to include rests, using this new technique, the right hand will always do the 'air hit' or 'fake' for the quarter rests. For example, if the pattern is Q R EE Q, then the hand pattern is R (R) RL R. For EE Q R R, then the hand pattern is RL R (R) (R). Some students will want to use their left hand for one of the rests.
- Practice a variety of rhythms that use quarter notes, quarter rests, and eighth notes. If resources allow, hand out a 'worksheet' and have the students indicate the hand patterns and then have them practice the rhythms (possible assessment or evaluation opportunity).
- If resources allow, have students play a variety of rhythms/songs along with play along tracks.
- When encountering an eighth rest, whatever hand is supposed to hit will become an 'air hit'. For example, if the rhythm is Q rE EE Q, then the hand pattern is R (R)L RL R.

At this point, all the students should know enough to become a class percussionist. Other techniques, rhythms and skills can be taught to students who are selected to be percussionists.

RESOURCES

Beginning Drummer Resources - Google Drive

Desk Drumming - Volume 1

Desk Drumming - Volume 2

OPTIONAL LESSON #1: Flams and Rolls

- Depending on time and need, you could introduce all the students to flams and rolls. This could be another method for teachers to determine which students have the skills to be a class percussionist.
- For flams, I have the students put one stick closer to the drum (or whatever surface), then bring both sticks down simultaneously. While I am aware that there is proper hand technique for flams, I am not particularly fussy. I simply tell my students whichever hand would normally play the regular note should hit first in a flam (which is what I find they tend to do naturally). For example, the rhythm indicated were: fQ Q EE Q, then the hands would play rL R RL R. This also follows my technique that the right hand consistently keeps the steady beat.
- For (buzz) rolls, the idea is to slightly release the gripping fingers when striking the drum (surface) while putting a little extra force with the wrist to have the stick quickly bounce multiple times. Start by having the students let the stick bounce with no force from the wrist, then have them add force (not too much), then have them perform this while keeping a steady beat in one hand, then the other, followed by alternating hands.
- Incorporate the above techniques into a variety of rhythms.

OPTIONAL LESSON #2: Sixteenth Notes

- My strategy for teaching sixteenth notes is similar to the quarter note to eighth note transition. In this case, the right hand will play all eighth notes and the left will play in between those. In terms of Kodaly language, eighth notes are referred to as a Ti Ti and sixteenths are Ti Ka Ti Ka. Therefore, the Right hand plays on the Ti and the left hand on the Ka. For example, if the rhythm indicates EE EE SSSS EE, then the hand pattern is RR RR RLRL RR.
- When encountering a quarter note, I have the students do a quick 'air hit' after each quarter note. This way, the right hand keeps the consistency. For example, if the rhythm is Q EE SSSS Q, then the hand pattern is R(R) RR RLRL R(R).
- Similarly, when encountering a quarter rest, I have them complete a double air hit. For example, the rhythm EE R SSSS Q would be performed as RR (R)(R) RLRL R(R)

OPTIONAL LESSON #3: Rock Beats

- For engagement purposes, I teach some basic rock beats using the bucket. One popular song is 'We Will Rock You' by Queen. I have the students play the rhythm as Q Q Q R, hand pattern R L R (L), where the third hit is on the rim of the bucket.
- Other fun beats include hitting the side of the bucket (to substitute a cymbal) with their right hand. One rhythm I refer to as the 'side both' rhythm. For this the students hit the side with the right hand, then simultaneously hit the side (with the right) and the top of the bucket (with the left). This will give you a simple standard rock beat with the stress on beat 2 and 4. As an extension on this one, you can count 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &, where the students play eighth notes on the side of the buck and stress beats 2 & 4 by hitting the top simultaneously (some really struggle with the simultaneous part).