2010 Boston University Winter Percussion Ensemble Front Ensemble Audition Packet
Welcome!

Thank you for your interest in the 2010 Boston University Front Ensemble.

The information presented in this packet is designed to prepare you for success during the audition process and throughout the winter season. Please read through this entire packet before learning the front ensemble exercises; it will help you utilize the proper technique and prepare you to perform the exercises to the best of your ability.

Please contact the staff if you have any questions. Contact information, as well as the 2010 rehearsal schedule can be found at

http://www.bu.edu/bands/athletic-bands/winter-percussion

Check this website often, as changes may occur and additional exercises may be added. We will continue to update the website throughout the season to keep you as informed as possible.

Our expectations

Come to rehearsal
First things first. If you are absent, you cannot contribute to the ensemble. We understand that certain conflicts arise that may take priority over BUWPE. If you know you will need to miss rehearsal due to a family emergency, extreme illness, or unavoidable school conflict, please communicate with the staff as soon as possible. Too much homework is NOT an unavoidable school conflict. Manage your time effectively so that you can contribute your best effort to the ensemble.

Come to rehearsal prepared.
Memorize exercises and music prior to rehearsal. Our time is limited, and our success as an ensemble depends on the level of “outside” preparation. When you practice, do everything you can to simulate the rehearsal environment. Be prepared to play exercises at any tempo indicated and at
all dynamic levels. Feel free to contact the staff if you need additional clarification.

**Be flexible.**
Our approach to technique is not the only correct approach, but it has worked for us in creating a unified sound and look throughout the ensemble. This unity is critical to our success, and may require that you change certain aspects of your technique. This applies to playing unfamiliar instruments as well. Perhaps you considered yourself a hot-shot vibist, and we asked you to take a look at the 2nd marimba part. Your attitude in these situations will speak volumes. Keep an open mind.

**Play with a metronome...a LOT.**
Keep yourself honest by playing with a reliable tempo source. Practicing an exercise fast and sloppily will only ensure that you get very good at playing sloppily, so practice exercises only as fast as you can play them correctly. Increase your practice tempo gradually (2 to 5 BPM at a time), and only when you’ve mastered a passage at the previous tempo. Get creative with your metronome practice. Play as if the clicks are offbeats, set the met to click once every two bars, and anything else you can think of to challenge your sense of timing. Spend some time playing along with recorded music to get a sense of timing in a truly musical context. This can make practice time a bit less tedious as well.

**Show some love to the vibes and xylo.**
Less than half of our keyboard players will be on a marimba, so spend some time getting comfortable on vibraphone and xylophone as well. Your ability to play multiple keyboards will maximize your opportunity for success in the ensemble.

**Practice with appropriate mallets.**
The mallets that we use are heavier than most “soloist” style keyboard mallets. Prepare your hands by using the right kind of mallets when you practice. As a reference, we will be primarily using Vic Firth Multi-Application series keyboard mallets.
PLAY WITH CONFIDENCE!
We strive to challenge every performer, so embrace difficult or unfamiliar passages with a positive attitude, and give your best effort 100% of the time. Perform every note knowing that you belong in the ensemble.

TECHNIQUE GUIDELINES

Before you play a note...

The audience will know what to expect from you by the way you stand behind your instrument. Keep in mind that the level of professionalism you exhibit while preparing to play will reflect the quality of your performance.

Standing comfortably behind the instrument should feel, well...comfortable. If you are balanced in your stance then it will feel effortless. Stand with your feet shoulder width apart, with one foot slightly in front of the other. Allow your body to occupy its full space. Lengthen your neck muscles and think of your back being as big as your front, (it is). This will allow freedom of motion in the arms and help you to feel balanced and confident. Stand where both manuals are easily accessible for now. As you play, you will move closer or further away from the instrument depending on the musical passage.

Determining correct instrument height

Let your arms hang comfortably down by your sides. Effortlessly bring your hands up and place your palms directly on the instrument. Your forearms should angle slightly below level, about 20 degrees. If your arms angle down more than 20 degrees, the instrument is too low. If the arms are level or raised relative to the floor, the instrument is too high. Adjust the height of the keyboard as necessary.
Mallet Placement

Play in the center of the bar directly over the resonator. There are many schools of thought on this, but we feel this provides the best possible tone and maximizes projection. Some musical passages will not allow you to play accidentals in the center of the bar. In this case, play on the very outer edge of the bar, with the fullest part of the mallet directly over the edge. Use your ears to match the “edge” sound quality with the “center” quality of surrounding notes.

2 Mallet Technique

Grip
The grip we use can be best described as “rear fulcrum” grip. We use primarily the back 2-3 fingers to hold the mallet. With about 2 inches sticking out from the back of the hand, wrap your 2 rear fingers around the shaft of the mallet. Then lightly place the other 3 fingers on the shaft keeping the index finger slightly extended. The rear 2 fingers hold onto the mallet, the index finger and thumb will guide the mallet. The grip should natural and curved. Keep your hand relaxed so that the mallet can rebound. As you set up to the keyboard, your hands will not be flat with palms facing down, but slightly angled. Allow your arm to connect to your wrist at a natural and comfortable angle.

Stroke
Initiate the stroke with the head of the mallet. Start at about a half-inch above the bar, lift the mallet head by using the wrist and then the forearm in one seamless motion. At the top of the stroke, bring the mallet down using the weight of the rear fingers in the back of the hand. As the mallet head comes down, turn the wrist to accelerate the mallet head into the bar. After contact with the bar, keep the hand relaxed and allow the mallet to rebound. Even here, the mallet head leads followed by the wrist and arm. At a normal moderate tempo, the stroke is 90% wrist motion and 10% arm motion. As the tempo increases, the stroke becomes more wrist oriented and the mallet height becomes lower to the bar. At a slower tempo, the
stroke becomes more arm oriented and the mallet height becomes higher off the bar. Always rebound, even through the last note of an exercise.

Stick Height

The height system we use at Boston University is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Height</th>
<th>Corresponding Dynamics</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3 inches</td>
<td>6 inches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( p )</td>
<td>( mp )</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Use these definitions only as a reference. Playing musically requires that we adjust these heights slightly as appropriate to the passage we are playing. Use your ears to determine how much to adjust.

4 Mallet Technique

Grip
For both marimba and vibraphone we will be using the standard musser-stevens grip. Our technique is based on the concepts outlined in Method of Movement by Leigh Howard Stevens. This is an invaluable resource for any keyboard player. We highly recommend that members of the front ensemble purchase this book and refer to it for more detailed technical information on the Stevens grip.

Holding the Inside Mallet
Open your palm and find your lifeline that curves around the base of the thumb. Place the tip of the mallet on the this lifeline close to the center of your palm. Now make a hand shaking position with your hand and curve your fingers so they point to the left. Keep the mallet in contact with the lifeline and rotate the mallet so it rests on the 1st crease of your index finger. Let go of the mallet. It should balance itself on the index finger with the end of the mallet shaft resting under the base of the thumb. Now take your thumb and simply rest it on top of your index finger, over the 1st
crease where the mallet is. This creates the fulcrum. Now we take our middle finger and bend it into the palm so it makes contact with the end of the mallet shaft. This keeps the mallet in constant contact with the palm.

**Add the Outside Mallet**
Keeping the inside mallet in place, bring another mallet over the top of your hand and place it in-between your middle and ring fingers. The point of contact with the fingers should be about three inches up the mallet shaft. Wrap your ring and pinky fingers around the shaft and take control of the outside mallet. Finally, slide the mallet up so that there is only about a centimeter is sticking out of the pinky. Your thumb should face the ceiling or sky at all times and the mallet heads should be at the same height. If you have never used this grip before, it will feel strange and will take some time to develop. Carefully review each step several times and be attentive to minor details. Eventually, holding the mallets will feel natural and effortless.

**Things to remember:**

Keep the thumb pointed up facing the ceiling.

Keep the index finger relaxed but extended, pointing to the left (or right in the case of the left-hand grip.)

The outside mallet will tend to droop. Pull back with the pinky and ring finger so that the outside mallet angles up. The height of both mallet heads should be equal when the thumb is pointed up.

Keep the thumb on the outside of the “V” created by the two mallets. The angle of this V should be about 45 degrees (an interval of a 5th on the keyboard.)
4 Mallet Stroke Types

**Double Vertical**
Both mallets play at the same time. Think of this stroke as a one-handed double stop. For now, initiate all motion with the wrist. Raise both mallets to a comfortable height by turning the wrist vertically. Turn the wrist vertically downward to strike the bars. Allow the rebound to carry the mallets back to their original starting height. This motion should be quick and piston-like, hence its name, the piston stroke. Though it is quick, it should be fluid and natural. Watch your hands and eliminate any unnatural tension.

**Single Independent**
One mallet (inside or outside) plays at a time. Think of the non-playing mallet as the axis of rotation. For instance, when stroking with the inside mallet, rotate around the outside mallet, keeping the head as still as possible while allowing the shaft to turn. The movement is a rotation of the wrist. As with the double-vertical, employ a piston motion, allowing the mallet to rebound back to its original height.

**Double Lateral**
Two mallets strike the bars in quick succession with only one wrist motion, much like a double-stroke on a snare drum. Think of this as two single independent strokes combined into a single motion. This stroke can be performed starting with the outside mallet or inside mallet. First rotate from the wrist, then quickly turn the wrist to use the other mallet, and then be sure to rebound at the end of the stroke. Avoid letting the second mallet flop onto the keys. Strive for equal stroke velocity and sound quality from each individual stroke, while maintaining a smooth motion.

**Some tips**
Spend some time watching experienced players perform. Many of these concepts will become instantly clear upon seeing them in action. VicFirth.com is an excellent place to find high quality videos of soloists and ensembles.
If you have access to a video camera, USE IT. Nothing will improve your playing faster than watching yourself from the audience’s perspective. Compare yourself to videos of your favorite players. If you don’t have a camera, at least use a mirror.

Just to say it again, USE A METRONOME. Good timing and good technique go hand-in-hand.

Some great resources on 4 mallet technique:

- **Method of Movement** by Leigh Stevens
- **Simply Four** by Gif Howarth
- **Up Front** by Jim Casella and Jim Ancona
- **Ideo Kinetics** by Gordon Stout

### Non-Keyboard Positions

**Percussion:**
Alternately known as the “rack” position, the percussionist position is one that requires musicality as well as technique and playing ability. Percussionists should be comfortable with symphonic techniques as well as marching techniques. Percussion auditions may consist of a snare solo (orchestral or rudimental), demonstration of auxiliary techniques (hand cymbals, triangle, tambourine, etc.), possibly ethnic percussion (congas, djembe, etc), and/or basic drum set styles (rock, jazz, Latin, etc). It is suggested to look over the essential PAS 40 rudiments. We prefer that you audition on all that you feel comfortable with so that we may get an idea of what you can play. Further audition material will be handed out at later camps, if necessary.

**Bass:**
Be able to play all 12 major, natural minor, harmonic minor, and blues scales. Prepare the bass parts in the audition materials, and be prepared to outline a bass part in varying styles to the exercises without a written out bass part. Tempo control and timing is very important! Please prepare a short 1-2 min. etude that showcases your abilities.
**Synthesizer/Electric Piano:**
Be able to play all 12 major and natural minor scales. Prepare both synthesizer 1 and 2 parts in the audition materials, and do your best to learn the keyboard part on the others. Tempo control and timing is very important! Please prepare a short 1-2 min. etude that showcases your abilities.

Thank you for your interest and good luck! Please email the staff with any questions and concerns. See you in November....

Kenny Kominic
Front Ensemble Instructor