



# TWO-MALLET **FUNDAMENTALS**

## from the Ground Up

### **Overview:**

Why fundamentals? What's the point? Fundamentals are the foundation of technique and the building blocks of success. Even the greatest performers rely on solid fundamentals. Imagine trying to read or write without knowing the alphabet. Or what if you want to be a top level quarterback but don't know how to throw a spiral? You're not going to get very far, are you? We NEED a solid foundation of fundamentals like we need a solid foundation on which to construct a building.

### **Keyboard Percussion Intro:**

The keyboard percussion family of instruments includes the following:

- glockenspiel (or orchestra bells, or bells)
- xylophone
- vibraphone
- marimba
- chimes (or tubular bells)
- crotales (or antique cymbals)

Each of these instruments consists of a set of tuned bars or keys played with an appropriate mallet or beater designed for each specific instrument. Keyboard percussion is often referred to as "mallet percussion" because the instruments are played with mallets. The bars on each instrument are arranged with naturals and accidentals, exactly like the black notes and white notes on a piano. Bars are made of various metals (glockenspiel, vibraphone, chimes, and crotales), wood (xylophone and marimba), or synthetic materials (xylophone and marimba).

*The following technique fundamentals may be generally applied to all keyboard percussion instruments except the chimes, as the vertical setup and different implements of this instrument require a slightly different approach.*

### **Fundamental Two-Mallet Technique:**

- A. How and where to stand at the instrument
  1. Feet shoulder width apart, waist about 6-8" from edge of keyboard
  2. Center yourself on the range in which you are playing (or at least where you're starting)
  3. Shift your body from side to side in parallel motion with the keyboard, not by rotating the hips. Do not shuffle your feet.
  4. Placement of music stand - in front of you, centered on the range in which you are going to play, just a couple inches above the black notes (accidentals) of the keyboard
- B. Two-mallet grip
  1. Similar to matched grip on snare drum
  2. Main grip is between index finger and thumb
  3. Always stay relaxed and let the back of the stick breathe/move a little in the palm of the hand. Pretend the stick is alive — if you choke it, it will suffocate and die! Or think of it like a dog. It can run and play, but within a fenced in yard.

4. Grip about 1/3 up the stick from back end of mallet (depending on the length of the stick). This provides a good balance of weight in the hand.

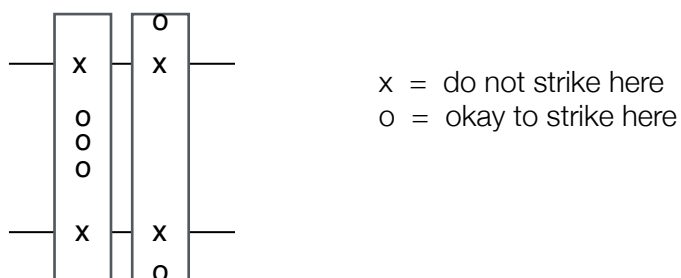
C. Stroke and vertical motion

1. Start with wrists low, mallets up 10-12" off keyboard. Focus on moving only the wrists and hands, not the arms, though minimal arm movement as a result of being very relaxed is fine as long as arms are not initiating the stroke.
2. Move the mallet heads straight down toward the keyboard and then bring them right back to where we started. "Every stroke starts and ends up!" The up position is the home position.
3. Be careful, the upstroke must not interfere with the striking of the bar. We want to stay relaxed, but still strike the instrument with some velocity behind the stick. THEN bring it back up. Always aim for a full sound.
4. Bringing the stick back up after each stroke helps create a fluidity when moving around the keyboard. This keeps the sticks from getting in the way of each other when playing alternating sticking passages (which is most of what we play).
5. See *Down-Up* exercise attached

*NOTE: I do not ALWAYS bring my sticks back up after playing every stroke, as it depends on the nature of the music I'm playing (tempo, dynamic, mood or style) but I have trained myself to do so when necessary, and this helps tremendously in moving around the keyboard comfortably. I should mention that I also approach playing four-mallets the exact same way.*

D. Striking zones

1. You can get different sounds depending on where you strike the bar. The main spots we want to avoid striking are the nodes of the bars, or where the string goes through the bars.
2. Good areas to play are slightly off center (most fundamental tone), the center of the bar (more harmonics), or the very very edge of the bar (similar to off-center).



3. It is possible to use the different zones of the bars to bring out different timbres (tone colors) or effects.
4. See *Chromatics* exercise attached.

E. Lateral motion with alternating strokes

1. Scales (1 octave) - Scales are a great tool for developing technique and improving your musical vocabulary. A great deal of music is built using scales, so if we are very comfortable playing them and recognizing them in music, learning and reading music becomes much easier for us.

2. After striking a note, as you bring the mallet back up with your wrist, your forearm will move a tiny bit in a lateral motion to prepare the mallet to play the next note (higher or lower on the keyboard). The same principle applies when reaching forward to play accidentals.
3. Always strive to remain relaxed and keep motions fluid and without unnecessary motion or tension.
4. See *Cinnamon* exercise attached.

### Additional Resources:

Below are some excellent resources for further development of two-mallet technique and musicality. Certain resources may be more appropriate for certain audiences, depending on what it is you are looking for.

Learning to read music from the beginning while learning mallets?

- *A Fresh Approach to Keyboard Percussion*, by Mark Wessels

Have a basic understanding of music reading, but a beginner on mallets?

- *Fundamental Method for Mallets, Vol. 1*, by Mitchell Peters

- *Fundamental Studies for Mallets*, by Garwood Whaley

Want to progress a little bit quicker through music reading and more challenging etudes?

- *Modern School for Xylophone, Marimba, and Vibraphone*, by Morris Goldenberg

(This goes from pretty basic to quite challenging.)

Want to develop vibraphone specific techniques?

- *Vibraphone Technique: Dampening and Pedaling*, by David Friedman

Need extra work reading notes on the staff and finding them on a keyboard?

- **Speed Note Reading Tutor** (interactive online resource)

<http://www.vicfirth.com/education/keyboard/speednotereading.html>

Want more Fundamental tips?

- PAS online resources and handouts from past sessions (members only)

<http://www.pas.org/resources/education/FUNdamentalsdownloads.aspx>

## GET IN TOUCH!

Have questions or comments? Feel free to contact me!

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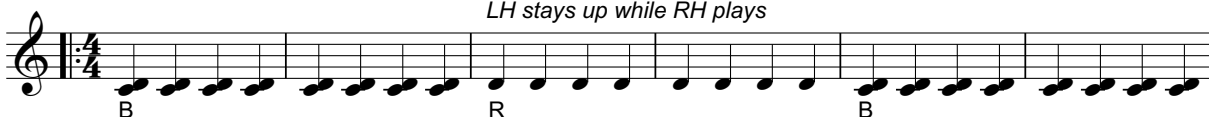
Special thanks to **Innovative Percussion, Pearl/Adams, Remo, Southeastern University** and the **Percussive Arts Society Education Committee!**

# Down Up


Brian Blume

♩ = 60-180+


Keyboard Perc. *LH stays up while RH plays*



7 *RH stays up while LH plays*



12



*Repeat sections as many times as needed before moving on.*

*Take this concept and make up your own exercise!*

# Chromatics

17 ♩ = 60-160+



*At slower tempos, strike the accidentals near the center of the bar. At faster tempos, strike the accidentals at the very edge of the bar.*

*Take this concept and make up your own exercise!*

# Cinnamon

Brian Blume

**A**

♩ = 90-160

Part 1

R L R L

Part 2

L R L R

2nd time, 8vb if on 4.3+ marimba

9

1

2

15 **B**

1

2

23

1

2

25

1

2

Cinnamon • Blume

2

29 **C**

Musical notation for measures 29-34. The system consists of two staves, labeled 1 and 2. Staff 1 is in treble clef and staff 2 is in bass clef. The music features a rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes with various accidentals. Measure 29 includes a common time signature 'C' in a box. The system ends with a repeat sign.

35

Musical notation for measures 35-38. The system consists of two staves, labeled 1 and 2. Staff 1 is in treble clef and staff 2 is in bass clef. The music continues with eighth and sixteenth notes. Measure 35 has a repeat sign. The system ends with a repeat sign.

39

Musical notation for measures 39-42. The system consists of two staves, labeled 1 and 2. Staff 1 is in treble clef and staff 2 is in bass clef. Measure 39 has a note with an 8va (octave up) marking. A note in measure 40 has a note with an 8vb (octave down) marking. A text annotation "(2nd time, not 8vb here to end)" points to the 8vb marking. The system ends with a double bar line.