

Composing for Percussion

Things to consider:

1. Can one player switch from one instrument to another in sufficient time? (This includes mallet switches).
2. How many instruments can one player play simultaneously?

Notation:

five-line staff, grand staff, or single-line staff

ex. Legend/Key from Side by Side – Michio Kitazume

ex. Legend/Key from Canned Heat – Eckhart Kopetzki

ex. Snare Drum part on single-line staff - Overture to Candide – Leonard Bernstein

Note value - sustains or muffle:

The player will typically allow the instrument to decay naturally. Writing "l.v" or "let ring" can help reinforce this.

The player will likely muffle after each note, unless specified.

Vibraphone

mallets: soft to hard yarn, rubber, bow, sometimes plastic

- pedal markings like piano
- uses a motor
- pitch bending (downwards), deadstroke, muting

ex. Pitch bending

ex. Deadstroke in rhythm

Glockenspiel

mallets: plastic, rubber, brass

ex. Glockenspiel excerpt from Pines of Rome – Ottorino Respighi

Tom-toms

mallets: soft to hard yarn, wood sticks, brushes, blasticks, hands

Bass Drum

mallets: soft to hard beaters, wooden beaters, superball

ex. Bass drum excerpt from the Rite of Spring – Igor Stravinsky

Cymbals

mallets: soft to hard yarn, wood sticks, brushes, blasticks, bow

types: splash, small, medium, large, hi hat, sizzle, china, pair of crash cymbals

ex. Cymbal notation low to high in pitch

ex. Notation for a suspended cymbal roll

Triangle

beater: metal, brass mallets, plastic mallets

- can be mounted or held

A plus sign on a triangle note indicates a closed/muted sound

Tambourine

- thumb or shake roll

- can be mounted or held

ex. Tambourine excerpt from Petrouchka – Igor Stravinsky

Listening Examples:

Igor Stravinsky – L'histoire du Soldat

Alexina Louie – Cadenzas for Clarinet and Percussion

Alexina Louie – A Curious Passerby at Fu's Funeral

Elliot Cole - Postludes