

PERCUSSION

BACKGROUND: If it makes a sound when you hit it, it could be a percussion instrument. The percussion section is the largest in the orchestra if you count the numbers of different instruments in the section. Percussion instruments contribute to an orchestra's rhythm; drums, such as the big kettle drums (or timpani), bass drum or snare drum, are called upon especially for the establishment of rhythm. Some percussion instruments add color: cymbals, triangle, tambourine or gong. There are melodic percussion instruments like the xylophone, glockenspiel or marimba, which play a tune. And finally, the percussion section is responsible for sound effects, with bird and train whistles (even though, since these are blown into, they are not strictly "percussion"), chimes, thunder sheets and all kinds of exotic, struck things.

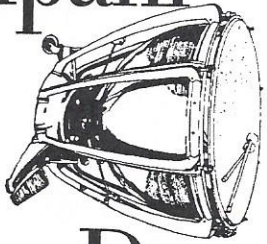
***NOTE TO TEACHERS:** Have your students bring in empty cans, plastic bottles and small boxes. Bring beans, rice, sand or other fine textured materials and some tape, and your class can make their own percussion instruments. Even hub caps or pot lids can be fun when struck with a dowel or sticks.

PERCUSSION VOCABULARY

- mallet - an implement used for striking a percussion instrument
- head - a) the plastic or skin part of a drum b) the end of the mallet that strikes the instrument
- plate - the metal part of a cymbal
- roll - repeated fast strikes that produce a long continuous sound
- acorn - the swelling at the tip of a snare-drum stick

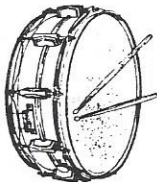
Percussion Instruments

Timpani



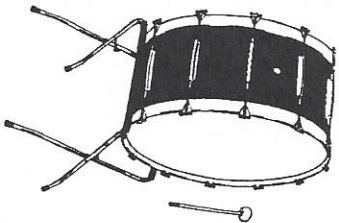
- Also called kettledrum
- Definite pitch
- Drum head, usually plastic, is stretched over a copper kettle
- Drum head skin can be tightened to raise the pitch
- Played in groups of 3-5 drums
- Produces deep thunderous tones

Snare Drum



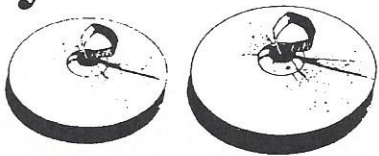
- Indefinite pitch
- Snares (wire strings) are stretched along the bottom of the drum head and vibrate when the drum is struck
- Sounds high, sharp tones

Bass Drum



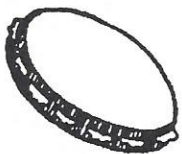
- Indefinite pitch
- Sounds very low, strong tones

Cymbals



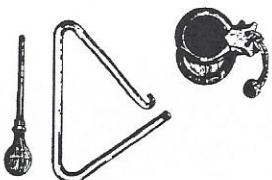
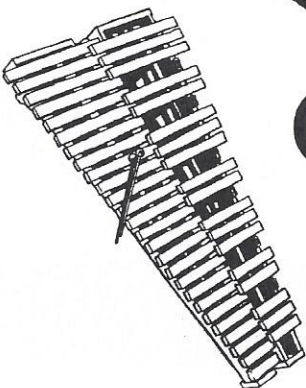
- Indefinite pitch
- 2 circular brass discs that look like large dinner plates
- Ancient Greeks and Romans used cymbals in their religious rituals
- Sounds loud, exciting tones

Tambourine



- Indefinite pitch
- Can be shaken or hit with hand or against knee
- Rolled sound is possible when thumb rubs along the edge of the head
- Sounds high, jingling tones

Other



- Pictured are xylophone, castanets, triangle
- There are many other percussion instruments such as the maracas, glockenspiel, celeste, bells, gongs, vibraphones, woodblock, etc.

Early Percussion Instruments: Percussion instruments are the oldest of the instrumental families. Sounds, such as striking a hollow log or an animal skin stretched over a cooking pot, were used for dancing, rituals, or sending signals.

Orchestral Percussion Instruments: Although percussion instruments have been a part of almost every culture, the percussion section has been the most recent instrumental family to be fully established in the orchestra. Baroque and Classical composers employed only the timpani in orchestral music, while Romantic and Modern composers have written for many, varied percussion instruments.

Sound Production: All percussion instruments make their sound by being struck or shaken. The hitting of one object upon another sets the struck material into motion creating vibrations.

Definite Pitch Instruments: Percussion instruments that are tuned to precise pitches (can play specific notes and tunes) such as the timpani, glockenspiel, celeste, xylophones, tubular bells are called definite pitch instruments.

Indefinite Pitch Instruments: Percussion instruments that produce tones that are not precise pitches (cannot play an exact pitch or tune), such as bass drum, snare drum, cymbals, triangle, tambourine, etc. are called indefinite pitch instruments.

Percussion Instruments add power, accents, and excitement

