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Music 101

Essential Tips and Suggestions for Indoor Percussion

Music Considerations

Shopping for music? Remember it sets the mood, guides your orchestration, leads the movement, grabs the audience, and lets you show your virtuosity.

It's that time of year when designers are searching for the perfect vehicle to inspire and formulate their indoor percussion shows. In recent years we have enjoyed original, classical, ethnic, rock, jazz, and music designed to startle the listener, all intricately orchestrated. There is no question at all that designers must have creative freedom in the selection of the music and creation of the musical score. However, once that music is selected, once the design team sets out to illustrate their vision of that program, then a whole new set of issues arise.

We have been talking about pacing of the show for years. Where, when, how and why effects are planned into a show has an enormous correlation to how the musical program lays out. The whole concept of pacing begins with the selection of the show music and how the music is arranged and orchestrated. Always consider the need for the kind of contrast and development which can guide many shows to create a successful coordinated effect. Always be concerned with the kind of impact points and musical/visual resolutions which our activity has come to recognize as effective tools within the program. Tension and release is an important consideration within the effect caption.

The whole history of reacting to the effectiveness of a program involves mood and appeal and, reality is, that it will be the musical choice that will set this in motion. One of the most commonly shared response mechanisms in people is their reaction to music/sound. Don't lose sight of this fact when selecting your music. Know your audience. Be prepared for how they will respond to your choices. Know the rules of competition and the tenets of good programming and be certain that your show's music will set you up to fulfill all the qualities which produce an effective and successful program. Consider these points as you begin your show planning when you are out there shopping for music.



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Orchestration

Many designers make the mistake of scoring for their indoor percussion ensemble using the same techniques and methods used for marching bands and drum corps. Before arranging a single note, carefully consider the indoor environment and the effects it will have on your ensemble's overall sound. The walls and ceiling, the close proximity of the audience, the amplification of some voices but not others, and the rapidly-changing listening environment should all have an impact on the scoring decisions made by the designers. Consider some of these suggestions for your front ensemble and battery arrangements:

- Leave more "space" in the percussion score than might typically exist in an "outdoor" production
- Make sure the melody will clearly project above all other voices
- The intent of the written score should be easy to decipher when listening to the ensemble
- When in doubt, use less and do less (most programs suffer from being "overwritten" rather than "underwritten")
- Write for the instruments you have, rather than the ones you wish you did
- Write for the students you have, rather than the ones you wish you did (always put your ensemble in a position to be successful with the skills you know they can demonstrate proficiently)
- Showcase the strengths of your ensemble
- Utilize music notation programs with realistic sound libraries to get a feel for your progress prior to music distribution (this way, many "rewrites" can happen before the music is ever learned)
- Work out all the details (dynamics, stickings, instrument changes, implements, etc.) prior to distributing music to your students