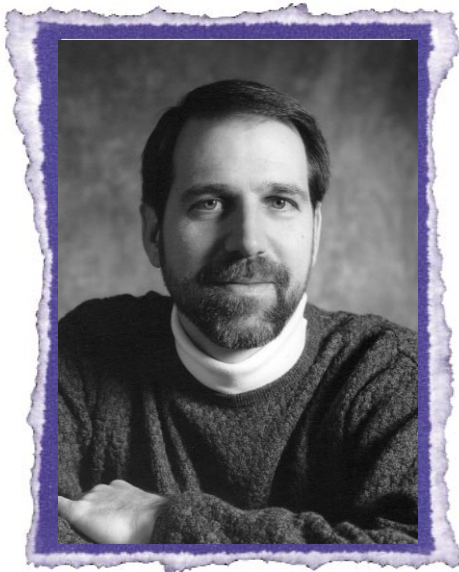




# YAMAHA Educator Series

PERCUSSION



*John R. Beck*

*John R. Beck is a member of the faculty at the North Carolina School of the Arts, and a percussionist with the Winston-Salem and Greensboro Symphony Orchestras. Beck has toured the United States as a xylophone soloist with the Marine Band, Jack Daniel's Silver Cornet Band, and the New Sousa Band. An active member of the Percussive Arts Society, he serves on the National Education Committee, is the president of the NC Chapter, and presents clinics throughout the United States and abroad. John R. Beck is a Yamaha performing artist.*

## The Idle Jazz Ensemble Percussionist: What to do when you are not playing drum set

By John R. Beck

"I just finished my tune with the jazz band and now the other drummer is playing. Boy, this is boring to watch someone else play!"

Is this the scene in your band? Too many drummers and nothing for all of them to do? With a bit of creative orchestration, every percussionist can contribute to the ensemble and develop better musicianship. Even when the music is written with specific instrumentation, keeping everyone active and thinking in the rehearsal is educational and will reduce the amount of non-musical discipline directed from the podium. When concert time comes around, artistic decisions about doubling parts can be implemented. The following are some ideas to help keep each percussionist participating during the jazz ensemble rehearsal.

### "Latin" Tunes

The obvious choice for keeping everyone busy is to play music with printed auxiliary percussion parts. Even if no parts are printed, percussionists with a basic understanding of traditional Latin-American rhythmic structure can play along on claves, congas, bongos, guiro, triangle, timbales, cowbell, maracas, cabassa or shaker. If several players are in the percussion section, make sure the printed (or improvised) rhythms complement each other, as well as the drum set. Simple repeated two measure

### Latin Percussion Instruments: Some Basic Rhythms

John R. Beck

Maracas: (substitute shaker or cabasa)

Triangle: o = open + = muffled

Guiro

Cowbell: o = edge of bell w/shoulder of stick  
+ = center of bell w/tip of stick

Claves: {3-2 clave} † can also be 2-3

Timbales: X = shell of drum

Conga Drums: h t slap h t tone h t slap h t tone  
L L L L L L L L  
h = heel of left hand  
t = toe/fingers of left hand

Nola Music 2000



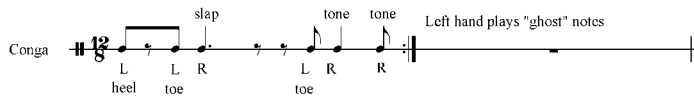
John R. Beck

patterns are the easiest to layer together. Avoid orchestrating the auxiliary instruments with everyone playing all the time by changing instrumentation as often as the musical texture dictates. Below are some examples of complementary patterns.

### “Swing” Tunes

Sometimes a conga drum works well in swing music if it is used sparingly. The conga player should not try to play fills or “set up” the band, but rather keep good time underneath the drum set. Conga works well behind horn solos and section solo passages, but not while the band is playing “figures.” Below is an example of a swing conga pattern.

### Conga pattern in Swing

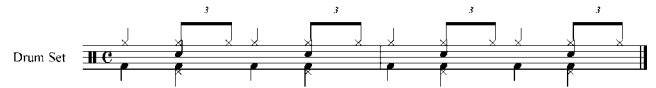


A better use of additional percussion in the swing style, both educationally and stylistically, is the addition of vibraphone. The idle percussionist will be encouraged to develop keyboard skills, and may even enjoy playing melodies enough to begin improvising. If vibes are not available, use a marimba or xylophone. (Rob McConnell’s Boss Brass doubles trumpet and brass figures on xylophone all the time.) Band directors can always write transposed lead trumpet lines and figures for keyboards to double. Better yet, have the students learn to transpose and copy music as a homework assignment.

Sometimes printed vibe parts with four note chords or chord symbols are frightening for a young player. Work with the student to find the root and third of the chord, playing with only two mallets. Gradually, the keyboard percussionist will develop the skills to play three, then four note chords including extensions. Keep it simple and fun at first. If no vibe part exists, use the piano or guitar part, playing only occasionally to help re-orchestrate the piece.

### Ballads

Keyboard percussion instruments are always a nice texture change in ballads. A few vibe or bell notes can help to enhance the sound of the band. Mark tree (wind chimes), triangle and suspended cymbal rolls are very effective background sounds, and can also be used to help keep the music in motion as the drum set player makes fast changes from brushes to sticks and mallets.



All of the ideas mentioned here need the band director’s direct involvement to implement in the jazz ensemble. Young players will want to play in every tune, unless there is an instrumentation plan for each section of the music. Working with your percussionists to orchestrate the extra parts will be a creative exchange and make rehearsals more interesting and fun for everyone.

