



# YAMAHA

## Educator Series

PERCUSSION



### Dear Gronemeier

Dean Gronemeier is currently in his fourteenth year as Professor of Music and Director of Percussion Studies at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Additional responsibilities include Graduate Coordinator for the UNLV Department of Music, and Associate Dean of the College of Fine Arts. He also served for two years as a member of the percussion faculty at UNAM (La universidad nacional autonoma de México) in Mexico City.

Along with being a percussion educator, Gronemeier is an active clinician for the Yamaha Corporation of America, SABIAN Cymbals, and Mike Balter Mallets. He has soloed extensively throughout the United States and Mexico, as well as making appearances as a soloist in England, France, Switzerland, Austria, Germany, Australia, and Chile.

Dr. Gronemeier received his Doctor of Musical Arts degree and his Masters of Music degree from The University of Arizona where he studied with Gary Cook. He received his Bachelor of Music degree from Northern Illinois University where he studied with Rich Holly, Robert Chappell, and Al O'Connor. Gronemeier recently received his Juris Doctorate degree from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, and passed the state of Nevada Bar Examination.

Dean Gronemeier performs exclusively on a Yamaha 4900 Cadenza marimba, SABIAN cymbals, and the Shadow Series mallets by Mike Balter.

## Six-Mallet Independence:

### A New Twist on an Old Idea

By Dean Gronemeier

Some time ago I had an idea to develop greater mallet independence by using a six-mallet technique. The basis is a non-crossed Musser grip with a Burton cross-grip superimposed where the inside mallet would normally be on the four-mallet grip (see photograph #1). This grip allows for independence of all six mallets, and always the use of any two mallets in a hand without any employing the third in the same hand. In addition to the basic independence, one has the facility to expand and contract intervals within each hand, along with performing such techniques as a one-handed, three-mallet roll.

The numbering of mallets used in this article is 1-6, from the left hand bass to the right hand soprano respectively. Photograph #1 is of the right hand, mallets 4-6. To obtain the six-mallet, independent grip by holding mallets 5 and 6 with the Musser grip, then cross mallet 4 underneath mallet 5.

Though years of experimentation, I have developed three basic mallet positions along with various embellishments for each position. Let us begin with the most basic, First Position.

First Position is the most basic position to learn because it is the most natural. Referring to photograph #2, mallets 4 and 5 are on the inside of the hand, spread apart from mallet 6 which is on the outside of the hand. First Position is most similar to the Musser grip with the exception of the two mallets extending from the thumb and index finger instead of just one. This position is used when there is a relatively large interval between mallets 5 and 6.

Second Position is formed when the thumb is pressed between mallets 4 and 5, therefore expanding the interval between them. As seen in photograph #3, mallets 4 and 5 are not manipulated by the pad of the thumb as they were in First Position. Instead, mallet 5 is controlled by the index finger and the inside of the thumb and mallet 4 is controlled by the index finger and the outside of the thumb. Second Position is generally used when equal intervals between the mallets are needed.

Often in six-mallet playing, tonal passages lend themselves to a voicing consisting of the tonic, fifth, and the octave. This occurs more often in the left hand as it generally plays the harmony of a particular passage. This mallet positioning occurs often enough to warrant its



How to Hold Right Hand



First Position, Right Hand



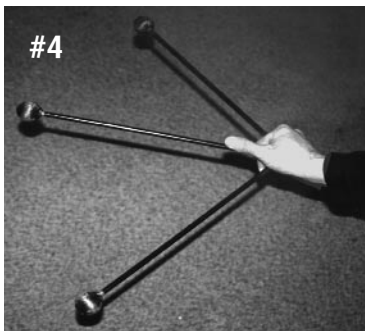
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Second Position, Right Hand

own title of 158 (tonic, fifth, octave) or Expanded Second Position. The 158 is achieved by widening the distance between mallets 4 and 6. First, push mallet 4 with the index finger while maintaining the approximate equal interval with mallet 5 by sliding the thumb up mallet 5 (see photograph #4).

The Third Position is formed when mallet 5 is positioned next to mallet 6. Due to the larger distance between mallets 4 and 5, playing in Third Position requires the least natural hand position. To position these intervals, the index finger and pad of the thumb must control mallet 5 by collapsing the index finger towards mallet 6 (see photograph #5).



158, Right Hand

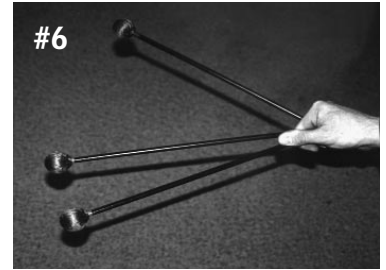
Along with explaining the basic hand positions used for six-mallet independence, it is important to consider some of the more common manipulations performed within the boundaries of the three positions. First, let us consider the hand position locks. The position locks are generally used when the intervals played in any given hand position remain constant for an extended period of time.

Of all the position locks, the First Position Squeeze, is the most sensitive due to the minute hand movement used. One may need to employ the First Position Squeeze when playing a consistent interval between mallets 5 and 6 while these mallets are positioned at a sizable intervalic distance away from mallet 4. Basically, the squeeze is realized by pulling the index finger down slightly while applying additional pressure to the thumb via the crossed mallets. This additional pressure helps to secure that the crossed mallets will not slip from their interval. Photograph #6 illustrates a common hand position for which the First Position Squeeze is used.

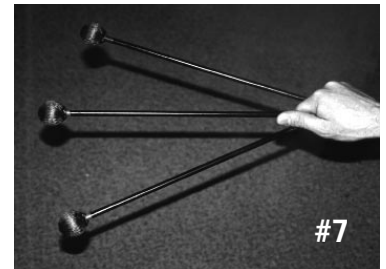


Third Position, Right Hand

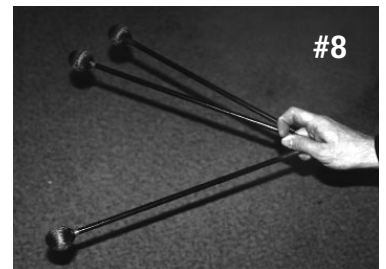
While playing in closed Second Position it is often necessary to employ the Palm Lock. For example, in the piece "Distinctive Personality," (M.Baker Publications; 1995) the performer plays a D-F#-A# augmented triad in the right hand which serves as the harmony to the left hand melody. Since the triad plays this chord for an extended period of time with a triplet rhythm, it makes good sense to incorporate the Palm Lock. The Palm Lock is achieved by squeez-



Common Hand Positions for a First Position Squeeze



Second Position Palm Lock



Third Position Lock

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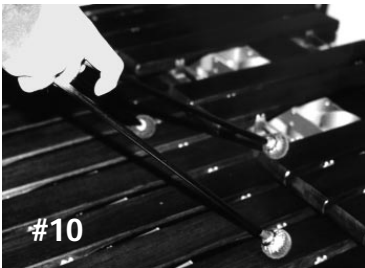




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Without Manual Pull



With Manual Pull



B-D#-F# Position for Manual Push

ing or contracting the muscles of the hand around the previously established Second Position intervals. Be careful, however, not to change the intervals when squeezing. Otherwise stated, the hand must be locked evenly. Photograph #7 demonstrates the sliding of the fingers and the overall manipulation of the hand to hold the Second Position Palm Lock.

Due to the very unnatural hand positioning used to play in Third Position, it is often necessary to employ the Third Position Lock. This lock is especially called upon when playing a physically demanding passage in the Third Position for an extended period of time. In the piece "Roccatà" (M.Baker Publications; 1995), for example, the right hand plays nearly the entire piece in Third Position. The part is fast, as it is a toccata tempo and the right hand has the additional demand of controlling the dynamic nuances. This lock is achieved by simply putting the index finger above mallet 5 as opposed to below mallet 5 as would be the case in standard Third Position playing. Compare photograph #8 to photograph #5 to see the alteration. The performer must be aware, however, that when the Third Position Lock is engaged, it is very difficult to change mallet positions rapidly.

Certain intervallic positions on the marimba are extremely difficult to achieve, and sometimes impossible. For example, the major triad in root position Eb-G-Bb does not lend itself to be performed with one hand. Quite simply, the mallets do not shape in the formation necessary to play that chord.

Many difficult triads can be played with some slight alterations of trajectory direction. For example, the root position of D-F#-A can be played by raising the hand and somewhat pulling the mallets toward you. This pulling helps to avoid the nodes on the D and A, and a resonant sound can be obtained. Notice in photograph #10 that by lifting and pulling the hand, the nodes are avoided on the D and the A. I call this motion the Manual Pull.

Let us consider, for example, the major triad root position B-D#-F#. In this case, I suggest a slight pushing motion. This push is no where near the amount of pull one would use for the Manual Pull, but I feel a slight push helps keep the mallets more stable for better accuracy. I call this motion the Manual Push. Photograph #11 illustrates a common mallet position for which the Manual Push would be employed.

In closing this article I would like to mention, that through the explanations of the aforementioned hand positions and mallet manipulation, I hope the concept of independence with six mallets becomes clearer to the marimba aficionado. In recent years, there has been a considerable amount of study done pertaining to the idiosyncrasies involved with six-mallet independence, and it is my sincere hope that this article inspires those interested to further analyze and expand the capabilities of this technique.

