Praise Him With Ringing Metal: Triangle and Suspended Cymbal

by Mark Shelton

According to *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (KJV), the word "cymbals" is found sixteen times in the Old Testament. The only mention in the New Testament is in the singular form (cymbal). These are probably references to ringing metal percussion.

Check out this example found in 1 Chronicles 16: 4-6 KJV: "And he appointed certain of the Levites to minister before the ark of the Lord, and to record, and to thank and praise the Lord God of Israel: Asaph the chief, and next to him Zechariah, Jeiel, and Shemiramoth, and Jehiel, and Mattithiah, and Eliab, and Benaiah, and Obededom: and Jeiel with psaltries and with harps; but Asaph made a sound with cymbals; Benaiah also and Jahaziel the priests with trumpets continually before the ark of the covenant of God."

I get a kick out of reading that Asaph served as both the bandleader and percussionist of this large worship band.

Thousands of years later, we are still employing the resonant sounds of cymbals, gongs, hand bells, triangles, glockenspiels, tam-tams, Chinese bell trees, chimes, and crotales in worship music.

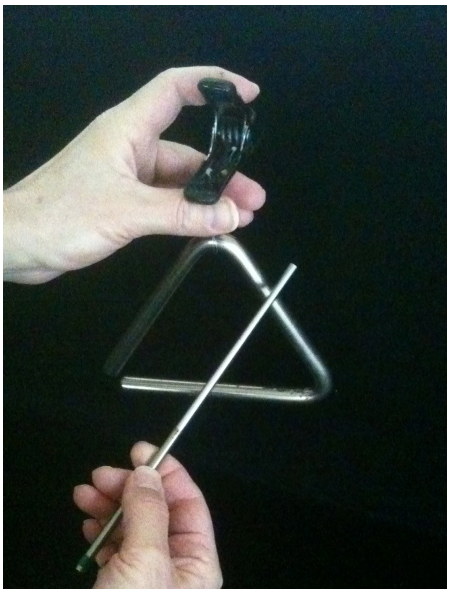
Two very common members of "The Ringing Metal Percussion Club" are the triangle and suspended cymbal.

Triangle Tone

Listen to a symphony orchestra playing at full volume. Add just one percussionist playing a single note on the triangle and hear the sparkling tone shimmer pleasantly over some seventy musicians. That's some power!

The most important factor in a good triangle tone is obtaining a high quality instrument. There is not much that can be done to improve the tone of a low-grade triangle. You cannot get a better reed, change the head, or put on different snares. Your main go-to triangle should be rich in harmonics with a good amount of sustain and a tone that is appropriate in a variety of settings. I prefer having a few triangles available so that I can experiment with matching my tone with the texture of the music being played.

- Invest in at least three different sizes of triangle beaters. Each size excites a different group of harmonics, thus affecting the tone.
- Experiment with striking various areas on the triangle for different timbres.
- My general striking area is on the side across from the opening about a third of the way down from the top corner. I find that playing slightly towards the back of this area (see photo) yields an array of overtones that blends well with the other instruments.



• Always suspend the triangle with TWO loops (for safety) of thin string, plastic ties, or fishing line. NEVER use wire or heavy cord that will buzz or inhibit vibrations. Keep the loops short so that the triangle cannot spin after striking.
• Hold the instrument so that you can easily use your fingers and palm to stop the vibrations when needed for proper phrasing.

Rhythm Triangle
Pay close attention to “Barlow Girl” by Superchic[k]. Do you hear that rhythm triangle? How about “Shackles” by Mary Mary? Rhythm triangle is in the mix.

The sound of rhythm triangle can be heard giving sparkle and drive to electronica, hip hop, smooth jazz, and loops-based compositions as well as certain Latin American styles.

Rhythm triangle parts are composed of permutations of open (ringing) and closed (non-ringing) sounds.

For this style of playing, you can either suspend the triangle with a standard triangle clip or remove the holder and suspend the triangle with the upper corner over your slightly curled index finger. The palm and fingers are used to squeeze the triangle for the closed sound.

With the “no clip method,” you will trade some resonance on the open tone for having more control of the instrument as you play the open and closed sounds.





+ = closed O = open

Suspended Cymbal Basics
A roll on the suspended cymbal can raise the musical intensity level higher or gently wash a musical passage into a peaceful transition.
• Use a relatively thin instrument for suspended cymbal work. Some cymbals are specifically designed for this purpose and marked “suspended.”
• Although it is sometimes necessary in a quick transition, try to avoid using timpani mallets on the cymbal. I prefer yarn- wound marimba mallets for general suspended cymbal playing.
• Both rolls and single strikes should be played with the mallets at 3:00 and 9:00 for balanced vibrations and quick response.
• Having an array of implements (sticks, mallets, brushes, dowel rods, triangle beaters, coins) expands the timbral possibilities of the suspended cymbal.

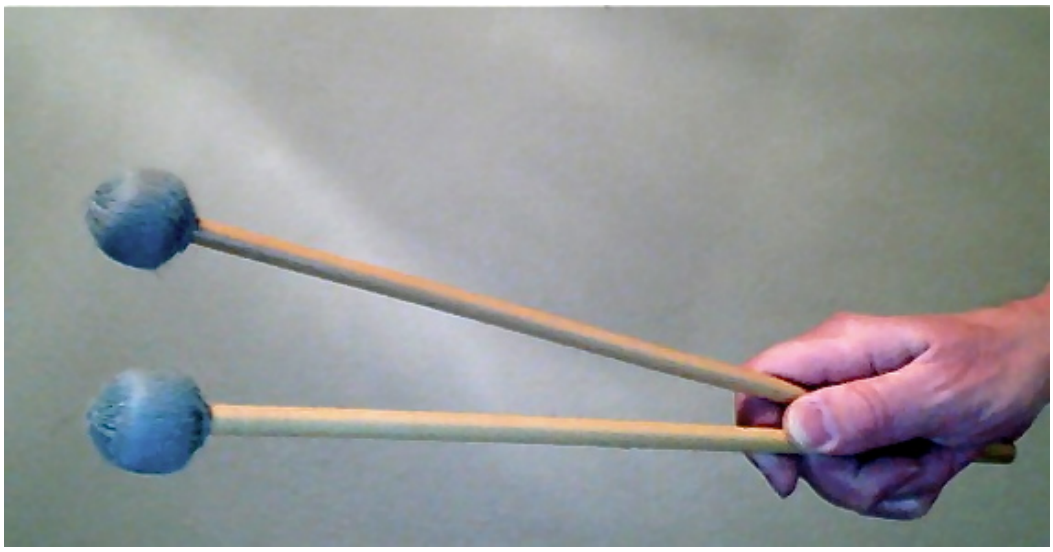
“Look, Ma. One hand!”
“I like what you’re playing. Can you keep that part going and give me a cymbal swell on the modulation?”

If the music director makes that request, you *can* toss in that crescendo roll while continuing the shaker groove with the other hand.

There are a couple of one-handed methods available to serve up that cymbal roll.

In one hand, hold two mallets using any of the conventional four-mallet grips (Stevens, Musser, Burton, cross). Spread the mallets to 3:00 and 9:00 on the cymbal and alternate the mallets in the independent roll fashion used in marimba playing.

For the other method, hold the two mallet shafts one over the other in a snare drum matched grip with about 2 inches between the mallet heads (see photo). With one mallet above the cymbal and one below, use an up-down motion to produce the roll.



Either approach will allow you to add that roll while continuing to play the instrument in your other hand.

Balancing Act

While subbing in an orchestra job, I noticed another percussionist's unorthodox method of suspending a cymbal. Instead of using a conventional stand to hold the cymbal, my colleague balanced it on his finger and struck the instrument using his other hand (holding two mallets). This technique went into my bag of tricks and I have used it many times.

• The cymbal rests on the smaller surface of the finger rather than the larger surface of the felt washer. (I like to think that this allows for better vibrations.)
• In acoustic settings, you can lift the cymbal higher for better projection--over the heads of those violinists seated in front of you.
• In amplified settings, you can “work the mike” (bringing the cymbal farther or closer with ease).
• In some halls, this method might allow the audience to better see the instrument. I am a firm believer that people hear with their ears and *eyes*.

Both triangle and suspended cymbal have high ratings in the category of “major sustain.” Controlling all of that ringing is a major part of playing these instruments in a musical fashion. Listen carefully to the phrasing of the music to determine the note lengths on the cymbal and triangle.

Let us follow the example of Asaph and praise the Lord *skillfully* with the ringing metal percussion.

(c) 2012 Mark Shelton Productions
Excerpts from *Percussion For Worship* by Mark Shelton

Previously published in *Worship Musician!* www.christianmusician.com