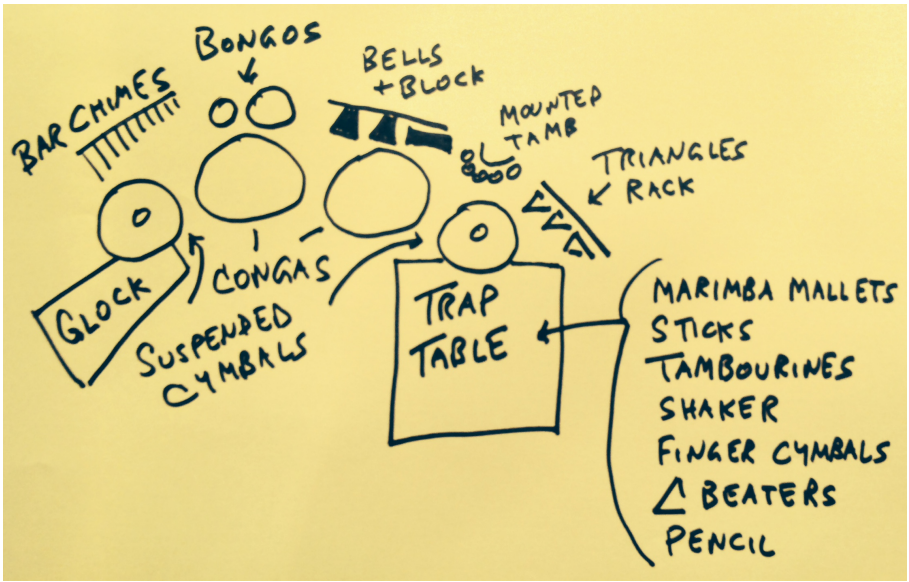
Set-up Strategy
by Mark Shelton

What might it be like to play percussion in heaven? Will we be able to concoct an ideal configuration of instruments and really get it right the first time? Could it be that in the celestial city there will be no cymbal stands? No mounting hardware? Imagine never having to wrestle with those methods of positioning instruments after we are inside the pearly gates? Imagine woodblocks and cowbells floating in midair at the desired height. Designing and assembling your percussion set-up would be much easier. In the meantime, here's some advice on organizing your set-up within the confines of Earth.

Ergonomics
A multi-percussion set-up should be ergonomically (work-friendly) designed so that you can meet the technical and musical requirements without wasted motion and energy.

When dealing with a large number of instruments, consider starting the design on paper before shuffling a bunch of drums back and forth. Work from a list of the needed instruments and draw a rough sketch of the setup. If you are reading music from an orchestrated chart, you can get ideas about which instruments should be adjacent. Some placement decisions are easy. For example, since I am right-handed, I generally place my trap table on my right so that I can pick up tambourines and shakers with my dominant hand.

Study your drawing and imagine making the necessary playing motions. You can even use a bit of "air drumming" as you imagine the logistical demands. Continue to tweak your sketch until it seems ergonomically sound.



As you begin to assemble the set-up, keep the instruments close to each other for economy of motion when playing. Remember that efficient instrument positioning is both

horizontal and vertical. Tone and technique can be compromised by drums that are positioned at the wrong height (and can lead to fatigue and injury).

Don't fear being a bit unconventional. While a saxophonist cannot rearrange the keys on this horn to make a lick easier to finger, a percussionist can alter the "traditional" placement of things within a set-up to reduce some technical challenges.

Visual Aspect
There might have to be some compromise between ergonomics and cosmetics. Remember that people hear with their ears AND eyes. People can be distracted and frustrated when they cannot see the instrument that is producing that captivating sound.

After you assemble the ergonomic setup, take a few moments to have a look from the audience perspective and make the necessary tweaks to enhance the aesthetic elements. Raising a stand an inch or tilting that rack forward a dab probably will not encumber your technique, but it might be just the change that brings the percussive optics into the view of the curious congregant.

Gear
Access to a variety of clamps, boom cymbal stands, and instrument mounting racks can make a big difference in turning your set-up design into ergonomic reality.

• Devices such as the Everything Rack (TM) from Latin Percussion or Gibraltar's Percussion Bar (TM) provide a convenient method for grouping blocks and bells into a convenient array.

• Conserve space and reduce the number of stands by using a cymbal stacker or mounting cymbals "bell-to-bell" with a felt washer in between.

• The Hamilton Concert Snare Drum Stand can accommodate drum sizes up to 18 inches! A floor tom can be placed in the basket and brought up to proper playing height for a standing player.

• The Percussion Claw (TM) from Latin Percussion lives in my mallet case. This little gadget fastens onto a drum rim and gives you another option for installing "peg-mountable" percussion.

• A trap table provides a central location for sticks, mallets, and hand-held instruments such as tambourines, shakers, and cabasa (and you can park your coffee mug on it).

• The best laid schemes of a percussionist go awry when it becomes apparent that the magnificent layout that worked so well in the practice room cannot be shoehorned into the allotted smidgen of stage. An electronic percussion instrument such as the Roland Handsonic (TM) with its hundreds of digital samples allows you to play those tubular bells and timpani parts when the "real deal" will just not fit into your sliver of space.



A multi-percussion set-up should be designed so that the musician can comfortably perform with the appropriate tone and rhythmic accuracy that facilitate musical expression. If musical expression is hindered by the placement of instruments, consider making some changes. Once the layout is in place and you are feeling comfortable (from both ergonomic and visual standpoints), snap a cell phone photo so that you can re-create the set-up in the future.

Here's hoping that it'll be easier in heaven.

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