Be Wise and Warm Up
by Mark Shelton

Music is pouring from your hands onto the instrument with relaxed and efficient movements. Licks seem to flow from your sticks with minimal effort. Forearms, wrists, and fingers are nimble and at your command. What a great feeling!

A musician is more likely to achieve that aforementioned musical fluidity after your body's playing mechanism has warmed up. Do you devote time to a warm up routine before diving into a practice session or a rehearsal? Can you find ten minutes to invest in an activity that can help performance and lower the likelihood of injury?

A good warm up raises your heart rate and increases both body temperature and blood flow. Licensed and Certified Athletic Trainer Diana Lichtenstein states that the body needs oxygen to sustain normal body functions and the demands of extra activity require additional oxygen. Since red blood cells carry oxygen, an increased blood flow boosts the availability of oxygen to assist while playing a blazing solo across the drum set or shaking a tambourine at a breakneck tempo. Ms. Lichtenstein points out that the heightened blood flow and body temperature cause muscles and connective tissue to become more elastic and pliable. Whether swimming, running, or tearing off a double stroke drum roll, elasticity and pliability contribute to better performance while decreasing the possibility of injury.

A session can be designed to incorporate stretching and warm up activities while developing and/or maintaining fundamentals and timekeeping skills.

Stretching

Include both static stretching and dynamic stretching in your warm up. As you begin to stretch, be mindful to never push a maneuver to the point of pain.

Static stretching is the classic "stretch and hold" method. Try this one: Place your hands together with palms and fingers touching their counterpart on the opposite hand (prayer position). Slowly move the heels of the hands away from each other and feel a gentle stretch at the wrists. Increase the opening and feel the stretching in the fingers. Hold that stretch for several seconds before slowly releasing.

Dynamic stretching employs continuous movements. Since my college days, I have used the simple motion of shaking my hand while rotating the wrist as a warm up exercise. (It's the same flicking motion employed after washing your hands at a public restroom and discovering the paper towel dispenser is empty.) Repeatedly opening and closing a fist along with wiggling the fingers are also beneficial dynamic stretches.

Stretching by Bob Anderson is a time-honored manual on the subject of stretching. With hundreds of illustrations by Jean Anderson, *Stretching* provides appropriate exercises for a

variety of activities and body areas including a series of stretches for the hands, wrists, and forearms.

Percussion Exercises

The early portion of warming up should include percussion exercises that are easy to read and execute. The notated exercises in this article combine simple rhythms with percussion fundamentals such as accented and unaccented strokes, diddles, flams, and buzzes. These exercises are drumming-oriented and serve as a starting segment before transitioning to specific exercises for keyboard percussion, hand drums, or timpani. Focus on proper technique without concern for high speed. Play along with a metronome and work on your click accuracy, time, and rhythmic subdivision as you get the blood pumping.

If you are playing drum set or using foot pedals in your percussion set-up, plan to include warm up exercises and stretches for the legs and feet. The exercises in this article can be adapted for the lower extremities.

Make It A Habit

Maintain your playing chops with daily warm up sessions. Keep a practice pad and sticks in your car, on your desk, and in your mallet case so that you can make good use of your time while holding for customer service or waiting at the drive-thru. Simply playing each of these exercises for just over a minute and interspersing some stretching is a respectable start--and certainly more beneficial than zilch. Can you find ten minutes?

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