Essential Implements

by Mark Shelton

“Do you need that many?”

It was an innocent question coming from my non-musician father as he surveyed my modest collection of sticks and mallets. Over the decades my arsenal of percussion implements has expanded considerably (along with my array of instruments).

A serious percussionist should own a stockpile of sticks and mallets that will adequately cover the requirements of a variety of musical situations.

Check out my suggestions for assembling a supply of strikers that will cover a broad assortment of percussion. An example of each recommended implement is included.

Drum Sticks

Concert drum sticks are designed for playing in orchestra, symphonic band, and chamber ensembles. Usually possessing more weight than drum set sticks, a concert model will pull a considerable amount of fundamental tone from an instrument.
Vic Firth SD 1 General

With a smaller diameter and less weight than their concert cousins, drum set sticks are created for easy maneuvering around the kit. Even if I’m not scheduled to play drum set, I keep a pair of 'dance sticks' handy for other percussion duties. *Vator Fusion*

Brushes

What a cool sound! Although nylon bristles are available, make your first investment in a set of old-school wire brushes. Get a pair with an adjustable brush width and a metal ring in the back end so you can toss in some cymbal dings and scrapes.
Vic Firth Heritage Brushes (HB)

Bundled Dowels

Several wooden or synthetic dowels are bound together in the handle area to form this implement. When struck on a percussion instrument, bundled dowels produce a tone with characteristics of a wire brush but with a more pointed attack. *Vic Firth Rutes*

Timbale Sticks

Instead of the normal taper and bead found on a standard drum stick, the traditional implement for timbales is simply rounded on both ends.
Marc Quinones SalsaTimbale Sticks by Zildjian

Yarn-Wound Marimba Mallets

These implements obviously work for playing the marimba, but you want to keep a pair of these mallets in your case as an option for striking other percussion such as wood blocks, cowbells, tom-toms, and temple blocks. This type of mallet is my go-to for most of my suspended cymbal work. *Musser M9*

Triangle Beaters

The tone of a triangle is acutely influenced by the choice of striker. I recommend owning two at the very least. Your primary implement should be fairly heavy with your second being a medium weight. *Grover Pro Percussion #SV-TB*

Cowbell Striker

Although a drumstick will work in a pinch, you'll have to swing some extra lumber when playing a brisk one-handed cascara rhythm. Get a striker with enough size and weight to produce a full tone from your cowbell but short enough to maneuver quickly when the salsa groove is muy rápido. A 5/8 inch diameter dowel cut to a length of approximately 8.5 inches will work just fine or just purchase the *LP268 Pro Cowbell Beater by Latin Percussion.*

Timpani Mallets

No substitutions allowed! If the gig calls for timpani, make sure you're using real timpani mallets. Invest wisely. A poor quality mallet can decrease the potential of a great set of timpani. If the budget is limited, buy a pair of 'general' sticks, but you eventually want to acquire both 'staccato' and 'soft' timpani mallets.
Grover Pro Percussion General Mallets TMB-T1

Combination Sticks

How are you going to switch from a delicate suspended cymbal roll with soft mallets to playing an intricate snare drum rhythm with sticks when there's only two beats of rest to make the change? You can grow an extra arm or simply use combination sticks. Equipped with a drum

stick bead on one end and a felt mallet head on the other, combination sticks can come to the rescue in a tight logistical moment.
Vic Firth SD12 Swizzle G Sticks

Barred Percussion

Your primary glockenspiel mallets should have hard synthetic heads that will produce the instrument's characteristic tone (*Mallet Tech OR45B*). A medium hardness mallet such as *Mallet Tech BB 34* will get you through a lot of xylophone repertoire while also serving as a darker tone option for glockenspiel.

If a percussion instrument needs to be struck to produce sound, the implement is crucial to obtaining the proper tone. Make sure you have the right one at the ready.

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