


Essential Exercises for the Advanced Marimbist

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These exercises are a way to work on the fundamental techniques of playing marimba. They are not bound to a specific grip, but instead focus on how to move around the instrument efficiently, regardless of the performer's desired grip. While some exercises will be easier with one grip, other exercises will be a challenge no matter which grip you prefer. Be patient and practice these exercises slowly and comfortably, always with a metronome. The best way to learn how to play at a fast tempo is to play perfect at a slow tempo. The exercises should be perfected in all Major and Minor keys, moving chromatically or through the circle of 4ths/5ths.

Superior technique is useless unless it is employed for superior music making. It is my hope that these exercises will make it easier to express your musical ideas and achieve a higher level of musicianship.

Double Vertical Strokes

 = 40 - 160



- In order to avoid injury and to insure many years of playing in the future, it is important to warm up our muscles before jumping into more technical material. Use this exercise to get your large muscles moving and warm.
- To use the least amount of energy, the mallets should start and return to the same place with a fast velocity wrist stroke.

All three of these strokes **waste motion**. That is, the mallet heads move farther than is necessary to accomplish the stroke. The following diagrams of the same three strokes (with their appropriate nicknames) have the unnecessary motions in brackets.

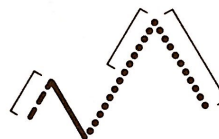
“The Prep. Stroke”



“The Resurrection Stroke”



“The Academic”





When the unnecessary motions are not drawn, all three strokes look very much like:



This piston or cyclic motion is the general stroking method recommended by the author.

Small Interval Shifts

 = 40 -  = 120



- Each subtle change of interval should have an exact location in the hand. Use your kinetic memory to catch the mallets in the correct position.
- The mallets should move to the next interval immediately following contact with the bar. The energy of the rebound will propel the mallets to their new position. Don't stop the mallets until they are in position for the next stroke.
- Make sure the stroke is still starting and returning to the same height. Don't use any extraneous motion.

If the interval change is **late** relative to the recovery, the mallet head motion will look like:



(The student may check these motions in a mirror or have a marimba-playing friend make the diagnosis from the audience side of the instrument.)



If the stroke recovery is held down or is late relative to the interval change, the mallet head motion will look like



If both recovery and interval change are timed smoothly, the mallet head motion will look like



Large Interval Shifts

 = 40 -  = 70

227

228



- First find the position of the mallets in your hands for an octave and then a second. Use your kinetic memory to remember where these two points are in your hand. Make sure you can get from one to the other without complication.
- Use the energy of the rebound to propel the mallets to the new position. The interval shift should occur at the same speed for both note values!
- Make sure all the properties of a good DV stroke are still present. Move from the wrist and not the elbow.

Arm Shifts/Body Shifts

$\overset{3}{\text{♪}} = 40 - \text{♪} = 68$

203

- Practice hands separately first.
- The interval changes, while minimal, must be precise and accurate. Don't lock the mallets into a generic interval. Use your kinetic memory to find the difference between 3rds and 4ths in different registers.
- Again, make sure to move to the next notes immediately after contact with the bar. Energize the rebound.
- Always keep your upper body straight and bend at the knees. The lower you are to the keyboard, the further you can reach.
- When practicing keys besides C and F-sharp, you will have to use body shifts to reach some chords. Your feet should move no more than one step in either direction. These shifts should occur, like the arm shifts, immediately after contact with the bars.

Single Independent Strokes

$\text{♪} = 60 - \text{♪} = 110$

1 1 1 1 3 3 3 3 2 2 2 2 4 4 4 4

- The key word here is independent. The motion of one mallet should not move the other mallet. Stay relaxed in order to keep the unused mallet stationary.
- Practice this exercise in smaller and larger intervals to work on control. The size of the rotation is different for each interval position.

Double Laterals with Single Independents

♩ = 80 - ♪ = 104

425

1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 4 4 4 4

4 3 2 1 4 3 2 1 4 3 2 1 4 3 2 1 1 1 1 1

- Make all the necessary shifts (interval, arm, and body) with precision.
- Remember to remain relaxed during the single independent strokes to keep the unused mallet from bouncing. Do not change the interval to facilitate this technique, but work on the correct rotation at a small interval.

Double Lateral Strokes with Body Shifts

♩ = 50 - ♩ = 100

- Work on the permutation (123234) and the block chords (root, 2nd inversion, 1st inversion, root) separately to begin with.
- Make sure the interval changes are exact and not lazy.
- You should only need one step to cover the distance from bottom to top. Don't crab step up the instrument and remember you don't always have to be in front of a note to play it.
- Arm Shifts occur immediately after a hand is done playing each group of two notes. Done slowly the LH will cross over the RH on the way up and vice versa on the way down.

Scales with Sequential Stickings

$\text{♩} = 60 - \text{♩} = 150$

590



	2 3 4 1 (1)	2 3 4 2 (1)	3 4 1 2	3 4 2 4 (1)	3 2 1 4	3 2 4 3 (1)	2 1 4 3	2 (1)
	4 1 2 3 (3)	4 1 2 4 (3)	1 2 3 4	1 2 4 2 (3)	1 4 3 2	1 4 2 1 (3)	4 3 2 1	4 (3)
F sharp	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 1	2 3 4 1	2 4 2 4	2 1 4 3	2 1 4 2	1 4 3 2	1
C	1 2 3 4	2 3 4 1	2 3 4 2	3 4 2 4	3 2 4 3	2 1 4 3	2 4 3 2	1
C sharp, D A, A flat	1 2 3 1	2 3 4 1	2 3 1 2	3 4 2 4	3 2 1 3	2 1 4 3	2 1 3 2	1
F	1 2 3 4	1 2 3 1	2 3 4 1	2 3 4 3	2 1 4 3	2 1 4 2	1 4 3 2	1

- Playing your scales this way can help you to figure out new sticking patterns that are more idiomatic than just hand to hand sticking. Try to incorporate these ideas into your literature.
- In order to reach a faster tempo, you will have to open the interval of a second slightly and use a larger rotation.
- Just as in two mallet playing, the hands don't have to follow the same horizontal plane. If you offset your hands you can play faster and more accurately.

Independent Roll Chop Builder

$\text{♩} = 60 - \text{♩} = 180$



- At first glance this looks like an exercise for single alternating strokes, but the independent roll is a closer relative of the single independent stroke. Simply practice single independents and drop the other mallet in.
- Stay relaxed and keep your wrists low to the keyboard.
- Every interval will require a different amount of rotation. Practice this exercise at the 5th, 3rd, 2nd, and octave.

Triple Lateral Paradiddles

$\text{♩} = 60 - \text{♩} = 120$

- Make sure each mallet is getting the same amount of rotation and each note is the same volume. If your rotation is lopsided one mallet will sound louder than the other.
- Stay relaxed and don't crush the triplet rhythm.

Double Lateral Timing

$\text{♩} = 50 - \text{♩} = 200$

- This exercise fixes any problems with double lateral timing. Make sure that there are no flams when mallets are supposed to strike together.
- You can work on this exercise in a variety of ways. Large intervals, small intervals, arpeggios, or chord progressions are all great ways to play these permutations. Try to think of other ways to apply it to work on your weaknesses.