

Study Guide for Teachers

Garden State Percussion Trio

Meet the Beat

presented by
Young Audiences New Jersey & Eastern PA
(866) 500-9265
www.yanjep.org



ABOUT THE PROGRAM

This trio marches in with drum loads of fun, humor, and information about the art, acoustics, and history of percussion instruments. Students play along, joining demonstrations of the xylophone, vibraphone, timpani, and drums as they learn about different kinds of percussion and the sounds that each instrument makes. Students discover that they can create sound on household objects as well as traditional instruments, and how movie and sound effects are created with percussion.

LEARNING GOALS

Students will

- Become familiar with percussion instruments and what distinguishes these instruments from other instrument types,
- Learn how sound is made on various percussion instruments and how the instruments are used in bands and orchestras.
- Learn the strong rhythmic effect of percussion instruments.
- Learn to better enjoy and understand the impact that rhythm has in music.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR STUDENTS

Percussion instruments are the oldest musical instruments (hands and feet were the first percussion instruments!). They are generally used to keep rhythm or add tone color. Some percussion instruments can be tuned to a definite pitch, whereas others are indefinite and do not change pitch.

Instruments of definite pitch:

- The timpani, or kettledrums, are large copper kettles with skins stretched over the tops. Screws placed around the top alter the pitch by changing the tension of the skin head; foot pedals are also used to alter the pitch. A minimum of two timpani are found in the orchestra, but they more often appear in groups of four or five. The percussionist uses mallets of different types to produce special effects; these mallets can be made from sponge, felt, rubber, or wood.
- The xylophone and the marimba are made of hard woods cut to many lengths and arranged like the keyboard of a piano. Both are played with wooden mallets. The xylophone has a dry, hollow sound, whereas the marimba has a softer tone quality.

Instruments of indefinite pitch:

- The snare drum gets its unique rattle from the metal snares attached to the bottom of the drum. When the top head is struck, the column of air inside the drum causes the snares to vibrate against the bottom head of the drum.
- The bass drum is a large instrument with two heads. When struck, it causes a thunderous sound; because of its huge size, it has a low pitch.
- The tambourine is actually a miniature drum with a single head. Small metal discs are inserted into the wooden hoop surrounding the head to produce a metallic jangling sound when shaken or struck.

There are many other percussion instruments. These include the castanets, wood blocks, cymbals, and a variety of African, Asian, and Latin American instruments.

BEFORE THE PROGRAM

1. Discuss percussion with your class. Make a list of all the percussion instruments students can name and make predictions about what instruments they will see in the performance.
2. Because these performers are classically trained, talk about how classical percussion might differ from contemporary percussion. What kind of percussion instruments are in a symphony orchestra? A rock band? A hip hop group?
3. How are the rhythms you hear in classical music different from those you hear in contemporary music?
4. Get the music teacher involved! Gather recordings of traditional music from around the world. Have a listening session where students can notice the differences between the percussion instrumentation and rhythms.
5. Discuss student preferences when it comes to music. What is the music they most often listen to and why? What kind of music would they not want to listen to and why?

RESOURCES

The Percussive Arts Society: Links to educational resources and children's sites.

www.pas.org

Classics for Kids: Information and games about the orchestra, classical music, and musical instruments. www.classicsforkids.com

Recommended Listening

Xylophone: "Fossils" from *Carnival of the Animals* by Camille Saint-Saëns

Timpani and snare drum: Opening measures of *Concerto in F* by George Gershwin

Timpani: *Canaries* by Eliot Carter

Chimes: "The Great Gate at Kiev," from *Pictures at an Exhibition* by Modest Mussorgsky

Celesta: "Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy" from *The Nutcracker* by Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky

AFTER THE PROGRAM

1. Discuss what was surprising about the performance. What happened that students did not expect? Did students' perception of music change at all? Which instruments were familiar and which were unfamiliar?
2. Listen to the same world music recordings as you did before the performance. Notice if students hear anything more or anything different this time. What sounds are like ones they heard in the performance? Can they imitate the rhythms by clapping, playing an instrument, or using their voices?
3. Make your own percussion instruments:
 - Have students find objects that resonate at different pitches when struck by a pencil. Arrange these objects in a row, placed according to pitch (high to low). Why do some produce high tones and others low tones? Why some are more resonant than others? Do the same with drinking glasses filled with varying levels of water.
 - Box-o-phone: Place a large wooden box on pad on the floor or on a desk, and play on different sides to get different sounds.
 - Thunder sheets: Take sheets of poster board, hold them up in the air, and flap.

ARTIST INFORMATION

Timpanist Adrienne Ostrander has performed for numerous Broadway shows. Closer to home she is a member of the Princeton Chamber Symphony and the group Solid Brass.

Percussionist Dan McMillan's career includes New Jersey appearances with the New Jersey Pops, the Papermill Playhouse, and the Cape May Music Festival, as well as performances with Shari Lewis and Lamb Chop. He has also played in the *Lion King*, *Cats*, and *Grease*.

James Neglia, a member of the Harrisburg Symphony orchestra and the Northeastern Symphony, is also the principal timpanist with the New Philharmonic of New Jersey. He has appeared worldwide in solo performances as well as with musical greats such as Plácido Domingo, André Watts, and The Moody Blues.