

The Timpani: Perspectives for Audition and Performance

By Stanley Leonard

Instruments:

Make every attempt to practice on the same type of instrument to be used at the audition. Before performing on new instruments take time for a brief warm-up, if possible. Check the mechanical functioning of the instruments; *i.e.* pedal movement, head response.

Make every attempt to bring personal instruments to an audition.

Sticks:

The sounds created by the sticks should be appropriate to the character of the music being performed. Soft sticks may be more appropriate than hard sticks for some rhythmic passages. Harder sticks may be more appropriate when playing with the orchestra.

Take into consideration the performing environment. A dry sounding room or hall may require the use of softer sticks vs. the resonant space needing smaller, harder sticks.

Playing Position:

It is acceptable for a performer to either sit or stand while playing the timpani. However, the **recommended** position is to be seated.

Performance Techniques:

The performer should treat the drums as a console, not merely as a group of individual drums. There should be a sense of dynamic and tonal balance in the relationship of the drums within the console.

The stroke of the stick should produce a clear, singing tone. Beware of whacking the drums. The tone of each drum should be focused by the stroke. **The stroke articulates the music.**

Tone Quality:

There should be a **variation** in the character of sounds produced. This is dependent upon the following means:

- The musicality of the performer.
- The type of sticks being used.
- The type of articulation used to produce the sound.

Musicality:

Musical instincts must be trained and developed to the point that an individual can trust their own interpretation of, rhythm, intonation, articulation, phrasing, and musical expression.

Rhythms; clear and articulated correctly.

Intonation; correct and focused.

Muffling techniques; appropriate use of hands and mufflers

The player should make music with the drums, **creating** the sound, not just playing on the drums.

The music must be shaped and become totally **alive**.

The performer should communicate a sense of musical personality, which is more than fancy motions made while playing. There should be a “flavor” to the performance.

The timpanist must have enough experience with the standard orchestral repertoire to be able to play any of the Brahms, Beethoven, Tchaikovsky symphonies or Mahler #1 with as little as one rehearsal. The performer must be prepared to play more modern works, (*i.e.* Stravinsky, Bartok), with as few as two rehearsals.

An assured demeanor is essential. The timpanist must be prepared to look the conductor in the eye at all times.

Ensemble performance:

While performing with the orchestra, or other ensemble, the sound of the timpani should become an integral part of the total ensemble, participating with correct intonation, tonal balance, rhythmic solidarity, and appropriate musical expression.