



YAMAHA Educator Series

PERCUSSION



Ney Rosaura

Ney Gabriel Rosaura is one of the most original and dynamic percussionists and composers today. He was born in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in 1952 and studied composition and conducting at the Universidade de Brasilia in Brazil, before getting his master's degree in percussion at the Hochschule fur Musik Würzburg, in Germany. His DMA is from the University of Miami in Coral Gables, Florida where he is director of percussion studies. As a composer, he has written many pieces and methods for percussion instruments. Most of these have been performed and recorded by world-acclaimed artists. As a soloist he has traveled more than 25 different countries and presented masterclasses and solo concerts with orchestras in the most prestigious international percussion venues.

Crossing Grip Extensions

By Ney Rosaura

When I first started to play with four mallets, I was a 25-year-old guitar player and composer who had been studying percussion for two years. At that point, I started looking for a four-mallet grip to use, and after studying the available grips, I chose the "Burton" grip.

Some years later, during my studies in Germany, I met Leigh Stevens on his first trip to Europe, and learned of his extended Musser grip. I spent the next four years working very hard with scales and technical exercises to strengthen my fingers. Because my hands are extremely sensitive, I always had to put plastic bandages around the bottom of the third fingers. However, I was so much into the grip that I even performed this way on the vibraphone.

After I finished my studies in Germany, I returned to Brazil to a busy routine of orchestral playing and teaching, and slowly started losing the power of my fingers because of a lack of daily practice. To keep myself alive on the market, I switched back to Burton's grip on the vibraphone, and later on the marimba as well.

However, I was not completely satisfied with the Burton grip, so I started to combine the best features of other grips in order to strengthen the three main technical problems of the grip: 1. the constant "click" produced by the rattan handles in the palm of the hands; 2. the lack of wrist torque to play one-hand rolls in small intervals; 3. the lack of four-mallet marimba roll possibilities (always 2 against 2).

In my more than fifteen years of playing mallets, I have developed a personal four-mallet technique. During my trips around the world, many students have encouraged me to write about the way I hold the mallets, because it is easy and very effective on the vibraphone, multiple percussion and especially on marimba. During these contacts with professionals and students from other countries, I have met other players that were using the same solutions that I am showing in this article. We all instinctively arrived at the same approach to solve our technical problems of the original Burton grip.

The purpose of this article is to present some extensions for the original Burton grip that makes four-mallet playing much more independent without losing the grip's original power. I will be referring to the four mallets with the following numbers.

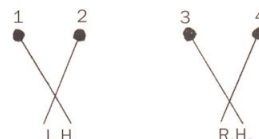


Figure 1



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Figure 2

The fingers will be numbered as:



The Outside Mallet

The 4th finger is the most important finger because it will always hold the weight of the outside mallet (mallets 1 and 4).

1. Place the end of the handle of the mallet between the two halves of the palm.
2. Curl the joint of the 4th finger as much as possible, and hold the mallet with the tip of this finger. This mallet should always be held with the 4th finger, and the angle between the second and third sections of this finger should always stay as close as possible to 90 degrees.

Remember that by holding this mallet, the 4th finger will never uncurl.

Figure 3



90°

The Inside Mallet

3. The inside mallet (mallets 2 and 3) will be mainly held by the 5th finger. This finger should be curled around the shaft of the mallet, and its tip should always be in contact with the palm of the hand. This will give the mallet freedom to swing up and down.

Figure 4



Holding the Mallets

4. Repeat steps 1 and 2 to hold the outside mallets (see Figure 3).
5. Cross the inside mallet in the palm of the hand, with its handle under the outside mallet, and curl the 5th finger around the shaft of the mallet, touching its tip on the palm of the hand (see Figure 5).

The 90° angle position between the sections of the 4th finger will create a free

space between the shafts of the mallets, allowing the inside mallet to swing up and down.

Unlike the original Burton grip, the outside mallet should never be held with the 3rd finger. Because of this, the mallets do not touch the palm of the hand and therefore will not produce the traditional "click" of the shafts touching each other. This extension also provides more independence for the mallets.

The 3rd finger has little to do and should just rest under the inside mallet, helping to support the weight with the 4th and 5th fingers. Remember that the 4th finger should never uncurl.

Figure 5



The easiest and most relaxed interval to use when learning a new grip is a fourth or fifth (see Figure 8 /position zero).

6. In this position zero, the shaft of the inside mallet lays naturally over the last joint of the second finger, with the thumb resting over it. The palm of the hand should face the floor. Be sure that your fingers are relaxed, your hand should be naturally curved, with no extra tension applied to keep the mallets in the hand.

Although holding the outside mallets with a curled 4th finger may feel a bit awkward at first, holding the mallets this way does not require any special tension or strength.

Changing Intervals

Changing intervals between the mallet heads is done by moving the inside mallet with the 2nd finger and the thumb. Use the 2nd finger to open the intervals and the thumb to close them. On intervals of a second (Fig.6) the outside mallet touches the first section of the 2nd finger. On intervals of a third (Fig.7) the outside mallet touches the second section of the 2nd finger. On intervals of a fifth (Fig.8, position zero) the inside mallet should be held like a snare drum stick and the outside mallet should touch the 3rd section of the 2nd finger.





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Figure 6



Figure 7



Figure 8 (position zero)



2. For intervals of a sixth and larger, continue the movement by pushing the mallet with the thumb as shown below on Figures 9 and 10. On intervals of a sixth (Fig.9), the inside mallet should touch the first section of the thumb. For intervals of a seventh, the inside mallet should touch the bone between the sections of the thumb. For intervals of octave the inside mallet should touch the second section of the thumb as shown on Fig.10

Figure 9



Figure 10



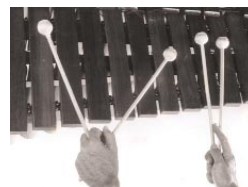
3. To close intervals, use the thumb to push the inside mallet until the heads almost touch each other. In this case the second finger should rise, allowing space for the thumb to push the inside mallet, closing the interval.

When opening or closing intervals, the outside mallet does not move. The 4th finger should always stay curled to hold this mallet.

4. To compensate for the lack of wrist torque on small intervals (especially seconds), the palm of the hand should stay in a vertical position (parallel to the floor), with the thumb facing the ceiling. This will help give more independence on rolls and "double lateral" sticking.

Note that as illustrated in Figures 6 to 11, the closer the interval the more the palm of the hand should be in a vertical position, with the thumb facing the ceiling.

Figure 11



Application of the "Musser Roll"

For expressive marimba rolls, use the concept of the "Musser roll" or "ripple roll". Start the movement with the palms of the hands facing each other so the heads of the inside mallets will be in a higher position than the outside mallets. Hold the outside mallet firmly, and let the inside mallet swing up and down.

Hit the keyboard first with the outside mallet, letting the inside mallet drop later from its higher starting position (Figure 12). The thumb will help control the direction of the mallets and the changing intervals while rolling. Be careful that the shafts of the mallets do not touch each other in the palm of the hand, producing a click sound.

It is also possible to make this roll by hitting the keyboard first with the inside mallets. In this case, the outside mallets should start in a higher position, and hit the keyboard later.

Figure 12





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Mallet Considerations

It is very important (especially for the marimba player) to use longer mallets than the average vibraphone/marimba mallets. I use longer mallets on the marimba, and I personally prefer rattan handles, because I think that the rattan's swing gives a much warmer sound on mallet instruments. Another important point is that the rattan should neither be too thin, which can cause the mallets to swing too much, nor too thick, which causes a dry sound like birch handles.

Conclusion

Finally, I would like to review some of the advantages of the above grip.

1. It is very natural for the hands and easy to learn. It can be applied to vibraphone, marimba and multiple percussion, or any other percussion instrument.
2. It gives the same power and speed of a two-mallet player, as with Burton's grip, without this grip's traditional click.
3. The use of the 5th finger to keep the weight and swing of the internal mallet controlled, and the position with the palm of the hand in a vertical position (for small intervals) gives the player more independence to work with one-hand rolls and certain double lateral patterns.
4. This grip allows the use of the "Musser roll" or "ripple roll" concept, especially on the marimba for expressive four-mallet rolls.

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