



School of Music

TENNESSEE TECH

Practice Like the Pros

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Percussionists Interviewed

(In alphabetical order)

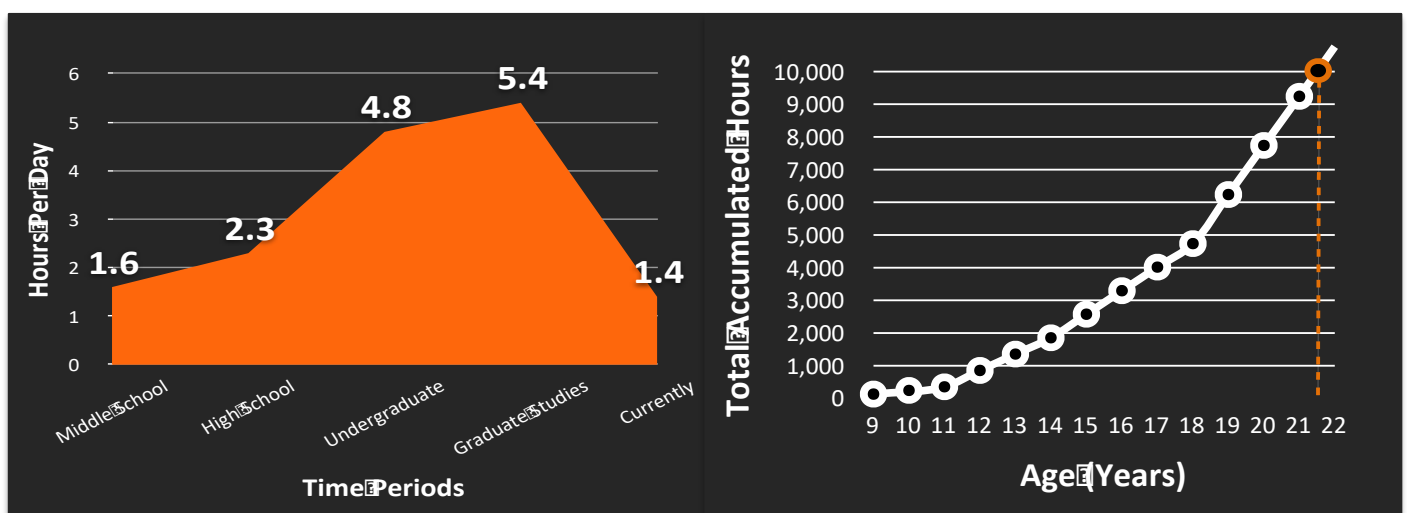
1. Joakim Anterot - Professor of Percussion at the Royal College of Music in Stockholm, percussionist with the Royal Stockholm Opera, and percussionist with the Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra.
2. Jason Baker - Director of Percussion Studies and Assistant Professor of Music at Mississippi State University, Principal Timpanist of the Tupelo Symphony Orchestra, and Principal Percussionist of the Starkville Symphony Orchestra.
3. Kevin Bobo - Associate Percussion Professor at the Indiana University.
4. Michael Burritt - Professor of Percussion and Head of the Department at the Eastman School of Music.
5. Thomas Burritt - Associate Professor of Music at the University of Texas at Austin.
6. James Campbell - Professor of Music and Director of Percussion Studies at the University of Kentucky, Principal Percussionist of the Lexington Philharmonic, past President of the Percussive Arts Society, DCI Hall of Fame, and BOA Hall of Fame.
7. Omar Carmentates - Instructor of Percussion at Furman University, member of the Nief-Norf chamber ensemble, and Percussion Arranger for the Sprit of Atlanta Drum & Bugle Corps.
8. Gary Cook - Retired Professor Emeritus and Director of Percussion Studies at the University of Arizona, retired Timpanist and Principal Percussionist with the Tucson Symphony Orchestra, and past President of the Percussive Arts Society.
9. Christopher Deane - Associate Professor in Percussion at the University of North Texas and retired Principal Timpanist of the Greensboro Symphony.
10. Bret Dietz - Associate Professor of Percussion at the Louisiana State University School of Music.
11. Matthew Duvall - Percussionist with Eighth Blackbird chamber ensemble.
12. I-Jen Fang - Percussion faculty at the McIntire Department of Music at the University of Virginia and Principal Timpanist and Percussionist of the Charlottesville Symphony Orchestra.
13. Mark Ford - Coordinator of Percussion Activities at the University of North Texas and past President of the Percussive Arts Society.
14. Andy Harnsberger - Assistant Professor of Music and Percussion Coordinator at Lee University.
15. Anders Holdar - Co-founder of world-renowned Kroumata Percussion Ensemble and Professor of Percussion at the University College of Music Education in Stockholm.
16. John Lane - Director of Percussion Studies and Assistant Professor at Sam Houston State University.
17. Julie Licata - Assistant Professor of Music at the State University of New York College at Oneonta.
18. Frederic Macarez - Principal Timpanist of the Orchestre de Paris and Director of the Percussion Studies at the Conservatoire National de Région de Paris.
19. Payton MacDonald - Associate Professor of Music at William Paterson University and founding member of Alarm Will Sound and Super Marimba.
20. Brian Mason - Associate Professor of Percussion at Morehead State University and Percussionist with the Lexington Philharmonic Orchestra.
21. William Moersch - Chair of the Percussion Division at the University of Illinois, Principal Timpanist/Percussionist of Sinfonia da Camera, and Artistic Director of New Music Marimba.
22. Jason Nicholson - Assistant Professor of Percussion at Utah State University.
23. Brian Nozny - Percussion faculty at Troy University.
24. John Parks - Associate Professor of Percussion at Florida State University and faculty member at the Eastern Music Festival
25. Paul Rennick - Percussion faculty at the University of North Texas and Percussion Caption Head of the Santa Clara Vanguard Drum & Bugle Corps.
26. Emil Richards - Long-time studio musician and freelance percussionist. Member of the Percussive Arts Society Hall of Fame.
27. Steven Schick - Professor of Music at the University of California and Consulting Artist in Percussion at the Manhattan School of Music.
28. Robert Schietroma - Regents professor at the University of North Texas and past President of the Percussive Arts Society.
29. Josh Smith - Assistant Professor of Music at Bethel College.
30. Gordon Stout - Professor of Percussion at Ithaca College and member of the Percussive Arts Society Hall of Fame.
31. John Tafoya - Chairman of the Percussion Department and Professor of Percussion at Indiana University and retired timpanist

- of the National Symphony Orchestra.
32. Blake Tyson - Associate Professor of Percussion at the University of Central Arkansas.
 33. Michael Udow - Retired Professor Emeritus of Percussion at University of Michigan and retired Principal Percussionist of the Santa Fe Opera.
 34. Ben Wahlund - Director of Percussion at Naperville Central High School and Adjunct Faculty at North Central College in Naperville, Illinois.
 35. Eric Willie - Assistant Professor of Percussion at University of North Carolina - Greensboro and member of the Nief-Norf chamber ensemble.
 36. Brian Zator - Director of Percussion at Texas A&M University - Commerce and Principal Timpanist and Percussionist with the Northeast Texas Symphony.

Interview Questions

1. If you have a regular warm up routine, could you please describe it?
2. How do you go about learning new music? Do you have a regular process?
3. When learning new material, do you typically listen to existing recordings? If so, how frequently and during what stage of your progress?
4. When performing, how much of what you play is memorized? Do you utilize any mental or physical methods during or before the performance to avoid memory slips?
5. How do you practice problem spots?
6. How often do you record yourself?
7. Do you practice differently the weeks and days leading up to a performance?
8. Do you have a ritual the day of the performance?
9. How old were you when you started playing percussion? At what age did you start focusing on your "primary" instrument?
Please give your best guess as to the number of hours per day you spent practicing during the given time periods: middle school, high school, undergrad, graduate school, early career, and currently.
10. Do you believe your practice habits have contributed to your success?

Averaged Data from Question #9



BOLD topics below are those covered in today's session.

1. PLANNING A PRACTICE SESSION

- A. Practice Environment - Carefully choose the location and time of day that enables the greatest productivity and fewest distractions.
Benefits: Maximizes efficiency. Establishes a practice routine that is less susceptible to 'prioritized' conflicts.
Pros: Anterot, Duvall, Tyson, Udow, Wahlund.
- B. **Mapped Out Schedule** - Create detailed short/long term practice schedules according to time and material.
 - *Short Term:* Individual practice sessions scheduled to the minute.
 - *Long Term:* Preparation timeline from day one to the performance.Benefits: Promotes focused practice and monitors progress towards performance dates.
Pros: Anterot, M. Burritt, Carmenates, Duvall, Licata, Willie
- C. **Kitchen Timer** - Short term planning, "*For the next 10 minutes, I'm practicing...*"
Benefits: Great for people who feel overwhelmed by long to-do lists. Creates short bursts of focus.
Pros: Deane
- D. Goals List - "*I'm not leaving the practice room until I accomplish...*"
Benefits: Guarantees productive practice and rewards mastery of material rather than time spent.
Pros: Baker, Fang, Rennick, Udow, Wahlund
- E. **Priority List** - Practice worst material first. Post-it Notes can be used for labeling levels of proficiency.
Benefits: Ensures disciplined practice and promotes steady progress.
Pros: Bobo, M. Burritt, Deane, Ford, Harnsberger, Lane, Nicholson, Parks, Tafoya, Zator
- F. **Consequence Oriented Practice** - Practice length is determined by correct repetitions rather than time.
Benefits: Places emphasis on quality not quantity. Simulates pressures of performance.
Pros: Campbell, Moersch, Nozny, Willie

2. WARMING UP

- A. Kinesthetic - Warming up muscles and joints away from the instrument.
Benefits: Guarantees the body is physically warmed up prior to playing and helps prevent injury.
Pros: Campbell, Holdar, Moersch, Smith, Udow
- B. Technique & Accuracy Based Exercises - Exercises that focus on basic technique, accuracy, and stroke types.
Benefits: Cultivates technical proficiency, accuracy, and endurance necessary to all players' development.
Pros: Everybody (currently or at some point in their career)
- C. **Musical Based Exercises** - Technical exercises derived from the musical material.
Benefits: Develops technical facilities the player inherently lacks, as exposed by specific musical passages.
Pros: Baker, Carmenates, Ford, Harnsberger, Nicholson, Nozny
- D. **Slow Musical Excerpts** - Musical material played at reduced tempos.
Benefits: Maximizes warm-up productivity, optimizing limited practice time.
Pros: Parks, Rennick, Schick
- E. Warm-Up Piece - Perform familiar piece that is not technically demanding or laborious.
Benefits: Promotes mental focus and provides an enjoyable start to every practice session.
Pros: M. Burritt, Udow

F. Improvisation & Theory Based Exercises - Free improvisation or harmonic transpositions of exercises or stroke types.

Benefits: Engages brain and stimulates creativity, often providing inspiration for compositions.

Pros: M. Burritt, Cook, Ford, MacDonald, Moersch, Stout, Wahlund

G. Sight-Reading - Reading through unfamiliar material.

Benefits: Creates guaranteed sight-reading time within a practice session.

Pros: MacDonald, Rennick, Udow

H. Learn New Music - Learn new notes of current practice material.

Benefits: Maximizes warm-up productivity by optimizing limited practice time.

Pros: Stout

3. LEARNING NEW MUSIC

A. Perfect Practice - Every repetition, starting from day one, is played without mistakes. This is achieved through extreme tempo reduction.

Benefits: The body and mind are only trained to play it one way - perfectly.

Pros: Campbell, Carmenates, Cook, Harnsberger, Moersch, Parks, Rennick, Willie

B. Read Until Familiar - Play using the music, as if sight-reading, until the piece becomes learned.

Benefits: Helps develop sight-reading abilities. Promotes accurate interpretation of the score markings. Often leads to an organic memorization of the piece.

Pros: Bobo, Cook, Fang, Harnsberger, Lane, Macarez, MacDonald, Richards, Stout, Tafoya, Tyson

C. Learn Away from the Instrument - Learn music in a purely mental capacity, eliminating all physical interaction with the instrument:

- *Visualize Instrument:* Visualize striking the instrument from the performer's perspective.

- *Visualize Score:* Visualize the notes and rhythms on the staff.

- *Audiation of Score:* Develop an aural recollection of how the music sounds.

Benefits: Leads to better understanding of the music. Maximizes productivity away from the instrument.

Pros: Cook, Holdar, MacDonald, Schietroma, Wahlund

D. Learn Based on Form - Learn music according to the formal elements and compositional structure.

Benefits: Results in a stronger interpretation and understanding of the piece, making it easier to memorize.

Pros: T. Burritt

E. Learn from Beginning to End - Learn chronologically starting with bar one.

Benefits: Leads to strong understanding of how the piece develops and progresses to the end.

Pros: Baker, M. Burritt, Carmenates, Dietz, Duvall, Ford, Nozny, Parks, Schick

F. Learn from End to Beginning - Learn the last phrase of the piece first and work backwards to the beginning.

Benefits: During performance, you are always approaching more familiar material, giving the music a more natural direction.

Pros: Nicholson, Rennick, Schietroma

G. Hardest Material First - Start learning the most difficult material first, saving the easiest material for last.

Benefits: Ensures that the hardest material is mastered in time for the performance.

Pros: Anterot, Bobo, M. Burritt, Campbell, Harnsberger, Lane, Macarez, Mason, Nicholson, Smith, Zator

H. All Aspects from the Start - Integrate all elements that will be present in the performance, except tempo.

Benefits: Performances are merely faster versions of what has been rehearsed since day one.

Pros: Baker, M. Burritt, Campbell, Carmenates, Duvall, Ford, Harnsberger, MacDonald, Moersch, Parks, Rennick, Schick, Tafoya

I. Remove Elements - Simplify music by removing musical elements. Learn notes, rhythms, and dynamics separately, adding them together once they have been mastered individually.

Benefits: Reduces difficulty, focusing on the mastery of individual elements. Simplifies highly complex music into manageable chunks.

Pros: Bobo, Deane, Fang, Licata, Stout

4. PROBLEM SPOTS

- A. Isolate and Surround - Isolate problem spot until mastered, slowly integrating into context by adding material before and after.

Benefits: Fixes problem quickly and ensures retention when played in context.

Pros: M. Burritt, Carmenates, Cook, Deane, Duvall, Harnsberger, Mason, Nicholson, Parks, Rennick, Schick, Smith, Udow

- B. **Slow Repetition** - High repetitions at a tempo slow enough to guarantee 100 percent accuracy.

Benefits: Retrains incorrect muscle memory and balances mental recollection with muscle memory.

Pros: Everybody except Richards.

- C. **Create Original Exercises** - Compose technical exercises that isolate technical deficiencies exposed by the music.

Benefits: Fixes personal technical deficiencies permanently, rather than simply learning to play a particular passage. Breaks practice monotony when a problem spot is a reoccurring issue.

Pros: Baker, Duvall, Harnsberger, MacDonald, Nozny, Schietroma, Stout, Wahlund

- D. **Post-it Notes** - Place Post-it Notes on undesirable playing spots.

Benefits: Acts as a visual and aural reminder (creates ticking sound when struck) of where not to play.

Pros: Ford

- E. Hands Separate - Play each hand independently.

Benefits: Clarifies which hand is creating the problem and directs focus to fixing the precise problem.

Pros: Bobo, Fang, Licata

- F. **Mental practice** - Mentally rehearse the problem spot away from the instrument.

Benefits: Allows player to fix mental deficiencies, independent of physical deficiencies.

Pros: Cook, Richards, M. Burritt, T. Burritt, Macarez

- G. **Additive Process** - Fragment problem spot into manageable chunks while maintaining tempo.

Benefits: Fixes problem spots not conducive to tempo reduction and directs focus to precise problem.

Pros: Lane, Nozny

- H. **Stop Practicing** - Stop playing or practicing problem spots for a short period of time.

Benefits: Often times, spots will mysteriously fix themselves. Eliminates mental blocks and anxiety associated with reoccurring problem spots.

Pros: T. Burritt, Holdar, Tyson

5. MEMORIZATION - AVOIDING MEMORY SLIPS

- A. Slow Practice - Run sections at an extremely slow tempo, void of muscle memory.

Benefits: Eliminates ability to rely purely on muscle memory, testing the player's mental recollection.

Pros: M. Burritt, Carmenates, Dietz, Nozny

- B. Triple Channel Learning - Learn music using three separate methods: aurally, visually, and kinesthetically.

Benefits: Ensures that all three senses are equally responsible for retention, providing back-ups when one or more fails during performance.

Pros: Campbell, Cook, Licata, Schick, Udow

- C. Formal Analysis - Perform a formal analysis to understand the structure of the piece.

Benefits: Gives meaning to all notes so the player understands the larger context.

Pros: M. Burritt, T. Burritt, Carmenates, Deane, Duvall, Schietroma, Tyson, Udow

- D. **Create Associations** - Assign non-musical relationships to musical passages.
Benefits: Helps to create a structural understanding when formal analyses are not possible or overly complex.
Pros: Deane, Carmenates, MacDonald, Zator
 - E. **Create Triggers** - Create checkpoints throughout the piece that serve as mental reminders for subsequent material.
Benefits: Allows players to remember only specific cues, dividing the piece into manageable chunks.
Pros: Carmenates, Duvall, Schick, Tyson
 - F. **Sing in Head** - Mentally sing the part while playing.
Benefits: Forces brain to focus on the music, eliminating the mind's tendency to wander.
Pros: Nicholson
 - G. **Stop and Start Anywhere** - Learn to stop and start anywhere in the music.
Benefits: Eliminates fear of memory slips since the piece can be re-started immediately.
Pros: Bobo, Duvall, Fang, Schick, Tafoya
 - H. **Improvise in Style** - Learn to improvise in the style of the piece.
Benefits: Allows the player to hide memory slips and buy time to re-group mentally.
Pros: Baker, Nicholson, Tyson, Zator
6. PERFORMANCE PREPARATION
- A. **More run-throughs** - Incorporate more run-throughs into practice sessions.
Benefits: Tests ability to recover from mistakes and builds mental and physical endurance.
Pros: Bobo, M. Burritt, Deane, Lane, Nicholson, Udow, Willie, Zator
 - B. **Practice less** - Reduce practice hours and number of run-throughs leading up to the performance.
Benefits: Eliminates stale and over-rehearsed performances, creating energized performances.
Pros: Carmenates, Dietz, Fang, Licata
 - C. **Play for people** - Do mock performances in front of an audience.
Benefits: Tests one's ability to deal with the symptoms of anxiety triggered only by live performance. Exposes potential problem spots and performance tendencies.
Pros: Baker, Bobo, M. Burritt, Moersch, Parks
 - D. **Replicate performance scenario** - Re-create physical and mental performance conditions in the practice room.
Benefits: Exposes the challenges and differences of live performance, allowing for proper preparation.
Pros: Baker, Carmenates, Ford, Nicholson, Tafoya, Willie
 - E. **Change Focus** - Practice changes to focus on elements most crucial for a successful performance.
Benefits: Helps prioritize the most important aspects of the performance, eliminating wasted practice time on insignificant details.
Pros: Campbell, Ford, Harnsberger, Nozny, Schick, Smith, Tafoya, Udow, Zator
 - F. **Performance day routine** - Develop a routine that can be replicated on the day of a performance.
Benefits: Provides control and familiarity leading up the performance, easing anxiety.
Pros: Almost everyone (all but those in G. below)
 - G. **No performance day routine** - Treat performance day like any other practice day.
Benefits: Eliminates over-hyping a performance and allows for unpredictable performance schedules.
Pros: Baker, Nicholson, Richards, Schietroma, Tafoya, Tyson, Udow

Self-Survey

Planning a Practice Session	If yes, try method...
Do people commonly interrupt your practice sessions?	A
Are you routinely tired or absent minded while practicing?	A
Do you find yourself thinking about non-related issues while practicing?	A
Is it hard for you to find time to practice on a daily basis?	B, C, E
Does your designated practice time often get replaced by more pressing issues?	B
Do you commonly get behind in your preparation or feel unprepared to perform?	B
Do you have a hard time getting through all your practice material?	B
Do long to-do lists overwhelm you?	C
Do you have a hard time staying focused?	B, C
Do you commonly fear specific spots during performances?	E
Do you have large blocks of time to practice?	D, F
Are you easily discouraged in the practice room?	D
Do you commonly get bored in the practice room?	D
Does your improvement plateau as you get closer to the performance?	E, F
Do you get frustrated with the pace of your progress?	E
Do you find yourself doing mindless repetitions?	D, F
Do you struggle with mental focus while performing?	F
Do you typically underperform when it counts the most?	F
Do you stop and start a lot when you get nervous?	F

Warming Up	If yes, try method...
Do you have a history of percussion related injuries?	A
Does it take you a long time to feel warmed up?	A
Do you experience a lot of stiffness in your hands and wrists?	A
Are you a beginner or intermediate level player?	B
Do you struggle with consistency?	B, C
Could your technique use some improvement?	B
Are you unable to execute certain technical passages in your current repertoire?	B, C, D
Is your practice time limited?	C, D, H
Do you have a hard time transitioning from your daily activities to practice mode?	E, F
Do you dislike warming-up?	D, E, F, G, H
Do you enjoy music theory?	F
Are you interested in composing?	F
Do you have any auditions approaching?	G
Are you in the process of learning a new piece of music?	G, H

Learning New Music	If yes, try method...
Would you classify yourself as an inaccurate player?	A, H
Do you stop and start a lot in the practice room?	A
Are you good at sight-reading?	B
Do you routinely learn pieces incorrectly?	B
Do you experience memory slips on a regular basis?	C, D
Are you a visual learner?	C
Do you routinely get songs 'stuck in your head'?	C
Do you struggle with remembering the chronology of events?	D, E
Do your performances usually start off strong and finish poorly?	F
Do you typically have glaring problem spots leading up to the performance?	G
Do you typically feel unprepared for performances?	G, H
Are you a 'big picture' type of person?	D, H
Do you dread learning a new piece of music?	I
Do technical issues sometimes prohibit you from learning music quickly?	C, I
Do you get frustrated easily?	C, I

Problem Spots	If yes, try method...
Do you often fix problem spots only for them to reoccur during the run through?	A
Are you able to play the problem spot in isolation but not in context?	A
Do your problem spots commonly emerge late in your preparation?	B
Does the problem spot feel physically awkward?	B, C
Do you typically stop and start during your problem spots?	B, F
Do you dislike working on problem spots?	C
Do you get tired of practicing the same problem spots?	C
Have you routinely practiced a problem spots with little success?	C, E, G, H
Are your problem spots typically related to sound quality or beating spots?	D
Is your problem spot due to awkward stickings or shifts?	D
Does the problem spot appear easy but for some reason gives you a lot of trouble?	E
Do transitions give you the most trouble?	F
Are your problem spots inconsistent?	F
Are you playing a piece that uses rubato?	G
Are your problem spots usually tempo related?	G
Do you fear your problem spots in a performance?	H

Memorization – Avoiding Memory Slips	If yes, try method...
Do you typically rely heavily on muscle memory?	A
Do you have a hard time recovering from mistakes?	B, G, H
Do you have a hard time memorizing music?	C, D
Do you have memory slips on a regular basis?	B, C, D, F, G, H
Do you enjoy music theory?	C
Do you create strong emotional ties to particular locations?	D
Do your memory slips usually occur in the same places?	E, F
Do your memory slips typically occur during transitions?	C, E
Do you commonly get lost during repeated phrases or similar passages?	C, E
Do you usually have a memory slip after you start thinking about having a possible memory slip?	F
Do you commonly find yourself thinking random thoughts during performances?	F
Have you had a memory meltdown on stage?	B, G, H
Do you find yourself going on autopilot during performances?	B, F
Do you have memory slips on a regular basis?	B, C, D, F, G, H

Performance Preparation	If yes, try method...
Do you have a hard time recovering from mistakes?	A
Do you have difficulty maintaining stamina and focus during performances?	A
Are you typically prepared weeks in advance?	B
Do your performances sometimes lack expression or excitement?	B
Do you peak early on occasion?	B, E
Do you have bad performance anxiety?	C, F
Do you dread performances?	C, D
Does your performance attire sometimes affect your performances?	D
Does the sound of the performance hall throw you off sometimes?	D
Do you always practice in the same room and on the same instruments?	D
Does your progress typically plateau the few weeks before the performance?	E
Do you have a hard time getting excited for performances?	F
Do you have a hard time getting into performance mode?	D, F
Does your mood generally have a major impact on your performance?	F
Do you have a hard time adjusting to changes in routine?	G