

# Timpani: Technique, Tone, Touch, Tuning

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## SPECIAL THANKS



## Technique

### Highway to the playing zone:

- Setting up the drums: drums positioned to the player's arm length, reach, and size—move the 32" and 23" to accommodate
- Location, Location, Location! Where to hit the drum
- Sitting or Standing?

### The Basics

- **Grip:** How to hold the mallets
  - Thumbs on Top
  - Loose Wrists
  - LIFT
- **The Stroke:** How to hit the drum
  - Strike zone: consistency in stick placement on the head
  - Explode OFF the head→natural rebound
- **The Roll:** Relaxed single strokes without rhythm
- **QUOTE:** "Play uneven to sound even"
  - Weak hand balance
  - Orchestrating your range

### Touch/Tone Production

- Rhythmic Clarity/Articulation
- Mallet Choices
- Play to the Audience
- Roll Speeds

### Tuning

- Lean over, and place your ear over the drum.
- Tap the drum w/finger-be sure your ear is over the tap point!
- Gliss UP to the pitch—if you overshoot, start again!
- Practice your ear training! Match pitch, scales, 4ths, 5ths, triads
- How to creatively cultivate a timpanist: warm ups with the band
- Reference pitches and harmonic context: who should your timpanists listen to in an ensemble?

# Timpani: Touch, Tuning, Technique...and Maintenance

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## Featured solo

*Rock of the 80s* from "Pedal to the Kettle" by Kirk Gay

(Tapspace Publications)



## FROM THE "Timpani Survival Guide" by Evans Heads:

### Maintenance: how to change the heads

- Install a block of wood under the toe of the pedal to keep pedal fixed with the heel down
- Remove the old head by detuning the lugs equally.
- Clean debris or dirt from the counterhoop and drums.
- Clean the bearing edge with #0000 steel wool and a solvent
- Buff clean with a white rag or microfiber cloth
- Lubricate the bearing edge by applying teflon tape or spray
- Mount the new head and finger tighten all lugs to equal tension
- Using the appropriate sequential tuning method, begin with full key-turns on each lug until the drum begins to resonate
- Fine tune each lug using a chromatic tuner or head tension gauge
- Listen for a clear, focused tone through the tuning process
- Tune the drum to the recommended pitch
  - Suggested highest pitch: 32"= A, 29"= D, 26"= F, 23"= A/Bb
  - Pitch range will vary according to brand—but highest pitch should stay the same
- Remove the block of wood under the pedal.

### Mallet Choices and Care

- Purchase the highest quality mallets you can afford
- Cheap mallets will wear quickly, which will adversely affect the tone and longevity of your timpani heads, leaving you with the need to purchase new mallets and new heads.
- Have a minimum of three pairs of mallets on hand (at all times) including staccato, general, and soft mallets. This will ensure that you are prepared with the right 'tools' for all musical situations.
- Avoid handling the felt heads as much as possible; this will only accelerate wear and tear.
- Protect your investment by storing your mallets in a stick bag or stick case. The felt coverings on timpani mallets will sound best and last longer if you provide as much protection for them as possible while they're being stored.

### Instrument Care

- Always listen to the head through all steps of the tuning process. Strive for a clear, focused sound by keeping all lugs in tune
- Develop your "key technique" by monitoring the amount you turn each lug and how it affects pitch
- Developing a good "feel" for tuning will only help the process
- Always use the opposite lug tuning Sequence
- Change heads once a year or when you notice a reduction in resonance and tone

## Quick Tips

- **Protect Your Investment** – Invest in a quality drop cover, hard cover, or ideally both. This will prolong the life expectancy of your heads and prevent damage to the lip of the bowl. **Fingerprints** – Fingerprints will occasionally be transferred to your drum heads while playing and muffling. Over time these prints will affect the resonance and overall tone of your heads. To reduce this, frequently wipe your heads clean with a microfiber cloth to remove fingerprints without scratching the surface of the head. **Be on the Lookout** – Keep a sharp eye for preventative maintenance. Lubricate moving parts at least once a month. Check for loose nuts, bolts, or screws...replacing missing hardware is always more costly than a quick check.
- **Reference Guide:** To make ordering easier, Evans has developed a Timpani Head Reference Chart, which lists many of the known brands of drums for easier selection.  
[www.evansdrumheads.com/timpani](http://www.evansdrumheads.com/timpani)
- **Stick Tray** – Always use a stick tray so that timpani mallets will never be kept on the floor and the player will have easy access to them for quick changes. If a tray is not available, a flat music stand with a black towel placed neatly on top is an acceptable substitute.
- **Balancing Act** – You may notice that the pedal will not hold its position when tuning. The head has naturally stretched below the drum's pitch range and the drum is no longer in balance. Bring the drum back up to its designated pitch to restore normal pedal operation.
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**Jerry Noble** is the Director of Percussion at Wright State University, is currently the Acting Principal Timpanist of the Dayton Philharmonic, performs as a drummer with his pop/jazz group "Moment's Notice," and performs with nationally touring Broadway shows. Previously, he has served in the USAF Band of Flight where he performed over 1,500 concerts with the Concert Band, Jazz Band, Jazz Combo, and Ceremonial Band. Frequently working as a timpanist, Jerry has performed with the Cincinnati Symphony, Rochester Philharmonic, Indianapolis Symphony, Alabama Symphony, Indianapolis Chamber Orchestra, Fort Wayne Philharmonic, Hunan Symphony (China), New Mexico Symphony, and the West Virginia Symphony. He has also recorded, toured China, and played in Carnegie Hall with the Cincinnati Symphony, served as percussion staff with the UC Bearcat Bands, performed as Timpanist/Cast Member of Star of Indiana's "Brass Theater", and toured the Caribbean as a drummer for Princess Cruiseline. Jerry Noble is a performing artist/clinician for Evans, Freer Percussion, Pearl/Adams, and Zildjian.

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