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Yuri Star (friend and advisor): Encourager extraordinaire, thank you!

Introduction

Bucket drumming has come to the elementary music classroom, with the teachers and students getting in on the fun of pounding a pail. Forming a bucket ensemble is easy on the budget while providing a great vehicle for learning rhythms and exploring tone colors. A simple (yet well-played) bucket-drumming piece can be a real crowd-pleaser at a concert.

Many performers have explored the tonal possibilities of this common receptacle, coaxing an array of timbres from the various surfaces to create amazing improvisations and compositions. A simple search of the web will turn up dozens of examples of percussionists and buskers displaying their “found sound” virtuosity.

Give Me a Bucket provides you with a dozen easy-to-learn pieces for bucket ensemble, rehearsal tips, a quick bucket tutorial, and recordings for study and inspiration.

Your students can enjoy both polyphonic ensembles, scored for a few assorted instruments, as well as unison pieces that can be played by any number of performers. When teaching and performing the polyphonic ensembles, you can double (or triple) the parts to add to the fun. The unison pieces have a certain visual appeal, as the audience sees all hands and sticks moving in sync.

Go ahead—set up a few pails, hand your students some sticks, pass out the parts, and let the bucket jam begin.

Instruments

Tenor buckets are the workhorses of the bucket ensembles. These five-gallon plastic pails are the industry-standard, go-to instruments for bucket music. When inverted, the bottom becomes the drumhead and the rim is ready for a crackling rim shot.

The timbre and pitch of the tenor bucket can be manipulated by raising and lowering the opening of the bucket in relationship to the floor. Teaching this technique will provide your students with a great tool for their own improvisation and playing in general. For the open/closed technique, the player sits in a chair behind the instrument and places his feet on the sides of the bucket (at the floor) so that one foot can stabilize the bucket and the other foot can lift and lower the bucket. The following symbols are used in the scores to indicate bucket position:

O = Open position: Play these notes with the bucket opening raised at an angle to the floor.

C = Closed position: Play these notes with the bucket opening resting against the floor.

O-----C = Pitch glide (open to closed): Play the indicated notes starting in the open position and gradually lower the opening (using the foot) to the closed position.

C-----O = Pitch glide (closed to open): Play the indicated notes starting in the closed position and gradually raise the opening (using the foot) to the open position.



If a piece calls for the bucket to remain in open position throughout, place a chunk of foam rubber under the bucket to keep it propped open at an angle. A slab about 8" × 4" × 1¾" should do the trick.



Bass buckets pump out the low-end thump for several of these pieces. The choice for the recordings was a thirty-five-gallon plastic trash can. This size provides sufficient bass frequencies without taking up too much space. Position these instruments horizontally with the playing surface facing toward the audience. Rest the instrument on the floor and have the player sit behind it, or lay the bucket on top of an inexpensive keyboard X-stand so that the musician can stand.

Metal buckets can provide a ringing sustain that contrasts the rather secco sound of the plastic buckets.

A few different sizes were used for the recordings, including a six-gallon bucket, a one-gallon paint bucket, and a #10 (three-quart) can, as well as a bucket lid.

Try combining different sizes for a composite sound. The one-gallon paint bucket can be held between the knees of the seated player,



while the larger metal buckets should rest on the floor. A musician can play two bucket lids like crash cymbals or hold a single lid and strike it with the shoulder of a drumstick.

Note: Remove the handles from all buckets to prevent rattling during performance.

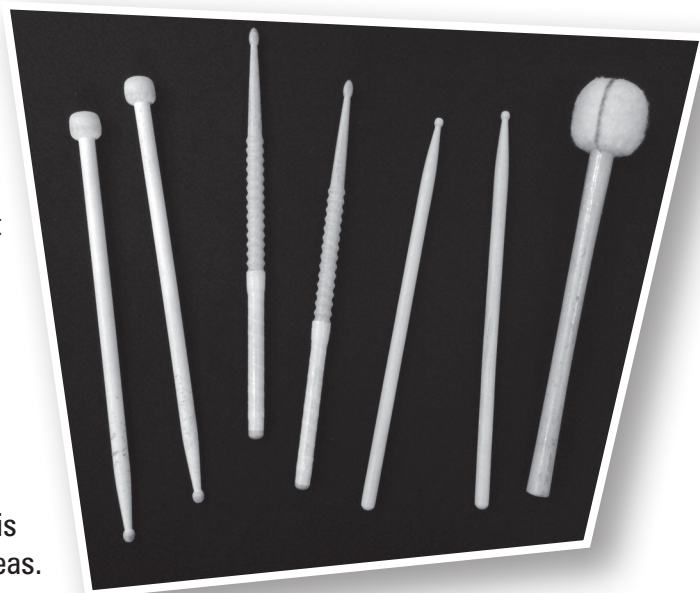
Boomwhackers® share the spotlight with buckets on “Strange Asparagus.” The piece is scored for four tubes: C4, E4, G4, and C5.



Implements

The choice of playing implements is crucial to obtaining the desired tone on any percussion instrument, including buckets. Sticks, mallets, and brushes elicit various timbres and excite different harmonics based on factors such as materials, size, and weight. For the most part, drumsticks will be the implement of choice. When other implements are called for, they will be indicated on the scores. However, these are suggestions; feel free to experiment to find the implement that best serves your musical interpretation.

Drumsticks are the most common implements used in these compositions. Although the bead (tip) of the stick is generally used, percussionists routinely employ other areas. The butt of the stick will draw more lows from a bucket, while the shoulder (the area where the drumstick tapers toward the bead) works well for playing on the side of a bucket. Suitable stick sizes for buckets (and elementary-size hands) are 5A and 2B.



Bundled rods are sold under various names such as Acousticks™, Bundlz™, and Blasticks™. Several wooden or synthetic dowels are bound together in the handle area and are used to produce a sound that has characteristics of a wire brush tone but with a more definite attack. You could use Dreadlocks™, which have braided wire instead of dowels, to create a similar effect.

Fluted sticks have a ridged area over a portion of the surface. These can be scraped over the rim of a bucket for a guiro or washboard effect. If your rhythm sticks are ridged (so you can scrape them, similar to a guiro), you'll be all set.

Felt tenor mallets have less attack compared with a drumstick. The larger mallet head can bring out lower frequencies, thus producing a more mellow tone than a standard stick. This type of mallet is frequently used on multi-tenors in marching percussion.

Bass drum mallets excite the fundamental and bring out the bass frequencies on the low buckets. A medium-hardness felt beater with a medium to large head will provide both attack and the desired bass response.

Movements

In some of the scores, there are suggested movements (stick moves, head turns, etc.). These are starters. Students can use their creativity and cook up some "optic elements" of their own. Make sure that the buckets are positioned onstage so that the audience can see the choreography clearly. Using bright yellow or orange tape on the sticks and wearing black shirts can make certain visual elements pop even more.

THAT GUY NEXT TO ME

The simple rhythms of this unison piece allow the students to concentrate on the sticking patterns which contribute to the visual appeal during performance. Audience members will enjoy watching the coordinated movements as the performers shift in sync from bucket to bucket.

CD 1

GEAR

- Five-gallon plastic buckets
- Drumsticks

Teaching and Performance Tips

- Observe the stickings carefully. These are essential to the sound and look of the piece. Using these patterns will facilitate the bucket-to-bucket movement that is important to the visual aspect of the performance. If no sticking is given, students should play the part using alternating strokes, with the right hand starting each measure.
- Musicians should play the rims in the 11:00 to 1:00 area of the heads so that the audience can see the path of the sticks. In the score, RN indicates a strike on the neighboring bucket to the player's right, while LN indicates a strike on the instrument to the player's left. All notes without these markings are to be played on the player's own bucket.
- Watch the pattern carefully at measures 13–15. Beat 3 should be played on the player's own bucket. This is perhaps the most challenging section, but the visual and sonic aspects are worth the effort.
- The bucket should be played throughout in the open position to allow the low frequencies to resonate.
- While the recording maintains a constant tempo, an accelerando over the last seven bars can be quite effective.
- Seating the players in a straight line across the performance area will allow the audience to see all the visual aspects.
- Consider having the players turn their heads to follow their hand movements as the sticks travel from bucket to bucket. The unison head movement creates another layer of visual interest for the audience.
- To heighten the effect of the stick movements, have the performers wear black shirts and wrap their drumsticks with bright yellow or orange tape.

THAT GUY NEXT TO ME

1

Tenor Bucket

$\text{♩} = 138 \text{ or faster}$

Stick Click
Rim
Head

4

f

R R R L R L L L R L R L R L

4

SC R H

RN RN RN LN LN LN

R L R L R R R L R L L L R L

7

SC R H

RN LN

R L R L R L R L R

mf

10

SC R H

p

13

SC R H

RN LN RN LN RN LN

mf *p* *mf*

16

SC R H

f *f* *p*

R R R L R L L L R L

8