The 2011 MTSU Band of Blue Front Ensemble

Welcome / Information / Technique / Exercises

Welcome
Thank you for your interest in becoming a member of The 2011 MTSU Band of Blue Front Ensemble! You are taking the first step in becoming a member of the nationally recognized MTSU Band of Blue and MTSU percussion program. Please read through this packet and familiarize yourself its contents.

We have many positions available in the Band of Blue Front Ensemble. They include...

- Glock (1–2 Players)
- Xylo (2 Players)
- Vibes (2 Players)
- Marimba (3–5 Players)
- Rack Percussion (1 Player)
- Congas / Ethnic Percussion (1 Player)
- Electric Bass (1 Player)
- Electric Guitar (1–2 Players)
- Synth (1 Player)

Throughout the audition process you will primarily be evaluated in a group setting. The need for individual auditions will be considered on a case by case basis. Here are a few helpful bits of advice about your audition...

- Your achievement will be directly related to how much individual preparation you put in beforehand. Show up prepared with all music in this packet.
- Record yourself (audio and/or video) and see what you can improve on your own. You are your own best teacher!
- Use a metronome for 90% of your practicing.
- Memorization is not required, but would be highly advantageous.
- Be sure to contact us with any questions you have. There are no stupid questions. We are all here to help!
Keep an open mind. The technique we use may be different from what you already know. There are many correct ways to do something. What we use is what we have found to work best for us.

Stay positive. A great attitude goes a long way.

Front Ensemble Staff

Craig Cornish, Associate Director of Bands / Director of Athletic Bands
ccornish@mtsu.edu

Lalo Davila, Director of Percussion Studies
gdavila@mtsu.edu

Julie Davila, Director of Marching Percussion
sistajules@comcast.net

Required Materials Checklist

✓ Binder with View Cover

✓ Non-Glare Page Protectors

✓ Mechanical Pencils with refill lead

✓ Pencil Pouch

✓ Your own water bottle – Do not share!

✓ Hat / Sunglasses / Sun block, etc.
✓ **Band Aids** – Keyboard players will need these to protect blisters on their hands.

✓ **Metronome** – Any BOSS Product is recommended – DB12 / DB30 / DB60 / DB90.

✓ **Appropriate Rehearsal Attire** – Clothing that allows for free movement should be worn. We move heavy instruments and equipment. Sneakers or other fully covering footwear are required. NO FLIP FLOPS!

✓ **Earplugs** – “Measurements taken by Joseph Keefe, a 2004 graduate of Duke University in Durham, N.C., who was a drummer in the marching band there, show that band members were exposed to sound levels of more than 100 decibels (120 decibels is considered the threshold of pain) for hours at a stretch. At that intensity, unprotected ears can be damaged in just 15 minutes, according to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health. Now, at Duke, earplugs are mandatory for percussionists and optional for others…”

Source: USA TODAY 10/17/07 “Marching band — a threat to hearing?” by Joyce Cohen

✓ **A POSITIVE ATTITUDE!**
Front Ensemble Expectations

- **Professionalism / Public Perception**

We are always being judged by people, from professors to community members, as well as school staff and our peers. Even custodial staff! Our actions on and off the field represent all MTSU Band of Blue and Front Ensemble members of the past, present, and the future.

- **Pre Rehearsal Setup**

Rehearsals begin at the scheduled time. That means setup occurs before the scheduled start time. We have A LOT of set up to do, and we start before rehearsal to minimize the amount of rehearsal time lost. Once you finish your setup, help someone else until everything is done. Everyone is required to help at all times. Laziness is unacceptable.

- **Minimize Talking & Playing (Read: Hacking) During Rehearsal**

Great groups typically share one common factor – they have great rehearsal etiquette. We like to have enjoyable and productive rehearsals, and we all must do our part to achieve that. When you are not being worked with, remain patient, quiet, and pay attention to what is going on. You can learn a lot by listening to information others are receiving.

- **Setting The Standard**

When we are in ensemble rehearsal, we need to set the rehearsal standard for the rest of the marching band. Even when we as a section are not being worked with, which often happens with the front ensemble, we still need to be focused so that we do not distract everyone else and so we know what is going on with the rehearsal. Keep in mind that our talking and hacking during ensemble is most noticed because of our proximity to the box, as well as the fact that we have microphones all over the place!
• If You Don’t Get It The First Time, Ask!

We have to understand instructions so that we can maximize our rehearsal time and give the staff and leaders an accurate feel for where the group stands. We don’t want to be judged poorly by staff because we didn’t know what was going on! For example, if you aren’t sure what the rehearsal segment is, do not guess, ask for clarification!

• Instrument / Equipment Care and Respect

The MTSU Band of Blue Front Ensemble is unbelievably fortunate to have so much support from our directors, administrators, and corporate sponsors. Most college marching bands do not have front ensembles. You will see that we are literally the country club of college front ensembles. We take great care of our equipment. Use caution when transporting instruments. The pedals should always be lifted on vibes when moving or adjusting the height! Use the mallet bags and respect the mallets and other equipment including cymbals. We will bring tarps with us when rain is forecasted. If anything gets wet, dry it off immediately and completely!

• Tear Down Responsibilities

At the end of rehearsal, all equipment will be transported back to its assigned storage area. We need to keep our area of the band room looking nice. Everything has a home. If you are not sure where something goes, ask! No one should leave until everything has been put away. Once you finish, help someone else. We will always meet as a section before we leave.

• Your Music Binder

Your music, this packet, and any other handouts you get throughout the season go in your binder in sheet protectors. Bring this binder to every rehearsal. Make sure pencils are in your pencil pouch. We write often! Even once music is memorized, you still need to bring your binder to rehearsal. There will be times we need to reference something or recheck that crazy lick, etc.

• Bathroom, Water, and Well-being
Ample breaks will be provided. DO NOT SHARE WATER! THIS IS HOW PLAGUE SPREADS! Try to use the restrooms during breaks. If you need to leave, simply tell someone and return quickly. Believe it or not, playing in the front ensemble can take a physical toll on us, particularly with our hands. Also, standing still is not always comfortable either. We will stretch prior to warming up and you should periodically stretch on your own. Take care of yourself with proper protection from the sun including sun block, hats, sunglasses, etc., and always stay hydrated!

- **Leave The Rehearsal Site Better than we found it**
  The MTSU Band of Blue and The MTSU Band of Blue Front Ensemble are class acts both on and off the field. At MTSU or elsewhere, our rehearsal sites are a privilege, not a right. Wherever we are, we will always leave our rehearsal sites in better condition than how we found them. Everyone helps to pick up trash when needed.

- **Have A Great Time Creating Awesome Music**
  Hang out together. Go bowling. Eat lunch. Take a trip to the zoo. No doubt - in your instructors’ experiences, a front ensemble that chills outside of rehearsal and knows each other always ends up performing better together.

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**Keyboard Basics**

- **Posture**
  Great posture is a key quality of a good front ensemble member. It is one of the few ways of non-verbally telling the audience that you are confident and
know what is going on. Poor posture displays exactly the opposite. Great posture allows you to fully use all of your muscles for exceptional mallet technique. Great posture is quite simple...stand up straight!

❖ **Muscle Groups**

We use two types of muscle groups when playing mallet percussion. The first is the small muscle group, which is made up of the wrists, fingers, and forearms. We also have the large muscle group, which is made up of the shoulders, legs, and torso. There should be no tension anywhere in your body. Tension is bad. Relax!

❖ **Stance**

Most people have a tendency to stand way too close to the keyboard, causing their arms to take an unnatural position. We never want to crowd the instrument. Your feet should be at shoulders width. We should try to keep our body centered within the range of the passage we are performing. For example, if you are playing a two octave F Major scale, center your body in front of the “middle” F you are playing. This will help us to avoid “walking” up the marimba as we play and instead help us to shift our weight while staying in the same place.

❖ **Foot Shifts**

Sometimes we will need to employ foot shifts when we move from one end of the instrument to another, or when 4 mallet chords are played with notes on both manuals of the keyboard. Taking a step back or forward with a foot can put us in a better, more comfortable / less awkward position to play the chord. The large muscle group always moves first, followed by the small muscle group. In other words, the legs lead the motion, and the wrists, fingers, and forearms follow.

❖ **Wrist Motion**
There are two types of wrist motion in mallet percussion. A **break** is a straight up and down motion of the wrist (knocking on a door,) which is what we will use in our two mallet playing. We also use a break in four mallet playing for double vertical and single alternating stroke. A **rotation** is a twisting motion of the forearm, which rotates the wrist (twisting a doorknob.) Rotation is used in four mallet playing to perform single independent strokes, and also is used in traditional grip snare drum playing.

- **Stroke Types**

In percussion, there are four basic types of strokes.

**The Piston Stroke (aka Rebound or Full Stroke)** is the most often used stroke in the front ensemble, as it efficiently produces the sounds we need. This stroke is like dribbling a basketball. We start at a given height, strike the bar, and return to that same height all in one fluid motion. This helps us to prepare for the next note/chord. Velocity is important in the Piston Stroke. We produce the Piston Stroke primarily with the wrist, using the forearm to add a bit of height and flow. 90% wrist and 10% arm.

**Down Strokes and Up Strokes** help us create dynamic changes and accent patterns. We cannot do them without these strokes. For a Down Stroke, we start at a given height and stop the mallet at the height and dynamic designated for the next stroke. For an Up Stroke, we start where we stopped a Down Stroke and return to a given height.

**A Tap Stroke** is a soft, relaxed wrist stroke, usually played at around 2–4 inches in height. Generally we use tap strokes in between accents.

- **Beating Spots**

We always try to strike right in the center of the bar. This allows us to achieve the fullest sound possible out of the keyboards. Sometimes for fast passages or four mallet shifts we will we play on the very edge of the accidentals. When playing on the edge of the bar, think of the mallet head being half on the key and half not.
❖ **Mallet Alignment**

Make sure that the mallet heads stay right next to each other at all times, not one in front of the other (left over right, like we would play indoors), except on rolls.

❖ **Articulation**

There are three types of articulation that you need to become familiar with.

**Legato** strokes sound smooth and connected.

**Staccato** strokes sound short and detached.

**Marcato** strokes are basically halfway between Legato and Staccato.

Dampening a cymbal, muffling a timpani head, and using the vibraphone pedal to create a very connected melodic line, etc. are just some of the ways that percussionists can control articulation.

❖ **Velocity**

This is the speed at which the mallet moves towards the bar. The faster the mallet moves towards the bar, the more staccato the sound produced will be. The slower the mallet moves towards the bar, the more legato the sound will be.

**Two Mallet Grip**

The grip we use for two mallets is similar to the matched grip used in snare drumming. We discuss front fulcrum and back fulcrum scenarios.

All performers should strive for a **natural, relatively tension free technique.**
Find the natural, relaxed hand position.

Without mallets in your hands, drop your arms by your sides and let them hang naturally. Notice that your hand is naturally kind of open. Now, without changing anything else, hinge upward at your elbow to bring the forearm and wrist into playing position. Your hand should still be somewhat open just as it was before! If you close your hand and lose that open space, you will have more of a closed fist which creates tension!

Place the mallet in the hand.

Continuing from the playing position, position your hands palm up, slanted in at an angle. Lay the mallet down across the hand, entering the top of the hand at the first knuckle from the top of the index finger, and leaving the hand just below the pinky. About an inch and a half of the mallet should extend out of the bottom of the hand.

Now the fingers.....

Now, wrap the pinky, ring, and middle fingers around the mallet. These three fingers should follow the natural motion of the mallet and stay in contact with the shaft. When the mallet is in motion there can be disconnect of the mallet to palm, but not disconnect from the fingers to the mallet. Now, turn the hand inward so that our palms are flat.
Put the thumb and index finger in place.

Next, lightly place the thumb on one side of the mallet and the index finger on the other side. The index finger will have a natural curl to it. They will form a “T.” You should be able to put a bolt through your thumb, the mallet, and the index finger. The thumb and index finger are critical in controlling the mallet. It is very important that they lightly remain in place, keeping the “T” form.
Four Mallet Grip

The grip we use for four mallets is called The Stevens Grip. It is highly recommend that all members purchase a copy of Method of Movement for Marimba by Leigh Howard Stevens. This is the most thorough method book for four mallet technique in the world. It is known as the marimba bible. Below is an extremely brief breakdown of how to hold the mallets and the most common stroke types we will employ.

Beginning the grip.

Put out your hand as if you are shaking hands. Place the inside mallet on “the lifeline” and in the center of your palm. Bring the tip of the middle finger around the end of the mallet and allow the mallet to rest on the first knuckle of your index finger, or “the perch.” The mallet should be able to balance itself by resting on “the perch” and the end of the mallet resting under the base of the thumb.

Finish forming “the perch.”
Now, place your thumb on top of the mallet the index finger is under. The thumb and index finger form a “T,” and completes “the perch.” You should be able to put a bolt in between your thumb, mallet, and index finger.

The outside mallet.

Position the outside mallet on the 2nd knuckle from the top of your pinky and index finger. This securely forms the “Power V.” No more than half an inch of the end of the mallet should extend out.

Front Ensembles have evolved tremendously in
Practice Suggestions

- **Set Goals**

  Becoming goal oriented will help you achieve more. **Set short term and long term** goals for what you want to accomplish. A short term goal would be what you want to accomplish during one practice session. A long term goal could be for a week, a month, or an even longer period of time. If you have your goals set before you go to practice, then your **practice sessions can yield better results**. Set realistic goals!

- **Practice with a Metronome**

  Often times, slow tempos can be equally as challenging as blazing fast tempos! We should use a metronome for about 90% of our practicing.
Floor Exercises

You can do most of your technique practicing on the floor. This is especially helpful because access to the mallet percussion instruments is often limited. You can work on two mallets, as well as four-mallet issues such as shifting, stroke types, permutations, and interval changes. If the floor itself is too loud for people around you, you can play on pillows or blankets. Not only will this be a quiet alternative, but it will help you to build even more chops!

Snare Practice Pad

Most of all, you can get out a pad and sticks and just “chop out”. As just one example, we often find “Green” to be very difficult at fast tempos. If we played “Green” on a snare drum, all we are doing is a single stroke roll. When we play “Green” on a keyboard, we are just doing a single stroke roll and moving the hands up and down a scale. Work on your singles on a pad and then play “Green.” After some time you will be amazed at how much faster you can play it. A proficient keyboard player with a “drummer’s instinct” is a wonderfully rare thing. Attain It!!

MTSU BoB 2 Mallet Exercises

“Blue Team 8’s” / Basic Piston Stroke
Start this slow at 60bpm and work your way up from there. Goal = 135bpm. Work on getting a great piston stroke. All right hand in the first two measures and all left hand in the last two measures with a right hand release on the final note. Play in all Major and Natural Minor Keys.

“Lightning 78” / Octave Scales
Start this slow at 60bpm and work your way up from there. Goal = 135bpm. Play in all Major and Natural Minor Keys.

“Pop Rocks” / Green
Start this slow (60bpm) and work your way up from there. Goal = 140bpm. Play in all Major and Natural Minor Keys. Play with a right hand lead.

Blue Raider Octaves - We will not move this exercise around to other keys.
Crazy Chromatics - Use RLRL sticking throughout.

MTSU BoB 4 Mallet Exercises
Below you will find Broccoli Chords. Using these chords, you should be comfortable playing all of the following block chords, combinations, and permutation variations.

**Block Chords:**
As written

**Combinations:**
13/24 (1&3 and 2&4)  24/13 (2&4 and 1&3)
Ins & Outs (2&3 and 1&4)  Outs & Ins (1&4 and 2&3)

**Permutations:**
Luggage (1234)  Reversed Luggage (4321)
2341  1432
3412  2143
4123  3214
1324  4231
3241  1423

**Broccoli Chords**

*Broccoli* is a permutation exercise which has been popularized by Music City Mystique, The Bluecoats, and The Cavaliers. Below is not the exercise itself but rather the chords of it.