TIMPANI TECHNIQUE: AMERICAN GRIP

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I. GRIP
   A. The mallets are held much like the matched grip for snare drum with one essential difference: the hands are held in a thumbs-up position with the palms facing each other rather than down.
   B. The fulcrum is between the pad of the thumb and middle section of the index finger.
   C. The tip of the index finger curls around the shaft.
   D. The thumb is be almost parallel to the shaft; it usually is 10 to 15 degrees off of parallel.
   E. The remaining fingers curl around the shaft but do not completely encircle the shaft.
   F. The hand should be positioned near the end of the shaft depending on the length of the mallet; this positioning will permit using the weight of the mallet and achieve the correct balance for the design of the mallet.

II. STANCE
   A. Standing Position
      1. Feet are kept a comfortable distance apart so as to maintain your balance while using the pedals and moving between drums.
      2. Keep your energy centered; shoulders, upper back and arms must stay relaxed.
      3. The knees are bent slightly. Keep the upper body straight; do not lean forward.
      4. Depending upon the height of the player, bend elbows to the necessary degree so hands are positioned 2 - 4 inches above the timpani heads.
      5. Position the drums so the mallets will strike the heads in the ideal place with virtually no straightening of the elbows; do not reach for the drums.
      6. Body and music stand are centered between the 2 middle drums.
   B. Sitting Position
      1. Sitting is acceptable and even desirable when there are many tuning changes or the timpanist is tall.
      2. The height of the stool is such that feet rest comfortably on the floor and pedals.
      3. Hands are positioned 2 - 4 inches above the timpani heads.

III. PLAYING AREA
   A. The best sound is characterized by a prominent fundamental pitch which is deep and full.
   B. The exact playing area will vary with each size drum and the head tension; it will be approximately 1/4 to 1/3 of the length of the radius in from the edge of each timpano head.

IV. BASIC STROKES (LEGATO)
   A. Mallet movement is initiated in various ways; it is determined by the desired dynamic.
   B. In all legato strokes the mallet head should contact the timpano head for as little time as possible.
   C. Begin and end each stroke with the mallet in an up position.
   D. Let the weight of the mallet head draw as full a sound as possible from the timpano head.
   E. All movement should be relaxed and smooth with an emphasis on drawing the sound out of the drum head.
   F. Stroke height is directly related to dynamics but not to the degree that is true of snare drum playing.
   G. Soft dynamics: the stroke is made by pushing the shaft of the mallet with the back fingers; permit the mallet to rebound naturally off the drum head.
   H. Medium soft dynamics: use a rocking motion in the fulcrum in combination with the finger movement described above; the fulcrum rocking comes into play more on the up part of the stroke.
I. **Medium loud dynamics:** use the wrist as an equal partner with the back fingers and fulcrum in initiating mallet movement and picking the mallet off of the drum head.

J. **Loud dynamics:** the forearm rotates outward in combination with the wrist to make the stroke; the back fingers and fulcrum are still moving but to a lesser degree. It is important to have as little contact time as possible between the mallet head and drum head.

V. **STACCATO STROKES**
   A. Mallet movement is initiated through both fulcrum and wrist movement.
   B. The emphasis of this stroke is downward.
   C. As the mallet head approaches the timpano head the back three fingers should snap or squeeze the shaft against the palm.
   D. The mallet head should "sting" the timpano head in a downward motion and will remain very close to the drum head until the back fingers open in preparation for the next stroke.
   E. Generally, staccato strokes are shorter and snappier than legato strokes.
   F. Staccato strokes are most often used for quick, rapid notes.

VI. **MOVEMENT BETWEEN DRUMS**
   A. The lateral movement between drums should be smooth and uninterrupted without any up and down movement of the arms.
   B. When possible, limit the lateral movement of the arms to pivoting from the shoulder to accommodate reaching a drum which is not directly in front of you.
   C. When necessary, (usually in 3 and 4 drum playing), turn the upper body from the waist; take advantage of your bent knees to assist quick rotation of the upper body without changing the position of your feet.
   D. Arches made with the mallets and wrists will facilitate efficient and consistent movement between drums; keep the thumbs up at all times. Arches will also aid in very fast playing.
   E. Be sure to always use a straight up and down stroke to achieve the cleanest and best sound; do not glance the drum head when moving between drums.

VII. **TUNING**
   A. There are three ways of setting the head in motion to check its pitch:
      1. Strike it lightly with a mallet.
      2. Pluck the head lightly with a fingertip.
      3. Put your mouth very close to the drum head and hum the pitch into the drum. When the drum is in tune it will "sing" the pitch back to you.
   B. Whichever method is used, always approach each pitch from below. The pedal should be moved from below the desired pitch up to the desired pitch while the head is still ringing, strike each head only once during the tuning process.
   C. Always tune the lowest pitch first using a tuning fork; tune all other drums off of the lowest drum. Be sure to check your tuning by listening to the ensemble.
   D. When tuning, be sure to listen to the intonation of the drum immediately after it is struck, not as it continues ringing. The pitch of the drum generally seems to go sharp as the drum rings.
   E. The tuning of the drums will change slightly as you play them; it is the timpanist's responsibility to continually fine tune.
   F. Tuning gauges can be helpful devices when many tuning changes occur within a piece or movement.