

FREQUENTLY ASKED MALLET INSTRUMENT QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

by Arthur Lipner

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VIBRAPHONE

Q: Does the position of the fans affect the sound?

A: TOTALLY. Your own experimentation in a quiet room will prove it. Closed fans block the resonance (less fundamental) and give a more percussive sound, reflecting the mallet attack. Open fans yield a deeper tone from more fundamental, but less mallet sound. I recommend opening the fans about 2/3 of the way to balance these factors.

My vibes are broken...

Q: I'm missing the belt. Do I need it?

A: YES. Even if you don't use the motor, it keeps the resonators in a fixed position. For Musser belts contact, MalletWorks Music, www.malletworks.com. (203) 762-8083. For other brands try Steve Weiss Music tel (215) 659-0100.

Q: The cord supporting the notes is really loose. Does this matter?

A: YES. The bars are sitting unsuspending. Maximum resonance is achieved when they are properly suspended above the resonators. Go to the hardware store and buy four springs, about a buck each. Tie one on each of the four ends and make it pretty tight. Check it again in a few weeks; the cord probably will have stretched a bit.

Q: The cord is shot. Can I use the cord-du-jour from my kitchen drawer?

A: NO. It will stretch too easily or shred from the tension. Proper cord will last longer and save you headaches. About \$15 to re-string an instrument, call Steve Weiss Music (215) 659-0100.

Q: The motor has never worked as long as I can remember. Do I need it?

A: Not really. The motor is called for as an effect in some music. And it was popular in the roots music of the instrument - the Lionel Hampton and Milt Jackson era of jazz vibes. Repairing or replacing the motors is usually expensive, or at least a big headache. If you want to pursue it, check with your dealers or the manufacturer of the instrument and see what they recommend. Sometimes they will take them back for repair. But hope you're not in a hurry for its return...

Q: The pedal is not attached. And it always flops off when it does get attached. What to do?

A: Fix it. Maybe it isn't on right; some models can easily be assembled in reverse. If screws or nuts are missing, go to the hardware store. A vibe without a pedal is like a giraffe without a neck.

Q: The bars are in bad shape - pitted, scratched, scraped. What to do?

A: If they sound ok, you're ok. Bars can be reconditioned and replaced, but chances are it isn't worth it because the rest of the instrument likely has similar wear.

Q: I think the brakes are broken. I can tell because it moves across the room when pedaled.

A: A moving target is not suitable for instrumental music. Get some new wheels with brakes at the hardware store and put those babies on.

Q: We have a vibraphone with small bars. It almost sounds like a toy. Can I use it?

A: In order to stimulate the students, the instrument has to sound decent so they can feel the music coming from it. If it sounds like a toy, here is a great way to make some extra space in the storage room and a few extra \$'s: get rid of it.

Q: Do the vibes need maintenance?

A: YES. Clean the bars with light soapy water (or diluted Fantastik) when needed (a couple of times per year). Oil the moving parts (anywhere metal meets metal) every couple of months. These include: the pedal points above and below the instrument, the hook or meeting point of the pedal pole connectors and damper bar, and any resonator and motor moving parts.

Q: Someone before me at my job did some creative welding and now it's really strange looking.

A: Great, paint it yellow and submit it in a photo contest. If it sounds ok, it doesn't matter.

Q: We don't have a vibe. Our bunny-gutting contest does ok; how many wabbits do we have to carve to get one?

A: You'll need \$1,000 for something used and decent. \$2500-\$3500 for the real deal. Occasionally things come on at ebay or check malletshop.com.

Q: What's your recommendation for a good set of vibes?

A: Musser makes the best. Their 3-octave Pro model, and the less-expensive One Nighter, are the way to go. Silver bars sound the same as gold so save the extra few hundred bucks.

MARIMBA

Q: String is shot - see VIBES section.

Q: Brakes don't work - see VIBES section.

Q: Can bars be out of tune? One of them sure sounds like it.

A: Absolutely. Single bars can be removed and sent way for turning. Try Fall Creek Marimbas, www.marimbas.com. It's not too expensive and they usually come back fairly quickly. They also replace cracked bars.

Q: Can I use the Marching Instruments in a Concert Setting? A: Absolutely.

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A: Your decision. But don't get the wood and metal bars wet. And figure on getting little mileage out of the wheels and frames. They are not made for trips in the outback.

Q: Does the marimba need maintenance?

A: A little light furniture oil on the bars once per year is fine. And clean off the dust occasionally so it doesn't get embarrassed when it meets other marimbas.

Q: We have a Concert Marimba, but because of where it is, my students can only practice on a Xylophone. Is that ok?

A: Yes. Part of the percussionist's gig is playing keyboard instruments which are different sizes.

But if it's a performance piece, give the student a decent shot at excellence by finding a way for him/her to practice on the instrument being used for performance.

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A R T H U R L I P N E R D I S C O G R A P H Y

- 2004 Arthur Lipner "Street Vibe" ...*Jazzheads Records*
2003 WaterWorks (World Premiere, comp. Chris Brubeck)... *Wilton Library Assoc.*
Sticks To Latin Percussion Ensemble Series...*MalletWorks Media*
From Lead Sheets To Hip Solos...*Carl Fischer Educational Publications*
2002 Nelson Faria "Nelson Faria"...*Nossa Music (Brazil)*
2001 Sunny Ledford Band*MCA Records*
Caribbean Steel Drums (*producer*) ...*BMC Records*
Music For People - David Darling/Glen Velez/Arthur Lipner/Others Live... *MFP*
2000 Jazz Mallets: IN SESSION...*Rowloff Educational Productions*
1999 Ze Luis "Guarachi Banana"...*Melandro Brazilian Jazz*
"Vibes Works by MalletWorks" by Arthur Lipner...*MalletWorks Media*
1998 Arthur Lipner "Portraits In World Jazz" ...*Jazzheads Records*
"Mallet Works by MalletWorks" ...*MalletWorks Media*
1995 Amy Gallatin "Sweet Gatherings"...*Appy Records*
1994 Arthur Lipner "The Magic Continues"...*Palmetto Records*
1993 Jack DeSalvo/Arthur Lipner Duo "Liquide Stones"...*ENJA-Tutu (GERMANY)*
Glenn Medeiros Christmas...*Amherst Records*
1992 Arthur Lipner "In Any Language"...*JVC Records (JAPAN)*
1991 Arthur Lipner "In Any Language"... *Tall Tree/Palo Alto*
1990 Sal Salvador Quartet
1987 Brian Torff "Hitchhiker of Karoo" ...*Optimism Records*
1983 "Heads Up" w/ Dennis Gonzalez...*daagnim Records*

AND...Tv shows Sesame Street, Bill Cosby's It's A Different World, Designing Women, tv/radio spots for AT&T, Bell Atlantic, Shell, GE "Wind Energy" currently airing, Pepsi, Lime-Away, others...

P U B L I C A T I O N S

TEXT/METHOD BOOKS

- (2003) From Lead Sheets To Hip Solos - *C, Bb, Eb, Tenor, Bass each w/ play-along cd (Carl Fischer)*
(2000) Jazz Mallets: IN SESSION *for Vibes and Marimba w/ play-along cd (Rowloff Productions)*
(1995) The Vibes Real Book *method for two-and four-mallet soloing/performance (MalletWorks Music)*

PUBLISHED COMPOSITIONS

- (2003) Lime Juice *Solo Marimba (MalletWorks Music)*
(2003) Some Uptown Hip-Hop *Solo Marimba (MalletWorks Music)*
(2003) Hybridisation (*Lipner/Wendelboe*) Concerto for Wind Ensemble (*MalletWorks Music*)
(2002) Hybridisation (*Lipner/Wendelboe*) Concerto for Chamber Orchestra (*MalletWorks Music*)
(2000) Sweet Rio *for Percussion Ensemble (Rowloff Productions)*
(1999) Four Studies for Sight Reading (*MalletWorks Music*)
(1997) Lime Juice *for Drumline, arr. Jeff Moore (MalletWorks Music)*
(1996) 24 Jam *for Big Band, arr. Bob Mintzer (MalletWorks Music)*
(1996) Cabana En El Sol *for Big Band, arr. Bob Mintzer (MalletWorks Music)*
(1995) Places To Visit *contemporary works for Solo Vibraphone (MalletWorks Music)*
(1995) Crystal Mallet *Solo Vibraphone (MalletWorks Music)*

(1995) Kaleidoscope Solo Vibraphone (MalletWorks Music)

(1995) Pramantha (DeSalvo/arr. Lipner) duo for Vibes and Marimba (MalletWorks Music)

(1995) Space Dancer Vibes/Marimba duo (MalletWorks Music)

(1995) Some Uptown Hip-Hop for Percussion Ensemble (MalletWorks Music)

(1995) City Soca for Percussion Ensemble (MalletWorks Music)

(1995) Lime Juice for Percussion Ensemble (MalletWorks Music)

(1990) Solo Jazz Vibraphone Etudes (Ludwig Music)

++++ over 50 original compositions recorded on various albums...

AND...A dozen articles in "Drum!", "Percussive Notes", "The Instrumentalist" and other magazines...