TIMPANI FUNDAMENTALS

STROKE AND GRIP
These two elements are vital in the development of good technique and tone production.

French Grip: Thumbs are on top of the mallet shaft
German Grip: Similar to snare drum matched grip

Either grip can be used for appropriate situations; one is not “right” or “wrong.” French grip can be more conducive to legato playing, and German can be more conducive for staccato playing. However, you can achieve these styles with both grips.

THE UP STROKE
This term can be misconstrued. You don’t actually “pull” the sound out of the drums, but this can be a helpful mental image. The goal is to achieve a full sound with a minimum of tension. It is important to remember that the mallet will rebound if we “let” it. This is in contrast to the down stroke (where we don’t allow the stick to rebound past a specific point on snare drum) and the piston stroke (where we create an artificial rebound on keyboard instruments). Most of the work is done through the velocity of the stroke.

STROKE DEVELOPMENT
The stroke can be with fingers, wrists, or a combination of wrist, fingers (and arms to some extent).

Legato Strokes
The wrists and fingers propel the mallet, which rebounds freely. Remember that velocity plays an important role. The arm may assist (but not govern) the stroke at louder dynamic levels.

Staccato Strokes
More grip pressure can assist in achieving this stroke. This is similar to a down stroke on snare. The wrists are more in control here (as opposed to the legato stroke).

Roll Strokes
The fingers do most of the work here, assisted by the wrists at louder dynamic levels. Working on each hand individually to develop speed and strength.

BEATING SPOT
The beating spot is located 1/3 of the way from the edge of the bowl to the center of the drum. The size of the drum determines the beating spot. The drums are not equidistant from the player. Especially when one is seated, the distance from the drum is vital to achieving the proper beating spots.

MUFFLING TECHNIQUE

Use the back three fingers on the beating spot; do not use the thumb or index fingers. Muffling is used for duration and articulation. Duration refers to rests, caesuras, and other similar instances. Articulation refers to notes "bleeding" together. The volume and speed determine how much we muffle. The slower and louder we play, the more we can (and should) muffle. The converse is true (faster and softer=less muffling). Muffling should be done as quietly as possible; don't slap at the drums or drag your hands across the head.

STICKING CONCERNS

Alternate whenever possible. Sometimes the passage may require cross sticking or doubling. Cross sticking can sometimes be avoided by shifting. Doubling can cause an unevenness in sound, but may be required to facilitate movement between drums. Doubling between drums can be an effective way to achieve an even sound while facilitating good motion.

ROLLS

Rolls speed is determined by head tension and volume. A tighter head tension requires a faster roll (and vice versa). An extremely loud roll requires a fast hand speed (this may cancel out the head tension rule). One must practice accented rolls, sforzandos, and forte-piano rolls.

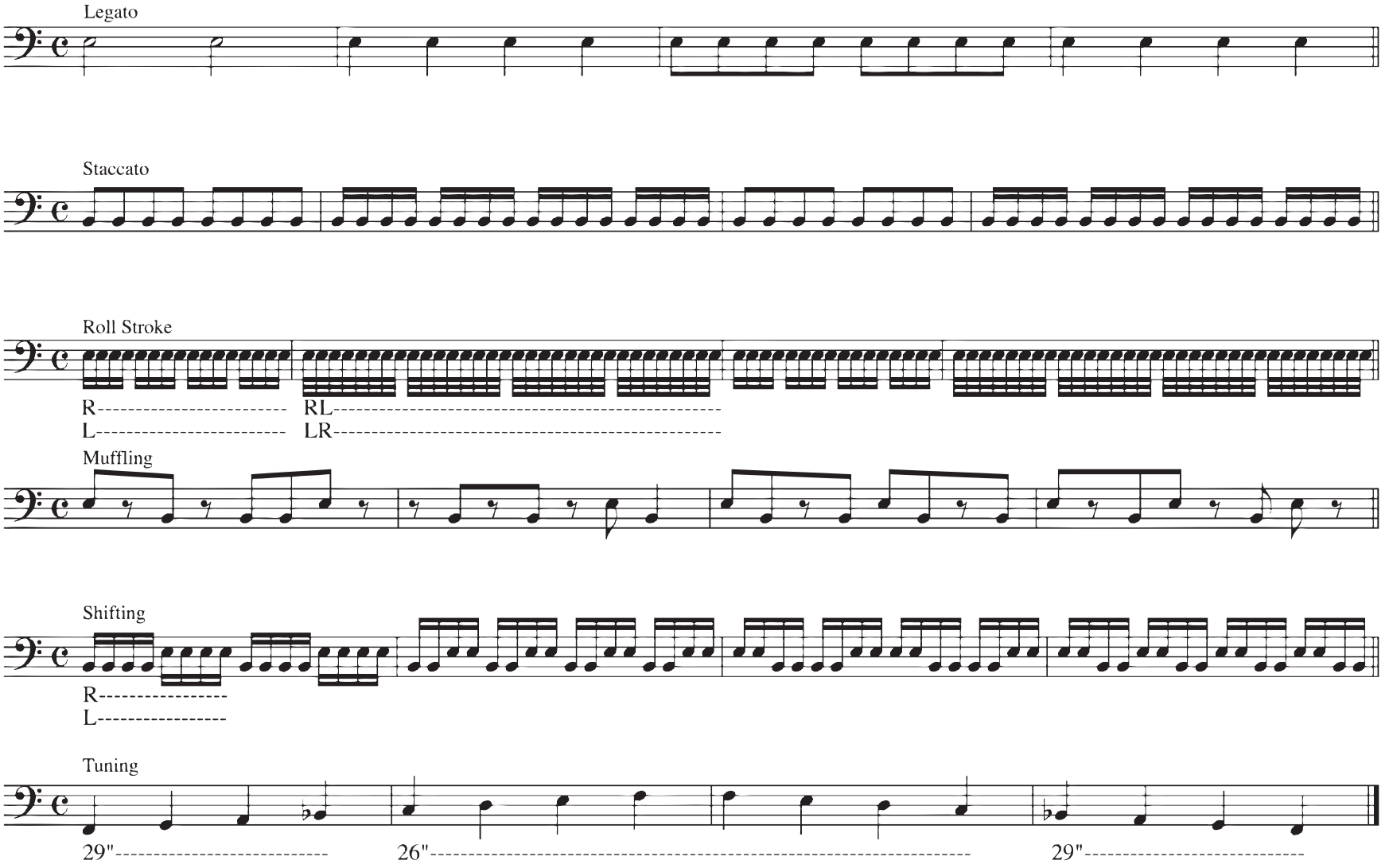
TUNING

Ear training is vital to good performance. The performer must be able to identify intervals. Singing will help develop this ability. Tune up to the pitch whenever possible. Gauges are a good aid, but do not take the place of a good ear. When playing a passage with tuning, one may need to play seated. Many players sit too low, which impedes good technique. A swivel stool is preferable to a wooden one, as this fosters good mobility between drums. Determine the range/tuning scheme for the timpani to assist speed in tuning. One possible range is as follows (top notes):

32" – a	29" – c	26" – f	23" – a	20" – c (middle c)

The effective range of each drum is a perfect fifth, but one can often obtain more notes on each drum (depending on the manufacturer, etc.).

SEATED VERSUS STANDING

The performer must determine when each is appropriate. The amount of tuning may dictate this.

Timpani Fundamentals