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Pacific Crest Cymbal Section Leader



PACIFIC CREST COMPETED IN DCI'S I&E CONTEST THIS YEAR AND FINISHED WITH A 92.00!!

[Who decided to participate in I&E? When was the decision made?](#)

It really wasn't decided by one person, this is the third year Pacific Crest has done an I&E. 2003 was the first year PC made the trip out to finals and the cymbal tech, Jen Swanek, told us about the ensemble competition... we have been hooked ever since!

[Was this something that all involved with the cymbal line collaborated on or was it arranged solely by Jen?](#)

Everyone in the cymbal line helps out. It a huge task to put together a show outside of our normal rehearsal schedule. Without everyone's ideas, it wouldn't be nearly as entertaining or even feasible.

[How is it arranged, or where did the ideas come from? Did you have a basic idea in mind? What was the arranging process like?](#)

We came up with the idea to use some of the rhythms found in the song YYZ by Rush. The 5/4 split pattern at the beginning and some of the hand cymbal fills all go along with rhythms found in the song. Other parts of the show were just some cool beats we could come up with. The whole process of arranging is constantly changing. Even on the show day, changes were made to enhance our sound.

[In your piece, were only marching cymbals used? What other types did you use?](#)

We were lucky enough to have a snare player join us for I&E. his job was to utilize the rack. The rack contained splash, china, suspended, and hi-hat cymbals. The hand cymbals were all Sabian HHX Synergy Cymbals, ranging in size from 19" to 21".

During the summer when you're constantly working on show music, is it hard to find to dedicate to working on the ensemble piece? Were there late nights involved or giving up other free time?

Exactly. The one thing you need to make all this happen is time, and there is never enough.

For quads, bass, snare, your hands and arms are playing the drum and your back and shoulders are carrying the drum.
For cymbals, you must use your arms, shoulders, hands, to carry an extreme weight and also play with quality, what types of things do you do to prepare yourself and make yourself able to carry them all summer?

We practice. The more you play, the less the cymbals seem to weight each day. Sometimes it is a good idea to do some weight lifting.

During auditions what types of things do you look for? What makes a person great in or for the cymbals?

The main thing is their attitude. If a person has a desire to do well and put all they've got behind it, there is no stopping them.

There seems to be a constant argument of "cymbals belong in the pit." From your position what makes a marching cymbal line a valuable resource? Why not have the cymbals only in the pit?

There are certain sounds that can only be achieved at a high level of technique. The pit has about a million things they have to do, the overall group benefits by setting aside certain sounds for hand cymbals on the field. The cymbal line on the field focuses on one thing all season:

cymbals. Not only are sounds a factor but also the visual aspect. It can certainly add a lot to the program.

As a section leader, how does your role differ from the other members?

I get asked more questions by the rookies about what to do and help a little with technique, but other than that, everyone is the same. We all put in 110% all season.

What do you feel is the most difficult aspect of being in the cymbal line? During this past season what was most enjoyable to you?

Getting a uniform look and feel. The one thing that is touched upon constantly all season is technique. One of my favorite moments every year is that one rehearsal where everything starts to click. Parts line up, people start to look the same, and the sound produced is crisp.

In what ways is the cymbal line in a drum corps different from a cymbal line of the average high school?

A drum corps practices almost everyday for 3 months, whereas a high school practices maybe 5 days a week during school. High school cymbal lines are the building blocks for some of these kids that eventually move up to a drum corps down the road.

Stick drums (snare, tenors, bass) can use different sticks (brushes, felts) and different kinds of notes (flams, shots, rolls) to create more than just the monotone drum sound. In the cymbal line what can you do to change the texture and what type of sound is heard?

We had all kinds of sizzles and slams. Almost every technique was utilized during the show including some we made up on our own.

Here is a list of sounds Pacific Crest commonly utilizes:

- Small, medium, and flat crash
- Evaluation crash
- Orchestral crash
- Slides
- Sucks

Sizzles
Presses and slams
Pillows
Leads
Chokes
Inward flare

There are more, but not nearly enough room to list them all.

A "roll" on the cymbals, complicated? Advanced?

There are 2 common ways of doing a roll on hand cymbals. The first, and easier of the 2 is to simply put your cymbals together off-centered and make a swirl motion with your hands. The second more difficult way is to hold your cymbals parallel at eye level and line up the edges on one side. Keeping only on area touching at a time, roll your wrists in unison to create a "roll" sound.

A person would like to put together a piece to play for a I&E contest, how would the go about the process?

One of the first things you should do is see what everyone's strengths and weaknesses are. Utilize the strengths and avoid putting people on weaker parts. Create a timeline of events for your show. Will it be fast, slow, or constantly changing? After all that is established, get together and start playing. Perfect practice makes perfect.

When watching lines in the lot there are some cym lines that warm-up (all exercises) with the snares/quads/bass while some lines go off and do their own thing. What do you guys do? Are there benefits to one over the other? (is the cymbal line secretly practicing some cult ritual??)

Pacific Crest cymbals warm up on their own, away from the drumline. It gives us time to stretch, play through some parts, and focus on a few things before we go over and play with the battery.

Cymbal straps:
How do you tie them, and tie them well?
Do go through many sets in a season?

Cymbal straps are tied by making a self-locking knot using 4 pieces of leather. The average cymbal player might go through as many as 5 sets in a season. I commonly go through about 3. When cleaning cymbals, it is always a good idea to remove the straps and pads as to avoid ruining them with cleaner.

Cleaning the cymbals: How/What do you use?

Some cymbal companies make cleaners for their cymbals, but I have always found that water and a light dishwashing liquid is best. On some rare occasions, one might use Wright's silver polish or even Brasso, but neither is recommended.

Is there a point at which the cymbals are absolutely too hot to pick up? Is it something you get used to over time?

If left in the sun for even 2 minutes, they can get really hot. When the sun is out, it is best to set them on top of each other with the top on upside down. Eventually you get used to the heat and it does go away after about a minute of playing.

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