

# **National Society of Steel Band Educators**

## **Commentary on Steel Band and COVID-19**

**July 10, 2020**

### **PREAMBLE**

The National Society of Steel Band Educators joins other arts organizations and professional societies in affirming the role of the performing arts as an essential component of education in the United States. It is imperative that school administrators, at all levels, recognize the value of music education, and work diligently to preserve and promote opportunities for students to participate in music instruction, including ensembles, even in the face of challenges posed by COVID-19.

NSSBE desires to present the steel band educator with ideas for minimizing risk in face-to-face instruction during the COVID-19 pandemic. These recommendations are provided in good faith, and NSSBE assumes no liability to anyone for any loss or damage as a result of the use of these guidelines or reliance on any information provided herein. This document is not meant to circumvent or override guidelines provided by the CDC or by state or local public health departments.

The following reflects what we believe are best practices as of July 15, 2020. We recognize that research on COVID-19 and the novel coronavirus that causes the condition is ongoing; hence new information and recommendations may become apparent at a later date.

### **GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS**

NSSBE concurs with general recommendations that have been broadly disseminated, that encourage best practices to minimize the spread of COVID-19. These recommendations include, but are not limited to:

- Stay at home if you are experiencing symptoms of illness.
- Practice physical distancing.
- Wash hands frequently.
- Avoid touching eyes, nose, and mouth.
- Wear a mask in public.
- Avoid handling other people's equipment (pens, computers, phones, etc.)
- Cover mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing and throw used tissue away immediately.

School administrations should be encouraged to provide hand sanitizing stations at convenient and accessible locations throughout the physical plant, and cleaning/disinfecting products in all classrooms, rehearsal spaces and practice rooms. Those who lead community-based ensembles should consider doing the same. Supplies should be replenished whenever necessary.

### Regarding Masks

Steel pan instruments, and the typical percussion instruments that accompany them (e.g., drumset, congas, etc.), do not require breath to produce tone. As such, it is highly recommended that all steel band members and instructors wear masks during all rehearsals and performances, except in cases where an individual may be provided an accommodation for health reasons.

## **REHEARSAL SPACES**

NSSBE recognizes that steel band educators operate in diverse settings, with wide variability in terms of rehearsal space. For instance, some ensembles have dedicated spaces where equipment can remain set at all times, while others are required to set up and tear down equipment for each rehearsal, as the space is shared among multiple ensembles or academic courses. The following recommendations for rehearsal spaces are generic, and should apply to all situations.

### Ingress/egress

If the rehearsal space has more than one entrance, consider establishing a plan for ingress/egress should be established to accommodate one-way traffic patterns as band members enter and leave.

### Doors

Doors may be propped open at the beginning and end of each rehearsal period, so that band members do not have to touch door handles.

### Instrument configuration

Instruments should be configured to accommodate physical distancing, with instruments at least six feet apart.

We recognize that abiding by distancing recommendations may result in a need to reduce the number of participants in the ensemble, due to space limitations. Further commentary on this situation appears below in the section on **Personnel**.

## **EQUIPMENT**

### Shared versus Personal Equipment

In many if not most situations, steel pan instruments, steel pan stands, drumset & auxiliary percussion, and music stands are owned by the institution/organization, and are therefore shared. Further, some ensembles utilize shared mallets. Special care should be taken to clean and/or sanitize shared equipment prior to or after each rehearsal session.

Cleaning supplies such as sanitizing wipes, towels, and cleaning spray should be provided in the rehearsal space, and replenished as needed.

### Steel Pans & Stands

Steel pans and their stands should be wiped down after each use. Consult your pan tuner and local health officials to determine the best practice for your situation.

### Mallets and Other Implements

Whenever possible, each performer should be assigned or own their own implements (e.g., mallets, drumset sticks) for the duration of the semester or academic year, to avoid sharing hand-held items. In cases where this is not possible or practical, implements should be wiped down after each use. Players should use hand sanitizer after handling shared implements.

### Music Stands

Consider making available a sufficient number of music stands for each instrument in the ensemble, so that music stands do not need to be shared among instrument locations or personnel. Music stands should be wiped down after each use.

### Setting Up/Tearing Down

In some settings, steel band equipment must be set up and torn down for each rehearsal session. In these cases, directors and band leaders should consider the following strategies:

- Assigning personnel to specific instruments for the duration of the semester or academic year. This way, each band member is only responsible for handling their assigned instrument.
- Identifying a limited crew of personnel tasked with setup & teardown. This would minimize the number of people handling the equipment.

In any case, personnel who handle equipment should wash their hands and/or use hand sanitizer immediately afterward.

## **PRINT RESOURCES**

To avoid sharing, individual print resources should be purchased or generated for each individual band member, including:

- assigned repertoire
- exercises and warmups
- method books

In cases where this is not practical, directors or band leaders should explore strategies for electronic displaying or sharing of print resources in the classroom.

## **PERSONNEL**

Physical distancing protocols or room capacity guidelines/mandates may limit the number of personnel who may occupy a rehearsal space during the pandemic. This challenge is one that all ensemble directors – band, choral, orchestral – face. Yet the steel band director or leader will encounter certain situations that are less common among other ensembles:

- Steel band equipment is often owned by the institution, as opposed to being owned or rented by individual members.
- Steel band equipment owned by the institution is housed within the institution's physical plant.
- Some steel pan instruments take up a comparatively large amount of floor space when set up (e.g., guitar pans, bass pans).

In response to constraints stemming from a lack of adequate space for rehearsals in the COVID-19 era, other professional societies have recommended strategies such as outdoor rehearsals, sectional rehearsals (as opposed to meeting the full-size ensemble at once), and supplementing face-to-face instruction with online or virtual activities or assignments. In addition to these, NSSBE offers the following suggestions which may be particular to the steel band idiom:

- In cases where the steel band must rehearse in a space that cannot accommodate the full instrumentarium while maintaining appropriate distancing or room capacity, the size of the instrumentarium could be reduced accordingly, with a concomitant reduction in personnel.
- Personnel could be divided into sub-groups, with each sub-group scheduled on alternating rehearsals.
- Ensembles that operate on an audition-only basis may choose to limit the number of members admitted into the ensemble for the coming semester or academic year.

## A Note on Part Assignments

NSSBE recognizes that steel bands abide by various acceptable practices with regard to making part assignments. A common practice is rotating members either to accommodate a larger number of members than instruments in the program, or to permit players to perform on multiple instrument types during the course of a semester, or other instructional period.

In order to mitigate against the spread of the novel coronavirus, we recommend that directors and band leaders avoid such behavior, and instead opt for part assignments that assign a single player to a single instrument, at least for the duration of a rehearsal, whenever possible.

## **PERFORMANCES**

NSSBE recommends the following practices for steel band performances:

- Maintain appropriate physical distancing between instruments and performers in the performance venue.
- For indoor performances, follow the guidance of local, state and national authorities with regard to house, front of house, and other facility issues and/or practices.
- Performers should wear masks at all times: entering the facility, during the performance, and leaving the facility.
- Consider setup and tear down issues as described above in the Equipment section, and take steps to minimize risk.
- For indoor performances, repertoire should be carefully chosen so as to not create programs that are too lengthy. Shorter programs will minimize the time that performers and audience members spend in the venue.
- Seek expert advice in cases where performances are to be live streamed, recorded, or otherwise shared or archived, so as to ensure compliance with copyright law and privacy concerns.

## **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

Managing COVID-19 Protocols in Administering Percussion Performance Curriculum

Percussive Arts Society COVID-19 Task Force

<https://www.pas.org/docs/default-source/2020-files/managing-covid-19-protocols-in-administering-percussion-performance-curriculum.pdf>

NAfME COVID-19 Resources

<https://nafme.org/covid-19/>

NAfME Copyright Resources

<https://nafme.org/my-classroom/copyright/>

Reducing Bioaerosol Emissions and Exposures in the Performing Arts

<https://smt.d.colostate.edu/reducing-bioaerosol-emissions-and-exposures-in-the-performing-arts/>

Yamaha, Inc. Guide to Disinfectant Safety

[https://usa.yamaha.com/files/BRDADM149580\\_DisinfectionGuideDrums\\_Percussion\\_f2ba28c551072ebaa22a8a19d204c77d.pdf](https://usa.yamaha.com/files/BRDADM149580_DisinfectionGuideDrums_Percussion_f2ba28c551072ebaa22a8a19d204c77d.pdf)

Centers for Disease Control COVID Landing Page

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>

Environmental Protection Agency list of Disinfectants for Use Against SARS-Cov-2 (COVID19)

<https://www.epa.gov/pesticide-registration/list-n-disinfectants-use-against-sars-cov-2-covid-19>

Performing Arts COVID-19 Resources

<https://www.nfhs.org/articles/performing-arts-covid-19-resources/>

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