

Four-Mallet Sticking Options for Marimba Part I: Basics

BY NATHAN DAUGHTREY

Over the past 30 years, the marimba has grown immensely, both figuratively and literally. The size of the instrument has grown from 4 octaves to 5 1/2 octaves. The literature has increased from very few solo works to what is likely thousands of works. Much time has been spent discussing and expanding the technique and the creation of new terms like *double verticals* and *inside independents*.

There has been quite a bit of discussion surrounding two-mallet sticking, using ideas borrowed from snare drum, such as alternating and double sticking; however there is much more involved in determining four-mallet sticking that requires additional terminology. My goal, therefore, is to dissect and explain four-mallet sticking options in a clear, succinct manner that can be applied to a wide range of pieces.

The following four-mallet sticking options are the result of several years of pondering and refining, condensing, and categorizing many complicated ideas into just a few concepts that can be applied to a wide range of pieces by a wide range of players with different technical and musical abilities. The importance of selecting an effective sticking for a given passage cannot be overemphasized. Effective sticking has the power to:

- increase note and rhythm accuracy;
- make the performer look and feel physically more comfortable;
- facilitate musical interpretation and phrasing.

Ultimately, most stickings are combinations of two or more options. The following points are discussed in the order of difficulty, with one musical example from a beginning four-mallet solo for marimba and one from a more advanced solo (with a couple of exceptions) and demonstrated through the scope of Independent (or Stevens) Grip. Additionally, the musical examples were chosen for one of three reasons:

1. They were written by a non-percussionist and therefore are not as biased toward the technical possibilities of the instrument;
2. They are primarily monophonic in texture (single-line) and therefore provide more sticking challenges and options;
3. They were written for the purpose of learning four-mallet marimba technique.

Throughout this article, and for all stickings in the music examples, mallets are numbered from 1 to 4, low to high (or left to right).

ALTERNATING STICKING

For *alternating sticking*, the right and left hands alternate every stroke. This is the most common choice when determining sticking, as it is the easiest to transfer from two-mallet playing. Since we do not typically start out with four mallets in our hands as percussionists, there is a great tendency to play as many passages as possible with alternating inside independents. Try playing Examples 1 and 2 with both sticking options and you will discover that your accuracy increases and your horizontal arm movement decreases by using four-mallet alternating sticking.

This sticking option is divided into three types:

1. **Inside Alternating**—only inside independent strokes (mallets 2 and 3) are used.

Example 1a. *Teardrops for Marimba* by Mitchell Peters, m. 33

Example 1b. *24 Caprices, No. 2* by Niccolò Paganini/ Daughtrey, mm. 1–2

2. **Four-Mallet Alternating**—still alternating left and right, but the outside mallets are incorporated into the sticking as well.

Example 2a. *Teardrops*, m. 33

Example 2b. *24 Caprices, No. 2*, mm. 1–2

Example 2b shows two staves of music in G major, 6/8 time. The first staff has fingerings 1 3 2 3 2 3 and stickings L R L R L R. The second staff has fingerings 1 3 1 3 1 3 and stickings 1 3 1 3 2 3. A long arrow below the second staff indicates a continuous motion.

3. **Double Vertical Alternating**—both left and right hands alternate double vertical strokes.

Example 3a. *Chorale and Variations* by George Frock, m. 41 (Var. II)

Example 3a shows a piano accompaniment in 4/4 time. The right hand part consists of quarter notes, and the left hand part consists of eighth notes. The left hand is labeled "Left hand" and the right hand is labeled "Right hand".

Example 3b. *Spiral Passages* by Jon Metzger, mm. 221–222

Example 3b shows a piano accompaniment in 2/4 time. The right hand part consists of quarter notes, and the left hand part consists of eighth notes. The left hand is labeled "L R L" and the right hand is labeled "R".

CONSECUTIVE STICKING

For *consecutive sticking*, groups of two, three, or four notes are played in ordered succession (consecutively) across the mallets. You will find this sticking option throughout solo marimba literature, as it is a very natural motion and technique. (Numbers refer to mallet positions.)

Two notes: 1–2 / 2–1 / 3–4 / 4–3 (2–3 or 3–2 would simply be alternating)

Three notes: 1–2–3 / 2–3–4 / 4–3–2 / 3–2–1

Four notes: 1–2–3–4 / 4–3–2–1

Brackets show each group of two, three, or four notes in the examples below to illustrate the forms of *consecutive sticking*.

Example 4a. *Three Pieces for Three Mallets, Mvt. III* by Mitchell Peters, m. 2

Example 4a shows a single staff of music in 12/8 time. The fingerings are 1 2 3 1 2 3 1 2 3 1 2 3. Brackets are placed under each group of three notes.

Example 4b. *WarHammer* by Daniel McCarthy, m. 112

Example 4b shows a single staff of music in 2/4 time. The fingerings are 1 2 3 4 1 2 2 3 4. Brackets are placed under each group of four notes.

DOUBLE STICKING

Double sticking occurs when two consecutive notes are played by the same hand or mallet. There are two types:

1. **Double Vertical** (Double Double)—two mallets in one hand strike twice in immediate succession. Brackets indicate where the doubling stickings occur.

Example 5a. *z'Rondo* by Ginger Zyskowski, m. 3

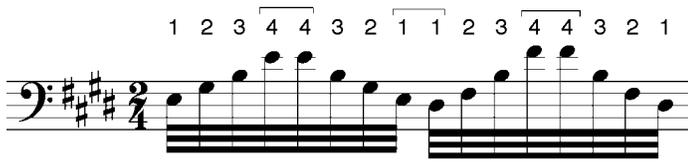
Example 5a shows a single staff of music in 4/4 time. The fingerings are R R R R R. Brackets are placed under each pair of consecutive notes.

Example 5b. *WarHammer*, m. 20

Example 5b shows a single staff of music in 2/4 time. The fingerings are L R L R L L R R L R R L L R L R L. Brackets are placed under each group of two, three, or four notes.

2. **Independent** (Independent Double)—a single mallet in one hand strikes twice in immediate succession. Brackets indicate double sticking.

Example 6. 24 Caprices, No. 1, m.1



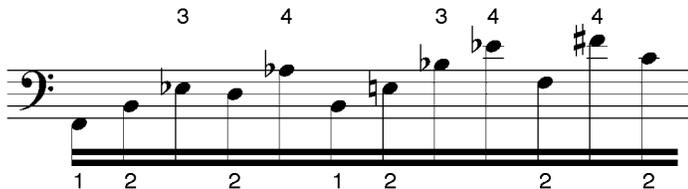
Independent double sticking is not found very often in early developmental solos for four-mallet marimba.

PLANE STICKING

For *plane sticking*, each hand plays notes on a different horizontal plane (i.e., accidental bars or natural bars). This is a great way to keep your hands out of the way of one another. It is slightly more difficult to identify opportunities for *plane sticking*, as it has the potential to combine each of the other sticking options. Start by looking for a passage with several accidentals, keeping in mind that this sticking can only work if there are no more than two consecutive notes on a “plane” at a time. No example is provided from a beginning-level piece, as this is primarily found in more advanced works.

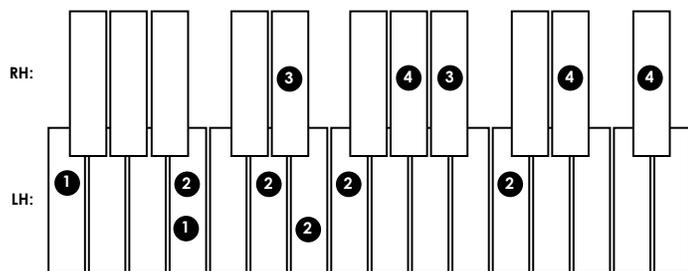
Example 7a. WarHammer, m. 1

RH: accidentals



LH: naturals

Example 7b. WarHammer, m. 1 (keyboard illustration of Example 7A)

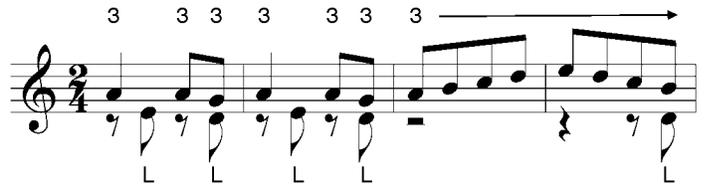


Numbers represent stickings only. They are not meant to represent mallet placement on the bars.

MULTIPLE INDEPENDENT STICKING

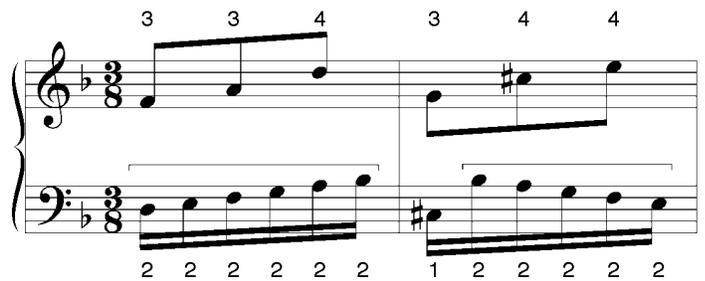
For *multiple independent sticking*, one mallet plays three or more notes in a row (usually scalar motion) using an independent stroke (inside or outside). This is only necessary for passages in which each hand is operating independently from the other.

Example 8a. Three Pieces for Three Mallets, Mvt. I, mm. 1–4



In this example, the right hand is using *multiple independent sticking*, while the left hand independently plays double vertical strokes.

Example 8b. 2-Part Invention No. 4 by J.S. Bach, mm. 3–4



In this example, the left hand is playing a scalar passage using *multiple independent sticking* while the right hand is playing inside independent strokes.

GUIDELINES FOR DETERMINING FOUR-MALLET STICKING

Now that we have established the five basic types of four-mallet sticking options, it is important to address the practical applications when learning a piece of music. Each guideline is intentionally broad so that you may think critically about how each applies to your own ability level.

1. Identify which grip you are most comfortable with. This has a great impact on the functionality of some sticking options.
2. Identify the basic musical elements (tempo, dynamics, rolls, overall mood/style, etc.) of the piece you are working on. All of these elements impact your sticking choices.
3. Choose which mallets you will be using. If you are using graduated mallets (different hardness/articulation in each mallet position) instead of uniform mallets (four of the same hardness/articulation), you will need to adjust your sticking to create the most musical interpretation. If you decide to switch to different mallets while working on a piece, be sure to consider the impact on your chosen sticking.
4. Use the composer’s/performer’s sticking suggestions as a *starting point*. Remember, however, that these stickings are likely based on the composer’s/performer’s technical ability and facility and, therefore, might not be appropriate for you.
5. Approach one musical phrase or figure at a time. It is very easy to get overwhelmed when determining sticking for an entire piece of music.
6. Identify important notes in each musical phrase or figure. These notes should not be played in the middle of a double stick-

A New Class Of Chaos.

HAMMERAX SUSPENDED HYBRIDS



Glass™

Meanie™

Boomywang™



Check out our new videos and audio at hammerax.com!

Hammerax™ Suspended Hybrids can be played with sticks, brushes, mallets, hands and fingers and are easily suspended from a standard cymbal stand. Here's what some of today's top professionals are saying about them:

"The greatest new sound arsenal to come along in quite a while."
Emil Richards (*LA studio legend*)

"Outstanding for accents."
Danny Gottlieb (*Pat Metheny*)

"A whole new language of color."
Walfredo Reyes, Jr. (*Santana*)

"A great new sound and a unique compliment to my cymbals."
Jim Keltner (*LA studio legend*)

"A liquid, portable, ecstasy in noise."
Pat Mastelotto (*King Crimson*)

ing or a double lateral stroke. In other words, it is important to lead into important notes with some form of alternating sticking.

7. Look for patterns and note groupings throughout the piece. This will often overrule *plane sticking* if you have applied it to a given passage.

8. Use *double sticking* as a last resort. Unlike two-mallet playing, double sticking is not as necessary since you have more mallets from which to choose. For some passages (see Examples 5 and 6), however, there are no other options.

9. Try as many sticking options as possible. If you constantly try to think outside the box and try new things, it will become easier and easier to identify and assign stickings.

CONCLUSION

When you are first trying to determine the sticking for a certain passage, start by going through each of the five four-mallet sticking options (alternating, consecutive, double, plane, multiple independent) and decide which combinations of each will best serve you and the music. Selecting the most appropriate stickings for four-mallet marimba playing can be a very daunting task because of the many possibilities.

To simplify the process, I have reduced this information by grouping all of the sticking options into manageable categories that are easier to grasp. Stickings we select as individual performers will change over time as we become technically and musically more proficient. Once you have absorbed the information in this article, watch for Part II of this article, which will deal with more advanced sticking options, including close-interval sticking and four-mallet arpeggios and scales.

MUSIC EXAMPLES

Bach, Johann Sebastian. *Two-Part Invention No. 4*.

Froch, George. *Chorale and Variations*. C. Alan Publications, Greensboro, NC: 1997. Used by permission of C. Alan Publications.

McCarthy, Daniel. *WarHammer*. C. Alan Publications, Greensboro, NC: 1999. Used by permission of C. Alan Publications.

Metzger, Jon. *Spiral Passages*. C. Alan Publications, Greensboro, NC: 1996. Used by permission of C. Alan Publications.

Paganini, Niccolò. *24 Caprices, Op. 1, No. 1 in E Major*. Adapted by Nathan Daughtrey. C. Alan Publications, Greensboro, NC: 2001. Used by permission of C. Alan Publications.

Paganini, Niccolò. *24 Caprices, Op. 1, No. 1 in E Major*. Adapted by Nathan Daughtrey. C. Alan Publications, Greensboro, NC: 2001. Used by permission of C. Alan Publications.

Peters, Mitchell. *Teardrops for Marimba*. Mitchell Peters, Los Angeles, CA: 1975. Used by permission of Mitchell Peters.

Peters, Mitchell. *Three Pieces for Three Mallets*. Mitchell Peters, Los Angeles, CA: 1978. Used by permission of Mitchell Peters.

Zyskowski, Ginger. *Memory's Glimpse / z'Rondo*. C. Alan Publications, Greensboro, NC: 2000. Used by permission of C. Alan Publications.

Dr. Nathan Daughtrey is a freelance soloist and composer based in Houston, Texas, where he also performs as a member of the Trommel Percussion Group. He holds degrees from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, where he also taught as a Visiting Lecturer in Percussion for three years. He has appeared nationally and internationally as a soloist and clinician. He has been involved in many recording projects, including his own solo CD, *Spiral Passages*, and his upcoming second CD. As second- and third-place winner of the 2005 PAS Composition Contest, Daughtrey is also very active as a composer, with his concert band and percussion works being performed worldwide. His compositions are published by C. Alan Publications.

PN