

Mussorgsky's *Night on Bald Mountain*
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Boston Symphony Orchestra



Performing the Excerpt

I will be discussing the crash cymbal excerpt from Mussorgsky's *Night on Bald Mountain* within the context of audition preparation. An audition candidate's first priority when performing this excerpt in an audition must be the precise execution of exactly what is found on the page. The rhythm must be clear and the crashes must be consistent. One's second priority should be playing with good time and at an appropriate tempo. Finally, once the excerpt can be consistently performed at a very high level of technical proficiency, the music should be instilled with an appropriate level of energy and musical character. I feel as though there should be a subtle sense of forward momentum through this passage as long as the time remains accurate and the rhythm feels settled.

Choice of Cymbals

I prefer a small but heavy pair of cymbals for this excerpt such as the Zildjian 16" K Constantinople Vintage Orchestral Medium Heavy. A small pair of cymbals is useful in this situation because they are easier to control than a larger pair. A heavy pair of cymbals will help provide better articulation and more volume with less effort.

Practice Techniques

The following are several ways I go about practicing this excerpt. As always, be careful with your hands and use earplugs!

-Build speed by practicing small groups of fast crashes (3-6 notes at a time). Try creating short exercises that gradually add notes to a pattern.

Exercise 1:



-Practice small groups of fast crashes grouped around different beats. Even the simplest rhythm takes on an entirely new feel when shifted one way or the other by a single eighth note.

Exercise 2:



-Remove notes to simplify execution when checking your time with a metronome or working on phrasing and direction.

Exercise 3:

♩ = c. 112

f

-Build strength and endurance by practicing in several short sessions spaced throughout the day. For me, four practice sessions of five minutes each is far more advantageous than one 20 minute session per day. Shorter practice sessions are also less likely to cause back, hand, and finger injuries.

-Practice with larger cymbals to make playing with smaller cymbals more effortless. Don't over-practice. Keep the practice sessions short.

-Practice with all kinds of cymbals to prepare for auditions where you may be asked to use a pair of cymbals you've never played before. It's not a bad idea to use the cymbals provided at an audition whether or not you are required to do so. Committees tend to respond better to hearing cymbals they are accustomed to hearing with their orchestra.