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[Interview with Will James, SLSO Percussionist](#) [Percussion Demonstration](#)

The percussion section is a family of instruments that you can strike, shake, or scrape to make sound. Some percussion instruments, like the bass drum, snare drum (c.), and tambourine, have a leathery material stretched tightly over a frame. This is called the head of the drum. When the player strikes the head, the air around it vibrates, causing a sound to ring out.

Other percussion instruments, like the xylophone (a.) and marimba, look like a giant piano keyboard. And some instruments, like the vibraslap (b.) and cabasa, look a lot like toys.

Xylophone Bones

Will plays an excerpt from Saint-Saëns' Carnival of the Animals on xylophone. The xylophone is a mallet instrument with wooden bars. This part of Carnival of the Animals is meant to sound like Will is playing on old bones. What does it sound like to you? Draw a picture or write a story to accompany this music.

Instruments Everywhere

A percussion instrument is anything you can strike, shake, or scrape. Will likes that anyone can create the same sounds that he can create. Try this: find some objects in your classroom or at home that can be percussion instruments. Find at least one thing you can strike, one thing you can shake, and one thing that you can scrape to make sound.

Adding Drama

Will says that percussion instruments accentuate dramatic moments in pieces of orchestral music. They don't often have the melody, but can make a moment feel more powerful by adding to it with a cymbal crash or triangle strike. Tell your favorite story (or make up a new one) and use the percussion instruments you found in the previous activity to highlight moments in the story.

I Can't Pick Just One!

Will says that one of the reasons he chose percussion is because he likes getting to play different instruments. Would you like to play more than one instrument? Which ones?



a.



b.



c.

