

What to Listen for in Cymbals

An interactive discussion/demonstration
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Techniques for listening:

1. Relax (with a deep breath, body tension released, mind cleared)
2. Do not judge what is heard (whether it's 'good' or 'bad', or what it means); set aside any pre-conceptions and biases in order to hear.
3. Notice as much as possible about the sounds you hear:
Components (pitch, volume, rhythm, timbre, etc.)
Changes in the sound occurring over time.
4. Ask yourself questions and think of your own plausible answers:
What specifically do I hear new to me, or what I do not understand?
What specific elements of the sound seem (to me) to be of importance?
What must I do to be able to understand this sound more deeply?

Listening to cymbals:

Concept 1: Listen to the “white noise” (“shhh” or “sss” sound)

- a) Notice when the “white noise” sound begins and disappears
- b) Notice the sound after the “white noise” sound disappears

Concept 2: Listen to the “fundamental” pitch (low tone you can hear and sing)

- a) Notice the pitch that is the foremost (fundamental); sing the pitch
- b) Notice when the fundamental sound begins and disappears.

Concept 3: Listen to the relationship between the “white noise” and the fundamental parts of the overall sound

- a) Notice which part of the sound – the fundamental or the white noise – is predominant at the beginning of the sound.
- b) Notice which part of the sound – the fundamental or the white noise – is predominant over time, as the sound continues.

Concept 4: Listen to the range of “harmonics” (component “overtones”)

- a) Notice the sound parts between the “fundamental” and the “white noise” sounds.
- b) Notice how dense(full or thin) these middle “harmonics” are in relation to the overall sound.

Relatively bright (French) or relatively dark (German) cymbal sounds:

Concept 5: Listen to the relationship for the “white noise” and the “fundamental” sounds to the overall sound

- a) How would you describe a sound in which the “white noise” predominates?
- b) How would you describe a sound in which the “fundamental” predominates?

Concept 6: It is mainly the sound of a cymbal determining it's relative brightness or darkness:

- a) Notice the differences in sounds produced when a cymbal is struck with a soft (yarn or felt) stick and a hard (wood or metal) stick.
- b) How would you describe the relative sound of the cymbal when struck with a soft mallet?

The weight (mass) of a cymbal

Concept 7: The weight (mass or thickness) of a cymbal affects it's sound

- a) After weighing two cymbals (having the same diameter) on a reliable scale, notice the differences in sounds produced when those two cymbals are struck with the same stick.
- b) How would you describe the relative sound of the heavier cymbal?