

# The Fulcrum Grip

By Ed Saindon

**T**he Fulcrum Grip is a four-mallet grip for vibraphone and marimba that incorporates finger control along with wrist and arm motion. I began experimenting with the grip's mechanism several years ago, determined to achieve (while holding four mallets) the ease of execution in terms of control, looseness, speed, and power of a two-mallet player. The grip incorporates the use of fingers via a hinge or fulcrum point as utilized by two-mallet players and drummers.

Two-mallet players generally hold the mallets like a drummer playing with sticks. The mallet is usually held between the thumb and index finger (the fulcrum) while the other fingers are used to generate the movement of the mallet as it moves into and out of the palm of the hand. With the Fulcrum Grip, we are essentially employing the same fulcrum concept while holding two mallets in each hand. With this approach, the four-mallet player has the best of both worlds: the dexterity and power of a two-mallet player as well as the ability to fully utilize *all* four mallets.

## FULCRUM GRIP DESCRIPTION

Essentially, the mallets are held very loosely in the hand (using the Burton grip) while the fingers are used to manipulate the stroke of the mallets. The ends of the mallets come out of the palm of the hand and are snapped back by the fingers. Through the use of finger control, the grip allows the four-mallet player to maximize the command of technique as it applies to dynamics, speed, and power, while economizing on arm and wrist motion. With this grip, the player is also able to produce a full sound without unnecessary height in the mallet stroke.

Many four-mallet players favor the outside mallet in the right hand and downplay the inside mallet in terms of activity and volume. A common reason for this is that the rotation motion for the inside mallet is not best suited for power and speed. Furthermore, the supinated forearm movement used in the stroke of the inside mallets can lead to a variety of wrist, elbow, and arm injuries. That being said, it is important to point out that the Fulcrum Grip utilizes a downward-upward motion (as opposed to rotation) with both inside mallets. Think of the inside mallet being more of an extension of the forearm.

## FULCRUM POINTS

There are two fulcrum points with this grip. They are dependent upon the mallet spread.

We'll address the grip from both fulcrum points. It is important to mention that in both fulcrum points, the mallets come out of the palm of the hand to allow for the snap motion of the fingers. Keep in mind that holding the mallets tightly in the hand without allowing the mallet ends to leave the palm of the hand will neutralize the use of finger control.

**Small to Mid-Range Spread Fulcrum:** The fulcrum or hinge of the grip is between the third finger and thumb. The key point of the grip is that the tip of the third finger is held to the side (towards the thumb side) of the outside mallet in order to retain control of the outside mallet and keep it in the palm of the hand. The thumb and second finger are held in a straight position. The third finger is used to allow the inside mallet to come out of the hand and then be snapped back. When playing the outside mallet, the fourth finger is also used to snap back the mallet into the palm of the hand. As mentioned before, the inside mallet uses a downward motion as if it were an extension of the forearm. See Photos 1 and 2.

Photo 1: Under view of Small to Mid-Range Spread Fulcrum with the third finger placed to the side of the outside mallet. Outside mallet is in the palm of the hand.



Photo 2: Top view of Small to Mid-Range Spread Fulcrum with the thumb and second finger extended.



**Mid-Range to Large Spread Fulcrum:** The fulcrum or hinge is between the thumb and the first joint of the second finger, as if using matched grip with drumsticks. With this grip, the outside mallet is not held in the palm of the hand by the third finger, but rather let go, thus allowing the end of the outside mallet to come out of the palm of the hand and be almost at a perpendicular angle with the forearm. With the thumb and second fingers acting as the hinge point, the third, fourth, and fifth fingers are used to snap the inside mallet back in the hand. The inside and outside mallets will basically form a right triangle, with the outside mallet almost perpendicular to the forearm. When playing with the outside mallet, a pronated movement of the forearm is used. See Photos 3, 4 5 and 6.

## SUGGESTED EXERCISES

Work on playing melodies with all four mallets while changing the spreads (from small range to wide range) of the mallets in each

Photo 3: Under view of Mid-Range to Large Spread Fulcrum with the fulcrum between the thumb and second finger. Outside mallet is out of the palm of the hand.



Photo 4: Top view of Mid-Range to Large Spread Fulcrum with inside mallet as an extension of the forearm. Mallets approximately form a right angle.



Photo 5: Inside mallet is out of the palm of the hand and ready to be snapped back by fingers.



Photo 6: Outside mallet is out of the palm of the hand and ready to be snapped back by the fourth finger. The third finger is placed to the side of the outside mallet. Mallets approximately form a right angle.



hand. This will necessitate alternating between the two variations of the Fulcrum Grip's hinge point. Also, open and close the spread of the mallets while making a smooth transition from the two fulcrum points. It's important that the player switch smoothly and quickly from the two different fulcrum points in order to use all four mallets comfortably and efficiently.

### PLAYING CHORDS

This grip can also be used in playing very full-sounding chords with a minimum of wrist and arm motion. When playing a chord, the mallets come out of the hand and are snapped back into the palm by the fingers. Classical pianists can get an extremely full sound by keeping the fingers on the keys and pulling up with the hands. This same principle can be applied to playing mallet instruments. In this case, the mallet heads are close to the bars and the hand is pulled up with an upward wrist motion, while simultaneously snapping the mallet with the fingers into the palm of the hand. This technique can create a very full-sounding stroke with relatively little effort and tension. This allows the player the ability to produce a very full sound with a minimum of mallet height, arm, and wrist motion. Try executing a variety of chord voicings (small and wide intervals) using this method.

Another method used in creating a very full

chordal sound is to allow the mallets to come completely out of the palm of the hands and be raised at a perpendicular angle to the bars. Once the mallets are out of the hand and are at a right angle with the bars, the mallets can be snapped back in the hand (with or without arm and wrist motion) for a full and powerful stroke.

### VOLUME AND SPEED

If the player has the need to play with a bit more volume and speed, use the Large Spread Fulcrum and the inside mallets. With this method, maximum mallet height is achieved with minimum arm and wrist motion. It's just like playing with two mallets, with which the player has the ultimate mallet height available without any unnecessary wrist or arm movement. In this case, the outside mallets are basically at a right angle with the inside mallets, whereby the inside mallets pivot off of the outside mallets.

From the French and German grips to the Moeller technique, there are many variations of grips when playing drums. All of these grip variations use different fulcrum points. There

are fulcrum points towards the front of the hand between the thumb and index finger versus fulcrum points towards the back of the hand that employ the fourth finger. Consequently, there are many ways for the mallet player to develop and experiment with mallet grips that use finger control along with variations of fulcrum points. The key is in trying to utilize finger control as a means of initiating and controlling the mallet stroke in conjunction with the wrist and arm. Mallet percussionists are encouraged to try the Fulcrum Grip and to experiment with their own variations of this concept.

For more information and a demonstration of the Fulcrum Grip, try to catch Ed at one of his upcoming clinics. His clinic schedule is listed at [www.myspace.com/edsaindon](http://www.myspace.com/edsaindon). The Fulcrum Grip can also be viewed on some of Ed's performance videos posted on YouTube (including his PASIC 2006 clinic in Austin, Texas) as well as on his Website at [www.ed-saindon.com](http://www.ed-saindon.com).

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