

# Burton Grip

This packet is meant to enable anyone to use Gary Burton's 4 mallet grip. Gary Burton is an extremely famous jazz vibraphonist. He has played with just about anyone in the jazz industry and is considered to be the best jazz vibraphonist alive. His technique is obviously built for a chord based approach to keyboard playing. I choose to teach his technique to my students first because most of the mechanics of it are extremely similar, if not identical, to two mallet playing and the way the hand holds the mallets allows for anyone, regardless of hand size, to use this technique effectively without discomfort.

First the finger placement for our default interval. Start by holding one mallet exactly in our textbook two mallet technique, making sure that all fingers are in the correct place. Next take the second mallet and slide it in between the index finger and middle finger so that it goes straight down the middle of the hand and behind the other mallet that is already in your hand.



Notice that the finger placement within our hand has not changed at all and we still want to maintain our fulcrum at our default interval. Both the middle finger and the ring finger should be holding the back mallet shaft. Some people's fingers are a little shorter than others so there is a possibility that the ring finger will not be able to touch the back mallet shaft. These fingers should stay in a curved position. Do not let your joints invert! Notice also that the back mallet shaft, which I will now call the outside mallet since it is further from the center of our body, is right down the middle of the palm. Like I said this is our default interval position; it should reach about a 4<sup>th</sup> or a 5<sup>th</sup> on any of the keyboards.

Next, let's talk about our stroke types. First, is the double stop or double vertical. Since our hand structure and the way our wrist is slightly flat on top is identical to our two mallet position, this stroke will be exactly the same as our two mallet stroke. It should be executed with mostly wrist while keeping the back fingers relaxed. It is okay for the mallet shafts to move around within our hand a little as long as they are not moving left or right.



Notice that the way that the wrist bends is identical to the way it does in two mallet playing. Also, as the mallets make contact the amount that the back the hand is flattened should look exactly like when we hold just one mallet.

Next, let's talk about single independent strokes, or just hitting one mallet at a time successively. First, if the mallets are in your right hand reach over with your left hand and hold on to the outside mallet in your right hand. Keep this outside mallet shaft parallel to the ground and rotate your right hand around so that only your inside mallet is moving up and down.



This is meant to allow you to learn which muscles are needed to move

only one mallet at a time. When we are just playing with one mallet it is our goal to rotate around the mallet we are not playing with so that there is as little wasted motion as possible. Also, if that other mallet is flopping around there is a chance it will hit a note unintentionally. After rotating with your hand on the mallet for a little while slowly take it away and see if you can replicate what was just going on. If you can't hold the outside mallet again and repeat until you are able to get a pure rotation without your other hand holding the mallet that is not playing. Repeat this whole procedure for every mallet.

When you are playing with just your inside mallet it should feel like you are putting your hand out like a blade with your thumb extended and then you are striking the ground with the side of your thumb.



When you are playing with your outside mallet it should feel like when you make a fist, hold it close to the ground, and then rotate to hit only your ring and pinky knuckles.



Work on mastering these motions both with and without mallets.

Next is alternating notes on one hand. This should feel like the single independent strokes except for after a mallet makes contact it stays down and the other mallet preps to play. The most important part of this stroke is that it stays relaxed and bouncy. It shouldn't feel stiff, like your just rotating your hand back and forth. There is really no good way to take pictures of this motion so let your brain tell you when it looks stiff or bouncy. We want bouncy.

Next let's talk about changing intervals. To get to larger intervals we need to slide our index finger down and allow the ring and pinky fingers to move up. As this happens the thumb will slowly move to the top of the inside mallet and just rest on top. Do not tuck the thumb in like you are making a fist. The middle finger should remain on the back mallet shaft at all times.



The first picture shows about a 6<sup>th</sup>, the second an octave, and the last the finger position for this octave or 90 degree interval. Notice the movement of the thumb overtop of the inside mallet while the index finger moves down. The index finger should not press against the outside mallet with the very end of your finger! Just pull the index finger in towards your hand to move that mallet out instead of pressing it out with your finger. Also, notice in the last picture the thumb is just resting on top of the inside mallet and that all of the other fingers are still wrapped around the inside mallet. Also, the pinky and ring fingers are in an extremely curved position to allow for the mallet shafts to be making a 90 degree angle. Picture that you are trying to touch where your fingers come out of your palm with your finger tips. So this covers how we get to larger intervals let's talk about how we go to smaller intervals.

From our default interval we need to press in with our thumb and let the back fingers move closer to our thumb. The index finger will also begin to extend out to let the mallet shafts get closer together. We should be able to press the mallet heads together.



The first picture shows about a 3<sup>rd</sup>, the second picture is a 2<sup>nd</sup> and the third shows our finger position at this 2<sup>nd</sup> position. Note how the index

finger is now up on top of the inside mallet at it is still slightly curved. Also, the back fingers have pulled over to where they are much closer to the thumb. You may also have to put your pinky on the outside mallet shaft to allow the shafts to get closer. Sometimes also the ring finger will slide off the inside of the outside mallet shaft, this is okay as long as the middle finger stays on the outside mallet shaft.

In terms of going to different intervals, you should be able to slide smoothly between our 90 degree shaft position and our interval of a 2<sup>nd</sup> mallet position and then stop anywhere in between. If you are capable of doing this you can cover any interval.

When we are playing a line that is most obviously a two mallet part we will play with mallets 2 and 4. This seems weird at first but with a little bit of practice it will become effortless. To do this we will put the right hand mallets at our 90 degree angle and then have our left hand in our default interval. The goal is for there to be two different motions. The right hand will be knocking on the door while the left hand turns the door knob. Also, it is necessary to keep the mallet shafts that we are playing in a V because if we do not the inside mallet in the right hand will hit the forearm of our left hand. If you keep the V this will not happen.