

Drum Set Pedagogy: Guiding Young Drummers through the Groove

By
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Clinic Outline

Objective

Drum Set Pedagogy: Guiding Young Percussionists through the Groove will explore the learning and teaching process of drum set through key learning levels and categories. This organized approach breaks down technique, coordination, musicianship, and resources to help students and educators better navigate learning how to play and teach drum set.

This clinic is organized in to four categories: technique and coordination, style, purpose, and method and resources.

I. Technique and Coordination

A. Technique

Drum set master pedagogue, Ed Soph says, “A cruel reality of drumming is you play the drum set as well as you play the snare (drum). If you have minimal control of dynamics, tempo, stickings, accent technique, etc. that is going to be magnified on the drum set.”

a. Grip

A proper grip will allow a drummer to correctly manipulate drum sticks. Without this step, the remaining steps are pointless.

b. Exercises and Literature

The Percussive Arts Society International Drum Rudiments and George Lawrence Stone’s “Stick Control” are the most appropriate place to start for crafting good technique.

1. What makes up a Drum Set?

- Drums – Snare Drum, Bass Drum, and Tom-Toms.
- Hardware – Hi-Hat Stand, Bass Drum Pedal, Throne, Cymbal Stands, Tom-Tom Hardware, and Snare Drum Stand.
- Cymbals – Hi-Hats, Crash Cymbal, and Ride Cymbal.

c. Motion

The drum set is a multiple percussion instrument and because of this proper navigation amongst the set-up is important. This is especially true because drum sets tend to be asymmetrical. Warmups that were done specifically on the snare drum can be re-written to be performed all over of the drum set.

PSA: It is important that the drum set is set up in a way that the drummer can play all instruments efficiently. Set ups will vary from student to student based on body type.

Begin the set up with the throne (drum stool), then the pedals, snare drum, and then the positioning and angles for the tom toms and cymbals.

1. Motion Exercises

Motion exercises can be done using written snare drum exercises that are moved to various places on the drum set.

B. 4-Way Coordination and Independence

The drum set is a multi-instrument combination that represents the composite responsibilities of at least four people. The ability to manipulate the hands and feet is imperative. 4-way coordination is using all limbs together at the same time, and independence is the ability to isolate one or more of those voices while maintaining an ostinato.

a. Feet

1. Heel Up technique is when the heel of the foot is off the foot plate of the pedal and the ball of the foot and the toes activate the pedal. The knee must come up as a prep stroke for this to work. Heel Up is particularly useful for loud dynamics. (For example: How you would use your foot to brake in a car.)
2. Heel Down technique is when the heel of the foot is on the end of the foot plate of the pedal and the ball of the foot and the toes activate the pedal. Heel Down is particularly useful for soft dynamics. (For example: How you would use your foot to accelerate in a car.)

b. Coordination

Coordination is best achieved by working on 1 voice at a time until comfortable, then adding one additional voice at a time. This may involve just the hands first and then adding one foot at a time. Slow, deliberate practice enabling all the voices is also an option if what you are working on is very linear.

c. Independence

Working on independence means working with a variable (melody) and a constant (ostinato) in which the constant is not visible or discernable. Sometimes these variables involve one or two voices or limbs.

II. Style

When referring to style we are describing what makes an interpretation authentic. This means understanding the characteristics of a music in an intimate way.

A. Genre

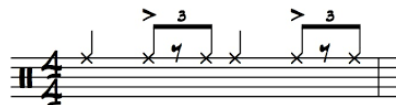
Genres that are prioritized for young drummers are generally mapped out in a school or all-state audition:

- Swing and Jazz of Various Tempi
- Blues and Shuffles
- Rock
- Funk
- Afro-Cuban
- Bossa Nova
- Ballads

B. Nuance

What makes each genre distinctly different from one another?

Jazz and Swing: 2 and 4 swing (Glenn Miller – In the Mood, Miles Davis – Freddie Freeloader)



Blues: Slow and understated, extremely connected to lyrics (BB King – Lucille)



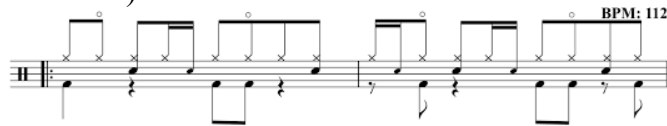
Shuffles: light, not heavy – emphasis on 2 and 4 (Bobby Bland – You Got Me)



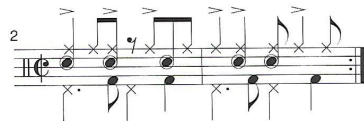
Rock: consistent pulse, aggressive (Pink Floyd – Another Brick in the Wall, AC DC – Back in Black)



Funk: syncopation, laid back (James Brown – Cold Sweat, Parliament-Funkadelic – P-Funk)



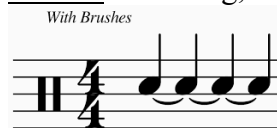
Afro-Cuban: clave, ensemble imitation, 2 bar phrases (Hector Lavoe – El Cantante)



Bossa Nova: almost invisible (Antonio Carlos Jobim – The Girl from Ipanema)



Ballads: no swing, texture (Ella Fitzgerald – Always)



C. Sound

Listening to prime examples of each genre will inform nuance and sound.

III. Role/Job

A drummer can be thought of as a co-composer for any song they play. Sometimes a drum set part is composed very specifically which can be advantageous or not depending on one's opinion. Other times a drum set part, or lack thereof, is written sparsely giving the drummer freedom to do what he or she wants. To best support an ensemble, the following are subjects are very important for a successful drummer.

A. Tempo

BPM and Feel: A drummer's tempo should be their pride.

- a. **BPM:** Setting tempo, maintaining tempo, and not dragging or rushing based upon technical difficulties.
- b. **Feel:** Be comfortable overseeing the feel (aggressive, laid back, swung, etc.) and the tempo. **Example: Kashmir by Led Zeppelin vs. Under the Bridge by Red Hot Chili Peppers** Both are around the same tempo but have very different feels.

B. Musicality

- a. **Dynamics:** various dynamics, crescendos, decrescendos, etc.
- b. **Style:** Understanding the appropriate style for the song/piece.
- c. **Texture:** You are playing an instrument that represents multiple musicians. Sometimes you only need a few musicians playing at a time and only particular instruments. This sometimes means playing instruments with fast decay for thin textures during verses and playing instruments with slow decay for thick textures during the chorus.

C. Transitions

Transitions are arguably the most important part of any piece of music, so it's important that someone is guiding these transitions. A drummer should break time (the continued pattern) in order to fill (improvise) and transition into another part of the song. These fills or setups become signals that a new or different section is coming and sometimes telegraphs a different mood, section, or texture.

D. Phrasing

The topic of phrasing can be divided into 2 categories: ensemble hits and fills.

- a. Ensemble Hits: Ensemble hits can be voiced and phrased depending on pitch, duration, and articulation.
- b. Fills: Fill phrasing refers to shaping improvised sections according to rhythm and sonic tessituras.

IV. Method and Research

A. Recommended Method Books

- a. Technique, Coordination, and Independence

Level 1

Stick Control by George Lawrence Stone

Developing Dexterity for Snare Drum by Mitchell Peters

Progressive Steps to Syncopation for the Modern Drummer by Ted Reed

Level 2

Advanced Techniques for the Modern Drummer by Jim Chapin

The New Breed by Gary Chester

4-Way Coordination by Marvin Dahlgren and Elliot Fine

Afro-Cuban Coordination for Drumset by Maria Martinez

Brazilian Coordination for Drumset by Maria Martinez

- b. Musicianship

Level A.1

Essential Styles for the Drummer and Bassist vol. 1 by Steve Houghton and Tom Warrington

The Big Band Drummer by Ron Spagnardi

Level A.2

The Ultimate Drum Set Reading Anthology for the Working Drummer by Steve Houghton

Sittin' In with the Big Band vol. 1 and 2 by Alfred Music

Groove Essentials vol. 1 and 2 by Tommy Igoe

Level B

The Art of Bop Drumming by John Riley

Control of the Drum Set, Phrasing for the Soloist by Alexander Lepak

Brushwork by Clayton Cameron

B. Research/Listening

Rule number 1 is listen to everything. Here are some artists that I believe are informative for listening when it comes to music and drummers. Parental supervision may be advised.

Duke Ellington
Miles Davis – Kind of Blue
Ella Fitzgerald
Billie Holiday
BB King
Bobby Bland
The Beatles
Pink Floyd
Led Zeppelin
Michael Jackson
Alicia Keys
AC DC
Antonio Carlos Jobim
Hector Lavoe
Tool
The Roots
A Tribe called Quest
The Police
James Brown
Parliament
Cream
Frank Zappa
Black Sabbath
Any album that has Steve Gadd

Dr. Benjamin Fraley is a percussionist, composer, and educator currently residing in Eau Claire, WI. He holds a Bachelors of Music degree in Percussion Performance and Music Management from The Hartt School at the University of Hartford, a Masters of Music degree and Artist Diploma from the College-Conservatory of Music at the University of Cincinnati, and a Doctor of Music degree from Florida State University. A veteran of many musical genres and percussion disciplines, Dr. Fraley has performed and trained throughout Europe and North America. Dr. Fraley is a proud endorser of Pearl/Adams Drums and Percussion, Remo Drumheads and Percussion, Innovative Percussion, and Grover Pro Percussion. Dr. Fraley is also a member of the Percussive Arts Society, the College Music Society, the National Association of College Wind and Percussion Instructors, and the National Association for Music Educators.



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