
T h e E n c y c l o p e d i a o f

DOUBLE BASS DRUMMING

B y B o b b y R o n d i n e l l i & M i c h a e l L a u r e n

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ISBN 978-0-634-01467-3

Published by
Modern Drummer Publications, Inc.
12 Old Bridge Road
Cedar Grove, NJ 07009 USA

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Introduction

The Encyclopedia Of Double Bass Drumming is a progressive approach for developing a comprehensive double bass drum or double pedal drumming style. By practicing the materials found in this book your ability to play double bass will greatly improve.

This book has been written right-foot lead for practical notational purposes. However, there really are no rules when playing double bass. In fact, various “footing” possibilities have been included where appropriate. (The term “footings” is used throughout the book to describe the foot combinations [right or left] to be used for a given exercise.) You may find it more comfortable to lead with your left foot. Experiment and see what works best for you. Also, you can play the examples with either a heels-up or heels-down approach.

The authors believe that beginning to advanced drummers will find this encyclopedia beneficial and rewarding. All chapters that contain beats also include basic warm-ups, fills, and a combination of beats and fills in various phrase lengths. If a double bass drum rhythm presents a problem, try playing it first with your hands. Once you can hear the rhythm, your feet will learn it more quickly.

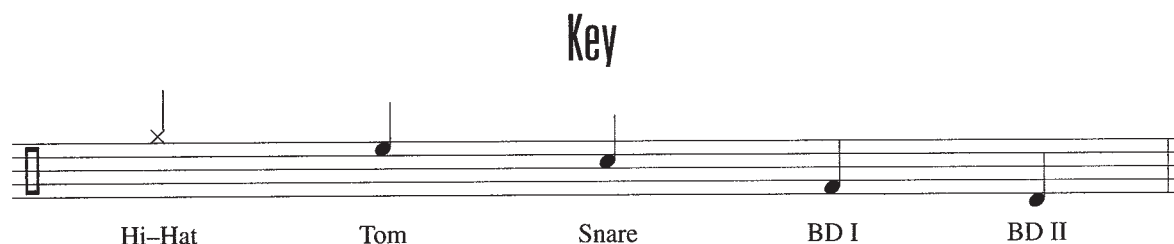
Finally, this book incorporates a variety of styles including rock, funk, and blues. Double bass drumming has no stylistic limitations.

Acknowledgments

Thanks to Michael Joos and the Long Island Drum & Guitar Center of Medford, New York for making this book possible.

Bobby Rondinelli would like to thank GMS drums, Paiste cymbals and gongs, Gibraltar pedals and hardware, Vater sticks, Attack drumheads, Community Professional loudspeakers, May drum miking systems, Hardcase cases, Zero Halliburton cases, and Brite Stuff cleaner.

Michael Lauren would like to thank Zildjian cymbals and sticks, Rhythm Tech percussion, and Remo drumheads.



Getting Started With Double Bass

Although there are no rules or absolutes when playing double bass, here are a few suggestions and concepts to think about when first getting started.

Where you sit in relation to your bass drum (or drums) and how high or low you sit are probably the first things you should consider. Everybody sits differently, but your seat should be positioned where, when your arms are relaxed at your side and your elbows are bent at about a 90° angle, your sticks can reach the center of the snare drum. When your hands are at their lowest point, they should not interfere with the up and down motion of your legs.

How close you position yourself to the drum is also an important factor. If you sit too far back, you're probably going to experience back problems. But if you're too close, your legs will eventually cramp up. Your legs should always be in a natural position. Finding the proper sitting balance for your body type is critical for relaxed playing.

In general, you should sit at a height where your thighs are parallel to the floor. Of course, experiment with different seat heights until you feel comfortable. Don't forget to check how your left foot feels on the hi-hat as well as the second bass drum. Your feet should be in a natural position in relation to the pedal board.

The position of your feet on the pedals is the next thing to consider. Finding the "sweet spot" to get the most volume, speed, and control with the least amount of expended energy is your goal. Here's one way to find that spot: Place your foot at the top of the pedal board. Play simple quarter notes. Then slide your foot down in one-inch increments until you reach the point where your volume doubles with no change in effort. *That's* your "sweet spot." (When you go past that point you'll find it more difficult to play.) You might want to put a piece of tape on your pedal board to mark the sweet spot. Follow the same procedure for the other pedal.

Adjusting the pedal beater position is another point to consider. The shaft should be set at a height where the beater strikes as close to the center of the head as possible. If you're looking for more power, the beater's starting point should be as far back as possible, without hitting your foot. Remember, there are no absolutes.

Pedal tension is also very personal. A good place to begin to find the feel that's right for you is a medium tension. But keep in mind that if the tension is too loose, the beater will flop dead on the head. And a very tight spring will have you fighting the pedal. You should be able to push on the pedal with a strong but relaxed motion and get a comfortable response.

While you can play double bass with a heels-up or heels-down approach, we recommend that you play the pedals with the balls of your feet, keeping your heels close to the pedal boards but not planted on them. (Don't lift your heels too high, as that will create a lot of strain in your legs.) Your foot should remain low to the ground. Be sure to keep your legs as relaxed as possible.

What about head tension? Is it better to play with a bass drum head that is dead (loose) or live (tight)? Again, you'll have to experiment. Some successful double bass players prefer a tight tension, others swear by a loose one. A big consideration is the effects tension changes have on your bass drum *sound*. Start with a medium tension (with slight finger pressure the head should easily push in) and go from there.

Two Bass Drums Versus A Double Pedal

What are the differences between using two bass drums and using a double pedal? Both setups have their own advantages and disadvantages. Double pedals give you a more even articulation, attack, and sound. Two bass drums give you a wider, broader sound. Using two bass drums of the same size, but tuned differently, or playing two different-size bass drums, can give you a variety of pitches to work with.

Of course, the convenience and portability of playing a double pedal are obvious. (And most studio and live-sound engineers prefer only dealing with one bass drum!) Two bass drums also bring about the challenge of increased physical movement, because they expand the kit. With double bass you might have to stretch a little to reach your toms and cymbals.

To a certain extent, singles are easier to play on double pedals, just like singles played by the hands are easier on one drum than split between two. But broken-up figures are a bit easier to play on two bass drums.

Applying Double Bass

When is the best time to play double bass? As in all musical situations, good taste should always prevail. Remember, too much of a good thing can quickly turn into a very bad thing. Pick your spots for the greatest musical effect. You can play busy with taste, but music without *contrast* becomes boring.

Double bass works great at the end of phrases and sections of tunes. The power of double bass can take the music to a higher dynamic level. But be careful not to “overplay the music.” Use double bass in spurts. Look for the holes in the music to maximize its effect.

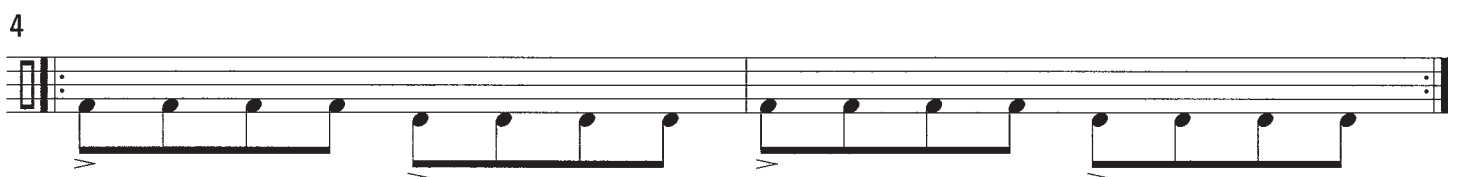
Double bass should enhance an already “complete” drummer. Double bass should *not* be a substitute for a weak single foot. And don’t forget the hi-hat pedal: It shouldn’t be a footrest when you’re not playing double bass. Musical hi-hat work is a very important quality of a complete drummer.

Double bass techniques are great when integrated into grooves or when used as an embellishment of a rhythmic figure, just as you would use ruffs and flams to embellish a figure played with your hands. Fills are a terrific place to use double bass, too. Of course, double bass is *great* for soloing. You can lay down an ostinato with it, integrate it into combination hand/foot rhythmic figures, or build huge climaxes with it.

Use your double bass technique for musical innovation and to propel the music forward. And one other important piece of advice: Don’t play double bass drums just because they are there. Play them only when their inclusion adds something *meaningful* to the music.

Chapter 1 Starters

- Starters are to get your feet going without worrying about your hands.
- These preliminary exercises isolate and help develop your weak foot.
- You're only as strong as your weakest limb.
- These exercises should be played at controlled tempos for long periods of time in order to develop stamina.
- Practice at a variety of dynamic levels and tempos.
- Don't neglect the accents.
- Exercises 8–12 are single-stroke rolls played between the feet. Single-stroke rolls are the foundation of double bass drumming.
- Play each exercise for at least one minute without stopping.
- Accuracy and evenness should never be sacrificed for speed.
- These exercises can be played on and off the kit.
- Tapping your feet on the floor *is* practicing and *is* beneficial.
- Work with a metronome or drum machine.



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Chapter 2 Two Consecutive 16th Notes

- This chapter includes warm-ups, beats, and fills containing two consecutive 16th notes.
- Although these two-note ideas can be played with one foot, the ability to play two notes evenly and powerfully between your feet must be developed.
- The warm-up exercises help develop your coordination by focusing solely on repeated two-note patterns.
- Make your feet sound consistent on their own.
- Beats 13–18 are more difficult. Feel free to come back to them at a later date.
- Beats 16–18 have syncopated snare drum rhythms.
- Beats 19 and 20 are two-bar phrases. Combine any of the previous beats to create your own two-, four-, and eight-bar phrases.
- Fills 21–30 are one-measure fills. Combine them with the previous beats.
- The fills are written with snare drum and bass drums only. Try other orchestrations. For example:
 1. Right hand on snare drum and left hand on high tom.
 2. Right hand on floor tom and left hand on high tom.
- Fill 31 is an example of a two-bar phrase containing a short fill.
- Fills 32 and 33 are examples of phrases that include a one-bar fill.
- Fill 34 illustrates a fill longer than one measure.
- Be creative with the length of your fills. They don't have to start and end on beat 1 of a measure.

Warm-Ups

