

Hawkeye Drumline Bass

Grip

The grip used is very similar to that of snare drum match grip, except the hands are rotated so that the wrists are vertical instead of horizontal. The thumb and middle finger form a “fulcrum” on the mallet. If one were to drive a nail through the thumbnail, it should come out the middle finger. The rest of the fingers should be wrapped around the mallet very naturally. It's very important to not introduce tension in the hand. This grip should be approached with relaxation in mind.

Stroke (Wrist Break)



Relaxation is the key. The motion is exactly the same premise as wrist turn in snare/tenor drumming, it's just that we don't get the benefit of having gravity assist our stroke. The motion itself can best be described as the same motion that you feel when dribbling a basketball.

Point A of the stroke is the set position, and point B is has your wrist broken back so that the bead covers up the shaft of the mallet (if you were to look at yourself in a mirror) and the top of the thumb should still be on top of the stick and visible from your point of view. If you're paying attention to your hands, you'll notice that wrist break alone cant get the mallet all of the way down, and you need to do a slight wrist rotation in order to get to point B. Just like the role of wrist break in the rotation technique, this isn't something that you need to actively think about; it will happen on its own if you focus on breaking the wrist and going to point B. Note that this only happens when going for a forte stroke, i.e. all the way to point B. Try to feel the pull come from as far back in the wrist as possible, trying to get your whole hand to turn back comfortably. As before, you should feel no tension in your hand while doing this. It is going to take practice, but it is a lot easier to achieve than you might think. One thing that I know has helped a lot of people in figuring this out is to get on a pad and drum with your first finger

extended across the top of the stick. For whatever reason, this helps to isolate your wrist and forces you to break it more.

Playing Position

The head of the mallet must be placed in the center of the head 1/4 of an inch from the playing surface. The mallet should be slightly turned in toward the surface. There should be a natural, slight angle between the top of the forearm and the highest point of the hand (the thumb). The upper arm should hang in a very relaxed, natural position. At no time should the player have tension anywhere from the shoulder muscles on down the arm through the hands. The forearm should be roughly parallel to the ground. The carrier and bass drum stand will be built to your body specifics to make these requirements possible. There should be about a 45 degree angle with the ground.

Sticks In/Mallets Up

Mallets will come out two beats before the attack, and will return to the "sticks in" position one beat after the release.



Interpreting 2's, 3's and 4's

Making sure that the members of the bass line all understand how to interpret 2's (ex. 16th notes), 3's (ex. 24th notes, half of a sextuplet), and 4's (ex. 32nd notes) is crucial to their success. Here are four general rules that must be applied in the order presented.

1. The first thing that must happen when approaching 2's, 3's and 4's is that the figure is started in the precise point in time that it is written to begin sounding. If the figure starts on the "&" of the beat, then the player needs to make sure that this happens first. If he/she plays a "3" perfectly spaced, not too open or too closed, and it is balanced and blended perfectly with the other players but the starting point of the figure is misplaced slightly in time, all chance of smoothness and continuity of the musical phrase are lost. This is the most important aspect that the player must think about first.

2. Once the player starts playing his/her figures at the point that they begin, the next step is to make sure that the rhythm played after the starting point is correct. The tendency that most players have is to play the rhythms too closed. Most don't put enough space between each note. One can't begin to worry about making sure that all the notes within the figure are speaking at the same volume if the rhythm is not correct, let alone worry about blending with the other players. If the player is playing their figure on the downbeat, it is more difficult to properly space out the rhythm than if it was started on the "&" because there isn't a strong beat after it to play to. When starting on the "&" the figure usually continues up to the next downbeat, which is where the foot hits as well. It's more difficult to play to the "&" because there isn't usually a strong musical emphasis on it, so spacing it out can be a guessing game for some. We don't do that. If the player has problems with this, which many do, they must play some exercise that has an eighth note following the figure that starts on the downbeat. If he/she gets used to how it feels to play to that eighth note, when it is taken away they will have a greatly improved chance of playing the figure rhythmically correct the first and every time.

3. Once the figure is started in time and played with the correct spacing, the next skill to master must be articulation. To get each note to speak clearly, the player must slightly crescendo each one. When a bass drum is struck it has a resonance that can last up to 1½ to 3 seconds until it completely dies away. If someone is playing a "4", the attack of the second, third, and fourth notes will be slightly covered up by the resonance of the note played before it. So if the player plays all four notes at exactly the same volume the articulation will sound muddier the farther away from the drum a listener gets. So, we play 2's, 3's, and 4's with a slight crescendo through each figure. From farther away it's almost completely unnoticeable. Using this technique allows each note to be clearly heard over the constant resonating head and it helps smooth out the musical phrase. The worst habit many bass drummers acquire is accenting the first note of the figure because they are so focused on starting it at the correct point in time. It's good that they are so attentive to starting the figure correctly, but interpreting it with an accent on the first note is completely backwards from the way we interpret it.

4. Once the bass drummer has mastered starting the rhythm in the correct place, spacing out the rhythm correctly, and articulating the right way,

he/she can now begin to notice how they are blending in with the bass line around them. One cannot really begin to analyze how they are playing with the other musicians until all 5 of them have mastered the first 3 steps. Balance and blend is not possible at the highest level unless the more basic skills are second nature to the players. If the first 3 steps are mastered, now we do small adjustments to certain phrases to make sure that each player is contributing musically to the entire ensemble.