

CREATIVE TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE METRONOME USE – A GUIDE FOR ANY INSTRUMENT (PART 1)

by Jim Bailey

A metronome is an invaluable tool for musicians seeking to develop solid time and feel. However, musicians often struggle to achieve a healthy balance between a stimulating routine and a mind-numbing experience. This tool serves us well in its traditional use (following the click), but it may be time to explore a more creative and artistic approach. In this article, I will present easy and effective alternatives to developing good time using a metronome.

Many people think that using a metronome means turning it on at the beginning of your practice session and off at the end. In this case, you are using the metronome as a crutch more than a tool. It is often easy to spot students who fall prey to this, because they can play a musical excerpt with a metronome very well until it is shut off and they are asked to play it again while maintaining tempo on their own. Their ability to feel steady pulse is hindered because they are more used to playing time with the metronome than keeping time themselves. Here are a few suggestions to help enrich your time with a metronome:

1. Hit more than just the standard times (100, 112, 120, 132, etc...). The idea behind this is to decrease the intervals between your tempo adjustments and increase your sensitivity to steady time. You are teaching yourself to feel the difference between 110 and 112, instead of 100 and 120. A famous musician was quoted saying, "No one plays truly in tune, the greats just catch it before others do." The same is true for time. Increase your sensitivity to time, and improve your ability to maintain steady time.

2. Rhythms, like harmonies, need to be resolved. Let's face it, syncopations scare a lot of musicians. More times than not, these syncopations end on an up-beat or another unfriendly count. Use the metronome to find and solidify the quarter note pulse in a given syncopation directly after the syncopation (thus giving it a resolution). The more you can identify and feel the quarter note through rhythms of this nature, the more you will be able to master (and internalize) these difficult rhythms.

3. Swingin' with the met - set the metronome to a comfortable tempo and play your favorite exercise or etude with the click representing the upbeat. This method is common among drum set players where the click represents the hi-hat. After experimenting with this, try the same exercise with the click representing other notes of a subdivision (maybe "e" or "a" of a 16th note based exercise.) Now you are getting creative with your use of the metronome. There are plenty of possibilities here, so explore as many as possible.

(This article will conclude in the next *Bandmasters Review*.)

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CREATING STANDARD ARTICULATION CONCEPTS FOR THE DEVELOPING PERCUSSIONIST (PART 1)

by James Campbell

The challenge of creating musicality when playing percussion is that the mallets move up and down, but the music moves side-to-side. It can be difficult to connect musical expressions with other instrumentalists who use air and bow motions to create their musical phrases. Creating articulation on percussion instruments can be an elusive pursuit because these instruments don't sustain like wind or string instruments.

Discussing the differences between articulations and styles can be confusing to young percussionists. In their early years, students should understand the following: staccato refers to light starts and short duration; legato refers to soft starts and full duration. As students gain experience, they should display awareness for more nuances that will create a deeper understanding and communication of articulation concepts as they relate to blending with the other musicians in band and orchestra.

A percussionist's mallet grip, volume, and touch on the instrument will affect the tone quality of the start of the sound and the length and color spectrum of the sustained tone. When I teach, I often find my articulation ideas are more obvious when I first demonstrate these concepts on timpani, since it has clear pitch and a long sustain, and then transfer the techniques to other percussion instruments.

The following guidelines will provide you with strategies to achieve proper stylistic blend with others.

LEGATO: A directive to perform a certain passage of a composition in a smooth, graceful, connected style.

- Maintain a light touch on the mallets at the grip point (fulcrum).
- Use a very fluid, full stroke with a natural rebound to create a legato start.
- Allow the percussion instruments to sustain naturally.
- As the percussionist gains experience, softer implements and changes in playing area (center, edge, tonal area on drums; center, nodal, off-center on keyboards) will enhance the legato articulation.

(**STACCATO, TENUTO AND MARCATO** will be covered in the conclusion of this article in the next *Bandmasters Review*.)

Additional Resource:

The Drum and Percussion Cookbook, published by Meredith Music Publications.

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THE MANY B-FLATS ON THE SAXOPHONE

by Neal Postma

B-flats are a source of so many issues for young saxophonists, with the important question being,... Which fingerings should we be using? Here are three acceptable fingerings, with each use defined by their context.

1. **The bis key.** The bis fingering involves the B-key and small key (bis key) between the B and A keys. Both keys should be pressed by the first finger alone—I always, always, always teach this fingering first! This is the easiest of the fingerings, and is the most functional. Currently, I use this fingering for about 95% of the B-flats I play overall.

2. **The side key.** For the side B-flat fingering, use the B and A keys on the left hand and the bottom side key on the right hand (the side keys are the three stacked on top of each other). Many teachers start their students on this fingering, using the logic that it is more difficult to play and therefore it is better to teach this one first or it will never be used. There is some truth to that, I suppose, but I still do not teach this fingering initially. The problem with this fingering is you are using two hands instead of one, which is never as accurate, and the side key is often loud, clunky and clumsy.

3. **The third fingering** is the B key on the left hand and the E key on the right hand. Note that it is NOT the F key on the right hand—this fingering for Bb is incredibly flat, by nearly a quarter tone! Some beginner books still list F key as acceptable, which it is not—so frustrating!

So, when to use which? As stated above, I use bis whenever possible and most of the time because of the speed and lack of key noise. The only time I recommend using the side key is when playing between B and Bb. Sliding on the bis key can be problematic. That being said, and I will break with MANY saxophonists here, I recommend sliding when going from Bb to B, as sliding up is fast and clean enough to be effective. But when going from B down to Bb I use the side key. So, yes, I do recommend using a different fingering in scales whether going up or down. I find this to be the cleanest and most effective in these situations.

What about other fingering? Bis accounts for 95% of my B-flats, and the side key accounts for 4.99%. I only use the third fingering in very rare circumstances—the most common is moving quickly from F# to Bb when the Bb is followed by a B-Natural or vice versa. Think about that one for a second—in the average hour-long solo recital, I use this fingering usually once, if at all. So while it is one to be aware of, it is not one that is used all that often!

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