

# Marching Bass Drum Technique Guide And Exercise Packet

## THE ROLE OF THE BASS LINE

The role of the bass drummer is one that requires many levels of accountability in the following areas: Individual performance, percussion ensemble and full ensemble responsibilities. The bass line consists of four (sometimes 5) individuals with exact interpretation of rhythm, space, volume, touch, sound quality, and flow. All of these elements combined create a seamless individual bass line with all of the qualities desired for perfect blend, balance, and articulation. The bass line, within the full marching battery, serves as a foundation for all of the sounds around it. It is the “bass voice” of the battery “choir”. While intensifying impacts, adding volume, and doubling other voices in the ensemble, it can also serve as a soloistic voice. All of these aspects can be utilized in their fullest potential. Along with being the unyielding support of the marching battery, the bass drum section also plays a major role within the entire music ensemble. Providing rhythmic and spatial reference points along with volume, impact, and motion are just some of the main character traits of an effective and impressive bass line. Ensemble cohesion often depends on exact clarity in all fundamental aspects of the bass line. This section is considered by many to be perhaps the most important of a marching battery.

## GOALS

By defining five key physical requirements of playing the bass drum, the bass line as a whole will reach performance at the highest level. Exact uniformity in technique, touch, sound quality, rhythmic and dynamic clarity are the main ingredients required to establish the perfect sound. There are two aspects of these that must happen simultaneously: Individual accountability and full bass line ensemble awareness. With all of this in place, the bass line will function as a single voice, unnoticeably performed by a quartet (or quintet).

## GRIP

The grip used is very similar to that of a snare drum matched grip, except the hands are rotated so that the wrists are vertical instead of horizontal. The thumb and index finger form a “fulcrum” on the mallet. There should not be a gap between the thumb and the third knuckle of the index. 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.

## **INTERPRETING 2's and 3's**

Making sure that the members of the bass line all understand how to interpret 2's (ex. 16<sup>th</sup> notes) and 3's (ex. 24<sup>th</sup> notes, half of a sextuplet) 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 and 3'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.
2. The next step is to make sure the rhythm played after the starting point is correct. The tendency that most players have is to play the rhythms too closed. Sometimes, 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 is not as strong of a 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.
3. 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 1 ½ to 3 seconds until it completely dies away. If someone is playing a "3", the attack of the second and third 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". From farther away it's almost completely unnoticeable. Using this technique allows each note to be clearly heard over the constantly 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.
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 4 (or 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.

## **EQUIPMENT AND IMPLEMENTS**

When rehearsing at stand-still (no drill) the line will utilize Stadium Hardware stands for their instruments. It will be each musician's individual responsibility to transport their own stand to and from the rehearsal area. Additionally, when the group travels each musician will load and unload his/her own equipment which will include drum(s), carrier(s), and stand(s).

The bass line will utilize Vic Firth "Corpsmaster" Bass Drum Mallets in the following sizes: Bass 1 – MB1H; Bass 2 & 3 – MB2H; Bass 4 – MB3H. All mallets must be taped with white electrical tape in the following manner: bare wood from the butt end to apx. 5 inches up the mallet; remainder of mallet taped in a spiral pattern, with apx. 1/4 width overlap to end of wood, just below the felt. These exacting standards will ensure a uniform look and sound throughout the line.

*All bass line members must have the following items for every rehearsal/class/performance:*

- 1 roll white electrical tape  
(available anywhere)
- 1 pair Vic Firth "Ralph Hardiman" sticks – WOOD TIP  
(available anywhere)
- "Gummed" type practice pad  
(available anywhere)
- 1 flip folio (for stand/pep-band music)  
(available through band office)
- 1 BLACK 3-ring binder with apx. 25 sheet protectors  
(available anywhere)
- Travel stick bag (zipper type recommended)

Please note that additional items may be required for camps and more information will be forthcoming.

## EXERCISES

1. **8 On A Hand**

*This is the primary “loosen up” exercise for the line. The KEY is to maintain a steady tempo and stroke velocity throughout.*

*MM=80 up to MM=160.*

2. **Double Beat**

*This is a variation on the standard double beat exercise. Pay particular attention to making all 16<sup>th</sup> notes/patterns evenly spaced out.*

*MM=80 up to MM=160*

3. **Unison Warmups**

*These exercises are varied but there are NO split parts for tenor or bass lines. Concentrate on nice, even strokes and tempos.*

*MM=80 up to MM=160*

4. **Green**

*This exercise is our standard full percussion ensemble exercise and will incorporate the front ensemble.*

*MM= 80 up to MM=130*

## CADENCES

1. **Street Beat 2011**

*This is the standard street cadence for the 2011 EPCHS Drum Line. This cadence is divided into 6 distinct sections, with each section capable of running in a stand-alone role.*

*MM=120*

2. **EP Backbeat**

*This is a secondary cadence that will primarily be used when entering the football stadium for games. This may also be used for homecoming “through the halls” as well as in the stands and at pep-rallys.*

*MM=120*

3. **2011 Field Cadence *\*\*bass line only\*\****

*This is the cadence that will be played every time the band exits the football field after completing the competition field show.*

*MM=120*

4. **Roll-off 2011**

*Forget what you’ve heard in the past, this is the new and improved EPCHS roll-off. Only 20 counts long from start to finish, it must be played strong and with confidence.*

*MM=120*

# 8 ON A HAND

Bass Drums

B Gregory

A

Two staves of musical notation for section A. The first staff shows a 4/4 time signature and a series of eighth-note patterns for the right and left hands. The notation is dense, with many notes per measure.

R \_\_\_\_\_ R \_\_\_\_\_ L \_\_\_\_\_

Two staves of musical notation for section A, continuing the eighth-note patterns from the first staff. The notation is dense, with many notes per measure.

R \_\_\_\_\_ L \_\_\_\_\_ R \_\_\_\_\_ L \_\_\_\_\_ R

B

Two staves of musical notation for section B. The first staff shows a series of eighth-note patterns for the right and left hands. The notation is less dense than section A, with fewer notes per measure.

R \_\_\_\_\_ L \_\_\_\_\_ R \_\_\_\_\_ L \_\_\_\_\_

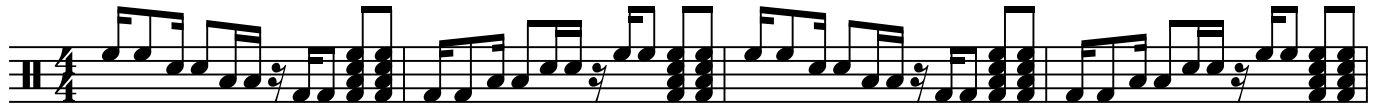
Two staves of musical notation for section B, continuing the eighth-note patterns from the first staff. The notation is less dense than section A, with fewer notes per measure.

R \_\_\_\_\_ L \_\_\_\_\_ R \_\_\_\_\_ L \_\_\_\_\_

# Double Beat

Bass Drums

B Gregory



R ..... L ..... R ..... L .....



# Unison Warmups

Score

B Gregory

**A**

Snare Drum

R R R R R R L R L L ...

**B**

R L ...

**C**

R R R R ...  
L L L L ...

**D**

R ... L ...

**E**

*mf* R L R ... R R L ... R L L ...

L R L ... R L ... R L ...

*ff*

# Green

Basses

B Gregory

Musical staff 1: Basses part, measures 1-6. The staff is in 2/4 time, marked with a double bar line and a 'II' symbol. The music consists of eighth-note patterns. Measure 6 features a 3/4 time signature change.

Musical staff 2: Basses part, measures 7-12. The staff is in 2/4 time, marked with a double bar line and a 'II' symbol. The music consists of eighth-note patterns. Measure 12 features a 3/4 time signature change.

Musical staff 3: Basses part, measures 13-18. The staff is in 2/4 time, marked with a double bar line and a 'II' symbol. The music consists of eighth-note patterns. Measure 18 features a 3/4 time signature change.

Musical staff 4: Basses part, measures 19-24. The staff is in 2/4 time, marked with a double bar line and a 'II' symbol. The music consists of eighth-note patterns. Measure 24 features a 3/4 time signature change.

Musical staff 5: Basses part, measures 25-30. The staff is in 2/4 time, marked with a double bar line and a 'II' symbol. The music consists of eighth-note patterns. Measure 30 features a 3/4 time signature change.

Musical staff 6: Basses part, measures 31-36. The staff is in 2/4 time, marked with a double bar line and a 'II' symbol. The music consists of eighth-note patterns. Measure 36 features a 3/4 time signature change.

Musical staff 7: Basses part, measures 37-42. The staff is in 2/4 time, marked with a double bar line and a 'II' symbol. The music consists of eighth-note patterns. Measure 42 features a 3/4 time signature change.

Musical staff 8: Basses part, measures 43-48. The staff is in 2/4 time, marked with a double bar line and a 'II' symbol. The music consists of eighth-note patterns. Measure 48 features a 3/4 time signature change.



# EP Street Beat '11

Bass Drums

B Gregory

INTRO

*mp*  $\longleftarrow$  *f* *mp*  $\longleftarrow$  *f*

A

*mf*

B

*mf*

C

*mf*

D

*f*

D2

*f*

E

*ff*

*f*

*ff*

# EP Backbeat

Basses (4)

B Gregory

1  
R R L R L L R L R \_\_\_\_\_ R R \_\_\_\_\_

5

9

13

# Field Cadence

Basses (4)

B Gregory

4

6

8

# 2011 EPCHS Roll-Off

Basses (4)

B Gregory

The musical notation is for four basses in 4/4 time. It begins with a whole rest. The first measure contains a triplet of eighth notes. The second measure contains a triplet of eighth notes followed by a quarter note. The third measure contains a triplet of eighth notes followed by a quarter note. The fourth measure contains a triplet of eighth notes followed by a quarter note. The fifth measure contains a triplet of eighth notes followed by a quarter note. The sixth measure contains a triplet of eighth notes followed by a quarter note. The seventh measure contains a triplet of eighth notes followed by a quarter note. The eighth measure contains a triplet of eighth notes followed by a quarter note. The ninth measure contains a triplet of eighth notes followed by a quarter note. The tenth measure contains a triplet of eighth notes followed by a quarter note. The eleventh measure contains a triplet of eighth notes followed by a quarter note. The twelfth measure contains a triplet of eighth notes followed by a quarter note. The thirteenth measure contains a triplet of eighth notes followed by a quarter note. The fourteenth measure contains a triplet of eighth notes followed by a quarter note. The fifteenth measure contains a triplet of eighth notes followed by a quarter note. The sixteenth measure contains a triplet of eighth notes followed by a quarter note. The notation ends with a double bar line. A dynamic marking of *f* is placed below the first measure.