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MP3s
Included on
Disc for All
Examples in
Part 2

Pedal Setup

In addition to developing your muscles to play the pedals, you must also analyze your setup. Your goal is to find the optimum position for your body in terms of relaxation and comfort, to minimize any roadblocks on the way to having complete technical freedom with your feet. Here are some aspects of this to analyze:

Distance from the Kit:

The distance you sit from the pedals has a tremendous effect on your playing. Look for the most relaxed position of your leg, and tailor your setup to this position. For most people, the thigh and lower leg create an angle slightly greater than 90 degrees when they are relaxed (Fig. 1). This position eliminates stretching and tension. Sitting too close to the drums (Fig. 2) causes the drummer to “pull back” and stretches the muscles of the upper thigh. This can be very fatiguing over time. Some drummers get into this position by trying to set all their drums up under them, instead of at a relaxed distance. Someone sitting too far from the pedal (Fig. 3) is wasting energy stretching their leg muscles and wasting work in the lateral direction as they try to play the pedal.



Fig. 1: Relaxed leg position



Fig. 2: Sitting too close

Among the other adjustments on your pedal that affect your technique are:

1. Spring tension: tight/medium/loose
2. Angle of the footboard
3. Angle of the beater
4. Height of the beater
5. Distance of the beater from the head
6. Tightness/looseness of the batter head
7. Front head choice (small hole, no hole, or no head at all)
8. Beater material (wood, felt, rubber, plastic, etc.)
9. Choice of strap vs. chain drive.
10. Split or single footboard.


Experiment with these options until you find what is most comfortable for you and what is most appropriate for the music you are playing.

Pedal Tension


Sitting behind someone else's kit can create a feeling of insecurity. One of the things that can affect your playing drastically is an uncomfortable bass-drum pedal. For me, if my feet are not feeling good, nothing feels good. Pedal tension is an extremely personal adjustment. In 1989, I performed in the first Buddy Rich Tribute Concert in Long Island, New York. I had a chance to sit behind each artist's kit. There was Louie Bellson (double bass), Steve Gadd (single bass), Gregg Bissonette (double bass), Vinnie Colaiuta (single bass at the time), Dave Weckl (double pedal), Jim Chapin (single bass), Joe Morello (single bass), and Al Miller (double bass). It was amazing how personalized each bass-drum pedal was. This is directly related to the different style of each player.

Exercise A is a figure I use to help find out how I should tune the spring on my pedal. Practice this on the drum-set with either two bass drums, double pedal, or bass drum and hi-hat. Play through the pattern first at a slow tempo, around 60-80 BPM, then repeat at a medium tempo (100-120 BPM) and again fast (138-160 BPM). Use the same procedure to play the other two examples. Try adjusting the pedal different ways to find the the best feel for control at all tempos. Make drastic changes to find out what might work and also what definitely won't work for you. For example, set the beater very high and the spring very tight. Play the exercise. Then set the beater low and the spring loose. Play the pattern again, and notice the difference. You will know what is right and wrong for you.


Keep repeating these different variations until you can make a sound decision as to what feels most comfortable. **Keep in mind that as your technique improves, the pedal adjustments may have to be altered.** Play all three exercises at different tempos and use other exercises from this book as well.

A 

1- R L R L RLRLRLRL RLRLRLRLRL RLRLRLRLRLRL RLRLRLRLRLRLRLRLRLRLRL
 2- L R L R LRLRLRLR LRLRLRLRLRLR LRLRLRLRLRLRLRLRLRLRLRLRLRLRLRL
 3- L L L L LLLLLLLL LLLLLLLLLLLL LLLLLLLLLLLL LLLLLLLLLLLL LLLLLLLL
 4- R R R R RRRRRRRR RRRRRRRRRRRR RRRRRRRRRRRR RRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRR

B 

1- RLR L RLR LRL RLRLR LRL RL
 2- LRL R LRL RLR LRLRL RLR LR
 3- LLL L LLL LLL LLLLL LLL LL
 4- RRR R RRR RRR RRRRR RRR RR

C 

1- LRRLR LLLRL RLRLRLR LLL
 2- RLLRL RRRLR LRLRLRL RRR
 3- LLLLL LLLLL LLLLLLLL LLL
 4- RRRRR RRRRR RRRRRRR RRR

Pedal Technique

The Free Stroke

In *It's Your Move* we presented the Free Stroke, which is a stroke that involves using the natural rebound of the stick. When playing on the pedals, you should apply a similar concept. Always think down, and use gravity to assist you. Drop to a relaxed resting position between strokes. This resting position is simply heels down with both feet on the pedals. After playing a note, always drop your heel and let the weight of your leg come to rest naturally. Do not pull up or leave your heel in the air. This causes fatigue in the leg. At some point between all strokes, your heels will be on the floor together. This is the way to maximize relaxation, control, endurance, and speed on your pedals. In time, as your muscles develop, you will find your own positions. Always think down!

Four Pedal Techniques

There is constant debate among drummers as to whether a heel-up or heel-down bass drum technique is best. My answer is they are both tools to be used to create a full range of expression for your feet, just as you have for your hands. In *It's Your Move*, we outlined the following stick heights/dynamics: low, half, and full. Similarly, for the feet there are four techniques to master, outlined below.

1. Heels Down: The first technique is playing flat-footed, with the heel down, and the entire foot touching the footboard of the pedal. This helps to develop the ankle muscle, and gives you a sensitive touch. Using this approach for low volumes is especially recommended (see Figure 1a-b).



Figure 1a: Heels Down (prep)



Figure 1b: Heels Down (stroke)

2. Heels Up: Ankle: The second technique is used for slightly louder dynamics than the first technique. Hold the leg still, and create the stroke by pivoting the ankle only. The leg stays in mid-air, with the heel approximately one-two inches up. Only the ankle moves. (see Figure 2a-b).



Figure 2a: Heels Up: Ankle (prep)



Figure 2b: Heels Up: Ankle (stroke)

See
Video on
Disc

See
Video on
Disc

