

Concert Bass Drum Techniques

By Steve Hearn

Heads and Tuning

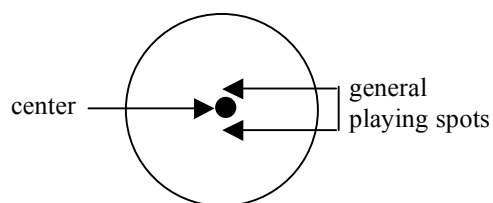
- Standard sizes include 36" X 16" and 36" X 18".
- Head material varies from (natural) calfskin to (man-made) plastic. Avoid clear or plastic heads. Most head manufacturers offer calfskin-like synthetic heads that offer a rich deep timbre.
- Tune the playing head a ½ step, whole step, fourth or fifth below, the resonating head. (Resonate head is tuned higher than batter head). Ensure that the playing head is not floppy, so that it is articulate and resonant. Suggested batter head pitches are C, D, or E.

Mallets

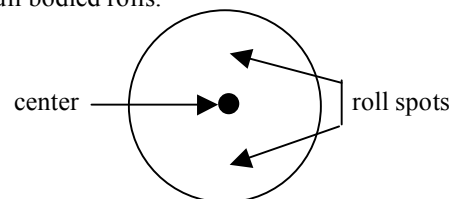
- General beater - medium to large headed felt mallets: these produce a well-rounded, resonant tone.
- Rolling beaters (pair) - a matched set of beaters.
- Large and small staccato beaters - less felt and a harder core; used for articulating rhythmic figures and sharper impact.

General Playing Areas

- Warm/full timbre and general playing spot = slightly off center.



- 1/3 the distance from the rim to the center is used for general loud and soft full bodied rolls.



- The center of the head offers an extremely articulate attack. The closer the stroke to the center, the more articulate the note.
- The edge is used for special effects (thin sound and higher overtones).

Proper Strokes

- The general playing stroke is produced by the forearm and the wrist. Soft strokes are produced mostly by the wrist. Loud strokes are produced by adding the upper arm to the general stroke.
- Keep the stroke smooth and in a continuous motion. Emulate the smooth motion of a basketball dribble.
- **Darker/full attack** = slower stroke speed. **Brighter/sharper attack** = faster stroke speed.

Dampening and Muffling

To dampen is to stop the vibration of the head by exerting pressure with the hand, arm or knee. It is important how to dampen and when to dampen.

- General dampening consists of tilting the bass drum, striking with the right hand, and dampening with the left hand. Dampening ranges from one finger-to the entire hand-to the left forearm, while placed at the edge to the center of the head. (Muffling with the forearm creates a dark/rich muffled timbre).
- A very staccato and dry timbre is achieved by muffling the batter head with the right hand (or right knee) and the resonant head with the left hand.
- Very little muffling is usually required (left hand only on the batter side), and the left hand usually muffles between strokes to ensure the fullest/warmest tone is achieved.
- A towel laying on the head and attached to the BD rim with a clamp is often used when two handed articulate passages are needed.



- Composers and arrangers are frequently not familiar with proper BD techniques and accurate notation. Thus, written note values are often not consistent with the rest of the ensemble.

- Players must listen and interpret the written part to match ensemble articulations. Check the full score for the proper note values, as shown below:

The image shows two staves of music in 4/4 time. The top staff is labeled "Bass Drum Part" and features a series of eighth notes with stems pointing up, indicating a rhythmic pattern. The bottom staff is labeled "Brass Part" and features a series of eighth notes with stems pointing down, indicating a rhythmic pattern. Both parts are written in 4/4 time.

Bass Drum and Cymbal Attachment

Cymbal Grip and Selection

- *See Crash Cymbal Techniques.
- For loud playing, use a larger cymbal on top.
- For softer playing, use a smaller cymbal on top.

Dampening

- Bring the top cymbal into the chest and grab the attached cymbal with the right hand (BD beater in hand).
- Dampen or muffle the bass drum with the right knee.