

Fun with Fills



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1. Regardless of the size of the ensemble or length of a **Drum Fill**, the most crucial note of a fill is the one immediately preceding the written figure that needs support.

For Example: If the written ensemble figure is: 4/4 

A very effective and simple drum fill would be:

Ensemble Cue
Drums

Musical notation for a drum fill in 4/4 time. The top staff shows a melodic line with eighth and quarter notes, some with accents. The bottom staff shows a drum pattern with eighth and quarter notes, some with accents, and rests. The fill ends with a double bar line.

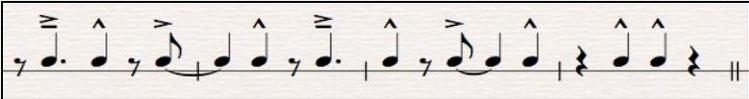
2. **Being successful at “FILLING,”** also known as kicking, punching, hitting, dropping- a- bomb, setting-up, catching, etc. requires the drummer to go well beyond the written notation. It requires creativity, improvisation, musical taste, awareness and intention. Filling means to accent, support and/or “frame” a written figure in a musical and stylistically appropriate manner.

- The fill must be in the genre and style of the chart/tune being played. A Led Zeppelin or Metallica fill on a Count Basie chart may not create the musical support your ensemble needs.
- The fill must “set-up” the forthcoming musical phrase, anticipating and energizing the ensemble’s dynamics, phrasing, articulation and style. Your drummer’s fills should indicate, if not dictate the direction and shape of “the music” to the rest of the band.

3. In general you can think of fills in 3 general categories.

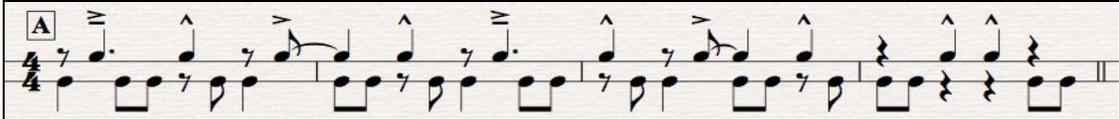
- The full out “Kick the Band Hard” shout section. Again this can be any size ensemble.
- The more subtle “set-up” that might support figures for let’s say, a soli or background section.
- Finally “catching” figures as part of an ongoing beat pattern; minimal set-up, if any.

For Example:

If the written ensemble figure is: 4/4 

The 3 general ways (referenced above) your drummer might “kick, set-up or catch” them are:

Ensemble Cue
Drums: Kick

Musical notation for a drum fill labeled 'A'. It shows a melodic line and a drum pattern with a strong, rhythmic kick. The fill ends with a double bar line.

Ensemble Cue
Drums: Set-Up

Musical notation for a drum fill labeled 'B'. It shows a melodic line and a drum pattern that sets up the following phrase. The fill ends with a double bar line.

Ensemble Cue
Drums: Catch

Musical notation for a drum fill labeled 'C'. It shows a melodic line and a drum pattern that catches the following phrase. The fill ends with a double bar line.

Bass Drum or SD/Tom under or over on-going beat pattern

4. Orchestration of a fill has a major impact on its effectiveness. Here are some general ideas:

- To kick the band in a full-out shout, think of lifting the band from the bottom or center. Include the lower toms and bass drum as well as the snare and high toms. Go for a full & phat sound.
- For a subtle set-up, think lighter and higher (not always though) and perhaps less busy.
- Finally “catching” figures means to play them in unison with the ensemble with a sonically supportive sound...determine what sounds best...snare drum, bass drum, tom, cymbal, etc.
- It’s common to play the bass drum in unison with the cymbal(s) when kicking, setting-up and catching figures. It creates a full drum set sound with a wide sonic range.

5. Effective Fills Rooted in Rudiments

4 stroke Ruff and Single Ratamacue

High Tom
Snare Drum
Floor Tom
Bass Drum

5 Stroke Roll

High Tom
Snare Drum
Floor Tom
Bass Drum

6 Stroke Roll and Paradiddle-Diddle

High Tom
Snare Drum
Floor Tom
Bass Drum

7 Stroke Roll

High Tom
Snare Drum
Floor Tom
Bass Drum

13 Stroke Roll

High Tom
Snare Drum
Floor Tom
Bass Drum

Single Paradiddle

High Tom
Snare Drum
Floor Tom
Bass Drum

Double Paradiddle

High Tom
Snare Drum
Floor Tom
Bass Drum

- Re-orchestrate all the above by changing any of the double or single strokes to a different tom-tom or bass drum or hi-hat. Be Creative...You can't make a mistake as long as you're groovin'!