

*Stephan Genze*

# **BIG BAND DRUMMING**

**A PRACTICAL COURSE WITH VIDEO TUTORIALS**

For  
Classroom  
Practice and  
Self-Study

**HELBLING**

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Innsbruck • Esslingen • Bern-Belp

## **Big Band Drumming**

with DVD and Audio CD

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# Foreword



Photo: Rolf Kühn

No one has a greater impact on the sound of a big band than its drummer. No matter how precisely the wind section rehearses and plays: without the prominent and effective support of a good rhythm section a band will not really be able to “swing.”

Just to mention a few shining examples of the great big band era: What would Benny Goodman be without Gene Krupa, what would Tommy Dorsey and Artie Shaw be without Buddy Rich, what would Duke Ellington be without Sam Woodyard, and what would Count Basie be without Sonny Payne? In many of the outstanding bands of later periods (for example, those of Kenny Clark/Francy Boland, Thad Jones/Mel Lewis, and again Buddy Rich) the drummers even advanced to become bandleaders, enhancing the recognition value of the big band even more.

Over the years I have played as a soloist and band member in various big bands in Germany and the USA (RIAS, NDR, Benny Goodman/Tommy Dorsey Orchestra, Urbie Green Band), and I can confirm from my own experience just how much the inspirational support for a band and the soloists depends on the drummer.

It is wonderful how the present booklet (with its DVD and audio CD) clearly and knowledgeably presents a broad spectrum of practical drumming styles in big bands. I have known Stephan Genze for many years and I value him as a distinguished and imaginative drummer. In my opinion, this practical course offers every (young) band drummer—whether in a school big band, a marching band, or a student orchestra—excellent, even indispensable, study materials for learning and becoming proficient with musical notation and various playing styles.

I wish the learner much joy and inspiration, and a fulfilling future with new musical encounters and challenges.

Rolf Kühn

# Welcome ...



Photo: Stephan Genze

Many years of workshop experience with big bands have shown me that particularly drummers have problems with reading and interpreting arrangements.

This derives primarily from the fact that drum charts are usually composed by arrangers and composers who are pianists or wind players. They frequently use a “homemade” notation which does not have much to do with the textbook notation common among drummers. And so leaders of school and marching big bands are often able to offer sufficient support to all of the instrumental groups—except the drummers. Without any practical big band experience or the assistance of experienced big band drummers, beginners normally do not advance their skills. This results in a nicely sounding wind section accompanied by a drummer desperately clinging to an arrangement with a non-stop, generalized groove, unable to really interpret the decisive rhythmic phrases (kicks). In the most unfortunate cases the drummer may even play everything “by the book.”

Thankfully, such shortcomings are relatively easy to remedy, and that is one of the main goals of the present booklet. With well-planned drum charts, detailed explanations on interpretation, and an enhanced awareness by the drummer of the musical setting as a whole, considerable improvements can be made in a very short time. Thus what might seem at first to be a “closed book” in fact becomes easily understandable reading. To better illustrate the types and key uses of the various drum sounds you will find included here a DVD with numerous didactically prepared tutorial videos and big band performances, as well as “sounding drum charts” to read and play along to. The six authentically arranged big band compositions are also provided on the audio CD as complete recordings and play-alongs. In the end no questions about instrumentation and sounds remain unanswered.

For each of the big band pieces contained in this booklet a full score, including the individual instrumental parts, has been published by HELBLING in the *Helbling Big Band Series*.

I wish you lots of fun and enjoyment with *Big Band Drumming*!

Stephan Genze

# Training Tips

Since everybody learns differently (some by listening, others by watching or imitating), this compact, didactically prepared theoretical and practical course offers drummers, bandleaders and arrangers a combination of visual (booklet), auditive (CD), and audio-visual (DVD) approaches.

The **booklet** is the “defining medium”; it is divided into a theoretical section (pages 7–20) and a practical section (pages 21–47). The theoretical section presents not only conceptual and tonal fundamentals concerning the topic of “big band drumming” but in particular also offers ideal notation for practical use by the big band drummer. These notational techniques are also visually important for arrangers, composers, and bandleaders (see page 5). Special emphasis is placed on the precise arrangement of so-called kicks (pages 15–16), which belong to the central roles the drummer plays in ensembles. The theoretical section finishes with a presentation of richly illustrated highlights from the history of big band music.

With the aid of six exemplary compositions (*Broadway Theme*, *Guena*, *Rush Hour Berlin*, *Sunrise on Maui*, *Blues Shuffle*, and *Funkissimo*) the practical section shows how a drummer can successfully implement the various basic styles of big band literature. You will become acquainted with the basic grooves in each style, which always function “in an emergency,” and section by section (**learning sequences**) you will work out the drum chart, which is also offered as a photocopyable template at the end of each chapter.

On the **DVD** you will find all of the basic grooves and learning sequences, clearly illustrated and explained. The split screen view is used in the six big band performances, continuously showing all of the important practical playing details. As a special service the pieces are offered not only as complete recordings but also as “sounding drum charts,” to enable the listener to read along with the playing techniques. All 24 video clips on the DVD are referred to textually and optically in the booklet with the symbol .

In addition, the **audio CD**  supplements the comprehensive set of materials with complete recordings and play-alongs for all six of the big band arrangements, including full versions without drums, to play along to. Thus, if desired, you can also make out a DAW player or computer.



Photo: David Becroft

### A good drum chart includes:

1. **Title:** often reflects the idea of the piece, or its style
2. **Style/Tempo:** includes or excludes style and techniques
3. **Time Signature:** specifies how many beats there are in each bar
4. **Dynamics/Articulation:** dynamics and articulation symbols provide help, particularly with instrumentation
5. **Groove Idea:** for example, “style of ...” to capture the mood of the piece (here: “Tower of Power Style”; usually written below the staff)
6. **Sequence:** should be as compact as possible, with repeat, Dal Segno, and Coda signs
7. **Form Sections:** organize and structure the piece of music
8. **Essential Drum Phrases:** are to be played with the band. Parts notated in the middle of the staff are mandatory
9. The choice of “Tools” for example, sticks, mallets, brushes, or dome (playing the bell of the ride cymbal)

### Summary

A good drum chart provides essential instructions, while at the same time offering much freedom for interpretation. The more information there is on the note sheet, the simpler and more practical it will follow along with the music. However, this requires of the drummer that he have solid technical skills, rhythmic reliability (counting, keeping the time), an overview of what is happening, and a good sense of hearing. The drummer is, to all intents and purposes, the leader of the band and must constantly be aware of what all of the other players are doing, in order to optimally lead and support them.

# Preparation of a Kick

Why is it necessary to prepare kicks? This can be explained using a simple experiment: a big band is allowed to play swing without drums for two 4/4 bars and then mute for one bar in order to prepare a kick on beat 2 of the fourth bar (see examples on pages 14 and 15/16), the musicians will definitely not be playing one hundred percent in time.

Since everybody has his or her own individual, “intuitive” sense of timing it is necessary, when playing in ensembles, to have a sort of metronome, a continuous groove—or even better a preliminary fill by the drummer, with the appropriate feel behind it. For example, if he would like to imply a certain tempo he should arrange his fill to be dynamic but held back.

Two simple examples can be used to illustrate a drummer’s preparatory fill:

- If he uses a lengthy and quietly articulated “one, two, three, four” count, the entry of the band will sound soft and smooth.
- If he uses a loud and robustly articulated “one, two, three, four” count, the entry of the band will be powerful and “snappy.”

## Summary

With acoustic vigor the drummer can decisively influence his band’s timing, energy, and dynamic qualities. Since he obviously can also make mistakes, exercising “elegant restraint” is sometimes a better method.

## 18 Demo Examples



The following examples demonstrate different possibilities for preparing a kick using a two-bar fill—ranging from rather restrained to very energetic. The examples are ordered according to their increasing difficulty.

1

2

3

4

5

6

# Broadway Memories

## New York, New York

For many people—especially for avid fans of big bands—the name “Broadway” immediately conjures up visions of the city of New York and its famous Broadway shows. Exactly this style of music is reflected in *Broadway Memories*, which we have included in the practical section: it is a typical medium swing, played “laid-back” in the sense of relaxed and stress-free. Here one also probably thinks of show stars like Frank Sinatra and his world-renowned hit *New York, New York*.



Photo: akq-images (Mondadori Portfolio)

## Basic Grooves



### Basic Groove 1 (Section [A])

This basic groove, with which you can easily accompany *Broadway Memories*, presents a typical two-beat or half time feel for section [A] (see page 12). It is frequently used with themes in traditional swing music.

①

### Basic Groove 1 Alternative (Section [A])

The swing groove is a somewhat more swinging variation of Basic Groove ①. It has not been recorded separately as a video or DVD.

①a

### Basic Groove 2 (Section [B])

In section [B] a clear walking or straight ahead feel (see page 12) is provided with quarter notes on the bass drum.

②