

Rhythm Section Woes: How to Develop the Pocket in Your Band

Steve Holley & the Quincy Ave Rhythm Band

Synopsis

As a bassist, my job is to ensure the groove is solid and the pocket is deep. As a Memphis musician, I learned early on how to craft a part that is tailored to the song, when to sit on the root and when to open up, and how to drive a band from the back of the stage. As an educator, one of my roles is to impart to my students the many lessons I've learned over the course of thousands of gigs. In this clinic, members of Kent Denver School's DownBeat Award winning Quincy Ave Rhythm Band will help demonstrate how to learn both intricate and simple grooves, how to divide up the parts, and how to play those grooves in an authentic style.

Focus Points in a Rehearsal

- *Agree on the version – studio, live, etc?*
- *What is stylistically correct for the song, period, style, etc?*
- *Think of the musical conversation – if you don't have anything to add, don't*
- *Play for the song – craft your part to fit the song. The Part Police...*
- *Layering the song to lock in the groove. Create a network of listening.*
- *Teach tone via listening examples*
- *90% & 10% vs 10% & 90%*
- *Levels of preparation – rehearsal vs live vs studio*
- *Have the band chart the form BEFORE you hand out charts*

the Guitar

- *Seven Roles of a guitar player*
 1. *Chank – provide tonality to the snare on beats 2 & 4*
 2. *Rhythm – think James Brown, Tower of Power, etc.*
 3. *Bubble – percolates under the surface*
 4. *Tic tac – Booker T and the MGs, the Meters*
 5. *Pad – long chords or arpeggios*
 6. *Combination – Sly and the Family Stone*
 7. *Solo – self explanatory*
- *There's never a reason to scrub...*
- *Keep your RH subdividing 16th notes ala James Brown*
- *Tone – know your controls*
- *Learn vocabulary, then supplement with pedals*

the Bass

- *Provide tonality to the kick drum*
- *Three approaches of playing with the drummer*
 1. *with the kick – Shining Star,*
 2. *against the kick – Golden,*
 3. *composite – most often used*
- *Keep the drummer in check*
- *Slap vs fingers vs thumb vs the hook vs pick*
- *Jaco tone isn't appropriate for Green Onions...*
- *Don't overplay, enjoy the groove*
- *Learn to play the drums*

the Drums

- *Lock with the bass player – pick a pattern*
- *Set up sections, horn kicks, endings, etc.*
- *Keep the overall volume in check*
- *Know the bass line, the vocal line, the horn line, etc.*
- *Don't overplay, don't overfill, enjoy the groove*
- *Learn to play the bass*
- *Your count off has a direct relation to how the band plays*

the Keyboard

- *Everything else that is left over...*
- *Question & answer with the guitar, horns, etc.*
- *Rhodes vs Wurly vs B3 vs Piano? What does the song call for?*
- *Ambience*

Final Thoughts

- *Develop vocabulary via critical listening – pan R-L, live version, isolated tracks, etc.*
- *Take advantage of technology, e.g. YouTube, speed controls, etc.*
- *As a director, learn the basics of the instrument*
- *Bring in guest artists*
- *Complement each other*
- *Metronome and other apps*
- *Don't be afraid to lay out to provide a lift later in the song*
- *Be musically mature and leave space for others*
- *Listen, listen, listen*