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Heel-Toe & Swivel Bass Drum Techniques

Lesson #19



Featuring Tim Waterson

With Jared Falk & Dave Atkinson

Overview by Hugo "Janado"

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Heel-Toe & Swivel Bass Drum Techniques

In this live drum lesson, Tim Waterson teaches you how to use the heel-toe and swivel techniques in your bass drumming. These simple bass drum techniques will add speed, power, and consistency to your bass drum playing.

Tim Waterson

Tim Waterson started paving his way as a world renowned drummer at the age of 12. At his earlier stages of learning to play the drums, where he practiced by playing along to all genres of music, he started showing the most important requirement one needs to have, to attain greatness on this instrument; desire to practice 24/7.

He started playing double bass at the age of 16, because of a band he was part of that used to let him solo a lot. This made him start experimenting with bass drums in two or three note patterns mixed with toms fills, and of course, by playing patterns to end songs. But it wasn't until the year 2000 that he started to really work on developing his speed on the double bass, mainly inspired by Virgil Donati's speed.

In 1999 Tim formed the "Drumcussion Society of Alberta", a non-profit society promoting drums and drumming throughout the community. As a way of promoting Drumcussion he arranged for a TV station to get him on one of the networks shows called "Big Breakfast", to create a world record for world's fastest bass drum player. The idea behind Tim's brain child was very straight forward; since there was a record for world's fastest hands (Johnny Rabb at the time) and no record for fastest feet, if he became the first one to play above 1000 strokes in one minute on the bass drum, he would not only become famous, but attain a great deal of attention for the Drumcussion Society since the world's fastest bass drum player was part of it. He was able to achieve what he intended to, and the rest is drumming history.

The Heel-Toe Technique

In late 19th century two techniques for tap-dancing were popularized: a fast style in wooden-sole shoes (also called Buck-and-wing), and Soft shoe, a smooth leather sole style. These styles gradually coalesced, and by the 1920's, metal plates, or taps, attached to the heel and toe portion on the bottom of the shoes were the trend. The tap-dancers would then play rhythmical patterns between both heel and toe. This technique would later be applied to the bass drum, giving birth to the heel-toe bass drum technique.

This technique is used primarily for playing fast double strokes on the bass drum, and can be compared to the push-pull technique used with the hands, since the concept between the two is very similar. You start this technique by holding the beater against the head of the bass drum by pressing down on the pedal with the heel up (1). The first motion of this technique comes when you let your leg come down freely on to the bass drum pedal, performing a heel stroke (2-

5). In the picture diagram below, you can see the leg starting its downward motion, which will in turn make the beater leave the surface of the head (2), since the ball of the foot stopped exerting as much pressure on the foot board. As the leg comes down on the board, you can see the beater getting even further from the bass drum head (3). This distance will give the beater the much needed momentum to perform a full sounding stroke when the heel connects with the



foot board (4). After the stroke is performed, the beater is rebounded back and his controlled by the now planted foot (5). The second and final motion of this technique starts where the first motion ended (5). So, to achieve the toe stroke you just have to play a note by lifting the heel and pressing the pedal with the ball of your foot (6). You end the heel-toe stroke in the same way you started it, with the beater against the head (1), which will enable you to perform another heel-toe right away.

Tim feels the heel-toe has more of a natural transition from playing heel-up than the slide; it's like



playing from the wrists to the fingers. You can also get a different sound from the bass drum with this technique, than you would with the slide. In the slide, the beater is buried into the bass drum head in the second stroke, while with the heel-toe you get the beater out of the head, which

not only produces a quicker response, but an open tone out of the drum, instead of a choked one.

When you start practicing this technique over exaggerate its movement. This is a must, because as time goes by, and you start getting comfortable with it, the movements will get smaller but as effective as the initial exaggerated ones. If you start using a small motion from the get go, once you get to higher speeds you will have less room to control each stroke, than if you had started over exaggerating the movement from the first moments you played this technique.

As you progress and learn how to control the actual rebound of the pedal, you will start noticing that it is not actually the heel doing the first stroke, and you are just using it to initiate the first movement of the technique. This is a very important aspect of this technique, because it is what actually makes it possible for people with big feet or a small foot board, to perform this technique as effectively as a guy using a long board or with small feet. What actually happens is more of a toe-toe stroke than a heel-toe, because as you get comfortable with the motion between the "heel stroke" and the toe stroke you will start developing a rocking motion with your foot, and that is what really makes it possible for you to perform a very quick double stroke. In the lesson, Tim shows this by playing the heel-toe with his heel out of the footboard so that you can see that this is really possible.

Constant Release

As you continue to improve your control over the beater, you can morph the heel-toe to a different but similar technique called constant release. The idea behind this technique is to



produce a continuous stream of similar strokes with a motion similar to the heel-toe. Just like the heel-toe, you start in heel up and just let your foot fall down freely (pic.1 to 3) into the foot board,

which will in turn give you the first stroke. Afterwards you just lift your heel from the footboard to give enough momentum for the toe to press the pedal down for a second stroke (pic.4 to 6). You then just have to keep doing these two movements to create a continuous and even stream of hits. These end up being the main differences between these two techniques, since with the heel-toe you just play a double stroke were the second stroke is not as even as the first one. With the constant release it is also possible to control dynamics in strokes, giving you enough freedom to play dynamic patterns with your bass drum, instead of only playing straight and fast patterns. By learning how to play dynamics with this technique you can use it for a lot more styles of music than heavy metal.

Spring Tension

If Tim is playing really fast music he likes to crank the tension up, because this way he can get a faster response from the beater. For overall playing he prefers medium tension, since high tension in the springs will make the beater bounce back quicker. This will prevent him from getting a hit as powerful as he wants, and the beater won't get as buried in the head also, two important requisites for rock playing for instance.

Drum Head Tuning

In the live lesson the bass drum head was a little tighter; Tim finds that once you get to a certain speed you will get a better response from a tighter head. A looser head sounds beefy, but when you get to playing double stroke rolls on them they will lack sound definition.

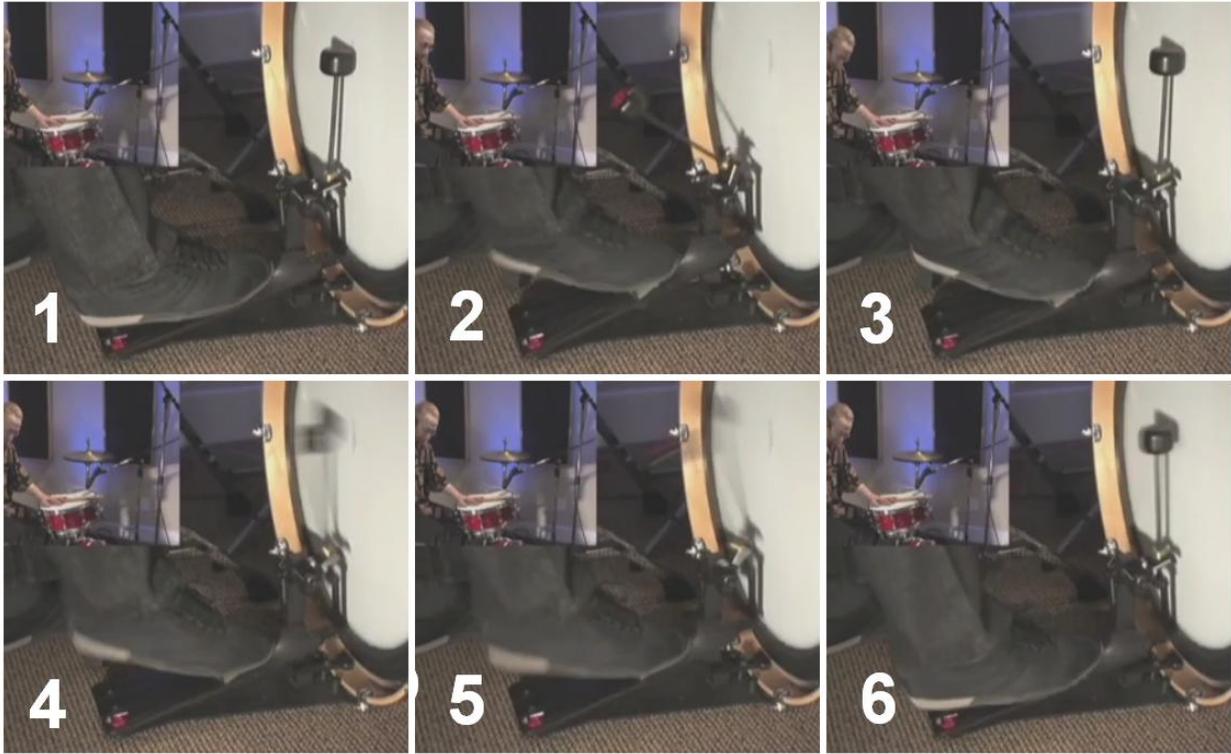
The Swivel Technique

The idea behind the Swivel is to enable you to play single stroke rolls with less effort, when compared to playing a single stroke roll with heel-up only, and to play dynamics more effectively and with a lot less effort.

With the beater resting on the skin of the bass drum while in heel-up position, and without the ball of the foot leaving the foot board, you move your heel inwards (pic.1 to 3) with your right foot, or outwards when using your left one; leaving your foot in an acute angle with the foot board, which in turn will give you your first stroke. From the inward position you then move your foot outwards (pic.3 to 6) with your right foot, or inwards when using the left; this way you execute another stroke. After this last movement your foot will once again make an acute angle with the footboard, but this time the heel will be pointing outwards. Once you start repeating this motion over and over again, you will generate a continuous stream of notes. This side-to-side bouncing of the foot, the swivel, is what enables a more relaxed usage of the pedal; you will have a lot less tension on your legs when applying it, and you will actually be able to get louder and powerful strokes when compared with regular heel-up playing. At higher speeds there will be a transition in technique, where you will start to control the beater more than you swivel.

This technique is really hard to be played slowly. Some guys only use it at really high speeds. Tim uses it when he feels that we will be comfortable in applying it, and for accenting patterns, since you can look at this technique as Moeller for the feet. Like Moeller, you perform a whipping

motion with your leg, enabling you to execute accents in between ghosted strokes, but on the bass drum. This is also a very good technique for playing triple strokes with one foot.



As we saw on the heel-toe, when you start practicing this technique over exaggerate your movements, and make you foot swivel as much as it feels natural to your body. Remember to always play this technique really relaxed, because if you tense up your legs while playing it, it can lead to injuries on your body, like on your knees.