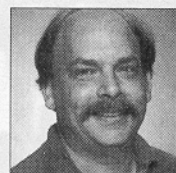


# DRUM MACHINE PROGRAMMING



NORMAN WEINBERG

## BALLADS—PART 1

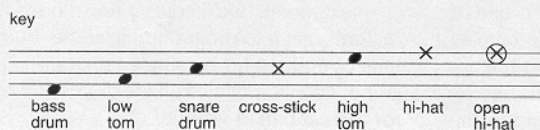
**B**ALLADS ARE AN IMPORTANT PART OF ALL STYLES OF POPULAR music. Slide any CD into a player and you're bound to get at least one dose of musical Valium. Even "alternative" bands that define their style with raw power and ferocious energy slow things down from time to time. So let's get right to it.

**KISS.** Drum parts for ballads tend to follow the KISS principle (Keep It Simple, Stupid). The overly simple two-beat pattern shown in Example 1 is used by more drummers than you might think. For a slightly more active feel, the closed hi-hat can shift from straight quarter-notes to a series of repeated eighth-notes (see Example 2). If you really want to

get fancy, substitute an open hi-hat on the "and" of beat 2 or the last eighth-note of the bar (see Example 3). An open hi-hat on the last eighth-note will give the measure more forward motion by making it connect with the following bar. For the most natural effect, don't use the open hi-hat on each and every bar in the same exact way.

Not all ballads use drum parts that are this simple. As we dive into

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Ex. 1. Overly simple two-beat pattern used in many ballads.



Ex. 2. Slightly more active feel, same simple ballad pattern.



Ex. 3. An occasional open hi-hat adds nuance.



Ex. 4. Ballad fills are short and sweet, often using deeply tuned toms.



Ex. 4. The bass drum can outline the pattern of the bass guitar without playing along with every note.

♩ = 42-76  
bass guitar



Ex. 5. A cross-stick rim shot is a common feature in ballad patterns.



Ex. 6. The hi-hat can "float" over the top of the basic ballad pattern.



Ex. 7. Giving the hi-hat a sixteenth-note groove is also effective.



## DRUM MACHINE PROGRAMMING

a few more interesting patterns, let's also talk about the drum kit's instruments and their function in a ballad.

**Instruments.** The bass drum, being the lowest voice of the drum set, tends to duplicate the rhythm of the bass guitar in a ballad. If an exact duplication of the bass guitar makes the bass drum sound too busy, you might try outlining the rhythm of the most important notes (see Example 4). A ballad's bass drum sound should have a different color than the bass drum sound used in a hip-hop tune. Live drummers will usually use a softer bass drum beater (felt or wool-covered) on ballads for a warmer tone. If you wish to imitate that color, choose a bass drum sample without too much punch, pass the sound through a lowpass filter, or roll off the highs with the mixer's EQ to downplay an overly bright, sharp, or brittle attack.

In ballads, the snare drum is the most restricted of the drum set's instruments. In about 90% of all ballads, the snare drum does nothing more than play on 2 and 4, often performing a cross-stick rim shot (see Example 5). The advantage of the cross-stick is its lightness. The relatively thin sound of the cross-stick won't overpower the vocal lines. However, one of the most common elements of ballad drumming is to switch to an open snare drum during the chorus. Try this: If the verse increases energy as it moves into the chorus, changing to the

open snare a measure or two early will give the chorus an extra lift. This also causes the verse and the chorus to overlap, creating a smooth transition from one into the other.

The hi-hat (or the ride cymbal — whichever is used in the groove) is the most improvisatory percussion instrument in a ballad. While the bass drum is adding extra depth to the bass guitar and the snare drum is catching the backbeats, the cymbals are free to “float” over the top (see Example 6). Another effective motion incorporates a sixteenth-note groove on the hi-hat over slower-moving drums (see Example 7). When programming ballads, try to find a hi-hat sound that has a good deal of stick attack. In ballads, most drummers will play the hi-hats with the tips of the sticks rather than the shaft. This performance technique, like the cross-stick snare drum, helps create a lighter sound.

Fills play the same musical function in ballads that they do in any other type of tune. In general, fills serve to punctuate one section of the tune and mark the beginning of a new section. Fills in ballads are less rhythmically active than those in other musical styles. Usually only one or two counts in length, ballad fills typically use deeply tuned toms with loads of ambience (see Example 8).

Next month, we'll cover a few more ballad patterns, get into programming some drumset effects, and see how a single tambourine or a pair of congas might be all the drums you need for a great ballad groove. ■