

Sound Enhanced

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Rhythmic Interpretation, Articulation Markings and Musical Shape

By Steve Fidyk

The following interpretation is commonly accepted when performing eighth-note rhythms in a swing style. This interpretation gives a smooth, connected, and legato feeling to the swing rhythms.



The tempo and style of a composition can also influence the way eighth notes are interpreted. Early swing music of the 1920s and '30s, for example, has a phrasing that is more closely related to this interpretation:



With arrangements played in a fast bebop style (300 bpm or faster), the eighth notes are interpreted and performed fairly straight:



No set rules govern the way a particular phrase is to be swung. Each band has its own rhythmic feel and phrasing style. To recognize this, listen to the lead players (trumpet 1, trombone 1, and alto 1) and match their phrasing and accents.

ARTICULATION MARKINGS

As drummers, we cannot play note durations with the accuracy of a horn player, but we can designate sound sources from the drumset that best complement the articulation and intensity of a note or phrase. Often, drummers base their approach to articulation on the duration or length of a note. This method promotes that all short notes are to be played on high sounds like the snare drum, and long notes are voiced on low sounds like the floor tom or bass drum.

The following articulation symbols are common in horn parts. They are used as indicators for emphasis.

This symbol (-) signifies a long attack

(.) or (^) suggests a short attack

An accent (>) can be interpreted long or short, depending upon the style and context.

A note's articulation is determined in part by: what section of the band is playing; the intensity of the phrase; the instrument range (high or low) in which the phrase is played.

The key is to *listen* and allow your ears and musical instincts to point you in the right direction. Your approach to phrasing and articulating should always complement the ensemble, and by reading and understanding these symbols and their meanings, you will bring clarity to the longer phrases you play.

Below is an example showing a trumpet 1 phrase with articulation marks.



If we expose the rhythms with articulations, we have a phrase that illustrates the *emphasized* horn rhythms. These are destination points in a musical line that create a second tier of accent texture. With just the articulated rhythm, the phrase looks like this:

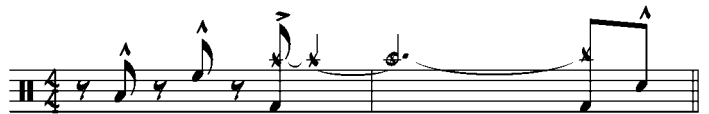
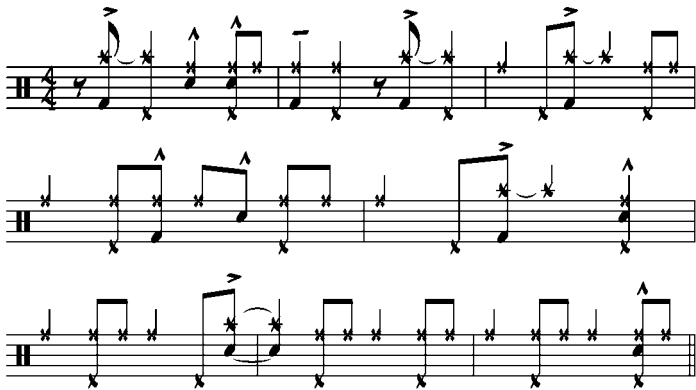


Below are the same two measures from the trumpet one part:



The line drawing below approximates the shape of the above multiple-note trumpet figure. You can try this by drawing an imaginary line through each note head in a phrase and mirror the shape on the drums and cymbals.

Here is a common drumset articulation for this phrase.



Musical examples from *Inside the Big Band Drum Chart* by Steve Fidyk
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By reading and emphasizing the articulated rhythm, you naturally attain the notes a horn player would give significance to. *Now* you are phrasing and articulating with the band!

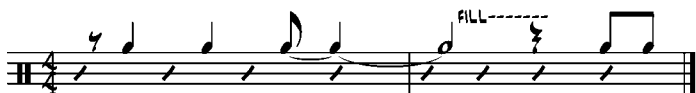
DYNAMIC EXPRESSION AND MUSICAL SHAPE

Each note we play has a dynamic. Percussionists achieve dynamic diversity through their stroke, motion, and stick direction. The closer the sticks are to the instrument when we begin our stroke, the softer the attack will be. Conversely, a stroke begun further away from the drum produces a louder dynamic.

The speed or velocity at which we throw the stick to the instrument can also influence the way a phrase is felt and heard. A faster stick velocity can produce rhythms with more intensity and forward momentum. As you practice, try varying your stick height and velocity and listen carefully to the differences in dynamic inflection. This approach can help bring expression to the written notation.

Music of all styles or genres has shape. As a piece of music develops, phrases ascend with intensity or descend, creating different musical textures and moods. As you read, you will notice that drum parts from big band arrangements have a multitude of single “flat line” rhythms that do not indicate shape.

Below is an example of a typical band figure from a drum part. Does the musical line ascend or descend? It’s impossible to tell by observing the drum part alone.



Steve Fidyk is a jazz drummer, author, and educator who has toured and recorded with Maureen McGovern, New York Voices, Cathy Fink and Marcy Marxer, The Capitol Bones, and The Taylor/Fidyk Big Band. He is currently the drummer with the Army Blues Jazz Ensemble from Washington D.C. Fidyk has authored *The Drum Set SMART Book*, *Inside the Big Band Drum Chart*, *Jazz Drum Set Independence 3/4, 4/4, and 5/4 Time Signatures*, and an instructional DVD, *Set Up and Play!*, all published by Mel Bay. He has also recorded over 75 jazz play-along volumes for the Hal Leonard Corporation. Fidyk is a member of the jazz faculty at Temple University in Philadelphia. **PN**

Flat line drumset section figure