

# How To Write A Drum Chart

## I: Know Who You Are Writing For

- ~ What role do you want the drums to have in the piece...the big picture?
- ~ What level of proficiency do you expect?
- ~ What musical references/grooves/players/concepts will they understand?
- ~ Do they need any special percussion/electronic equipment?

## II: Get Started

- ~ **Designate Tempo:** either in useful descriptive language (e.g. medium-up, ballad, etc.), or in the form of a metronome marking, if you need a more specific tempo.
- ~ **Designate striking implement** (e.g. sticks, brushes, mallets, etc.)
- ~ **Designate feel:** swing (in 2, in 4), ballad, straight 8th, latin (generic "latin", or a specific groove like bossa, samba, afro 12/8, salsa, etc.), funk, rock, shuffle (jazz or rock)  
  
**OR...**another reference that you think your drummer will know how to handle: ECM, Elvin latin, broken swing, Poinciana, etc..  
  
**OR...**if you have a specific groove that you need, or it's a standard groove written for a young student who might not be familiar with it, write it out in drum set notation.

## III: What Happens Now?

- ~ **You are constructing guidelines:** not necessarily a prescription. Use your judgment to determine how much information to give to your prospective drummer. Kicks are great, but only write them in where needed. Where do the drums need to be big? small?
- ~ **Think about orchestration:** Think about all the sounds the drum set can make. Is there a part where you just need cymbals? Is there a section where you don't want bass drum? Write these things in. Use words like "just cymbals". Use as few words as possible to convey your intention; it's difficult to read a bunch of words while trying to keep your place in the music.

#### IV: Notating Time

- ~ **Make phrases clear:** Slashes followed by repeat signs are fine, but a whole page of that with nothing else is not helpful.
  - \* Split up your phrases clearly line by line. Preferably, if the form remains constant, split the phrases the same way throughout the whole piece.
  - \* Give the drummer a double bar if a phrase starts between two rehearsal letters.
  - \* If you just have a million repeat signs in a row, give the drummer a "4" over the 4th bar of each rehearsal letter, an "8" above the 8th, etc.. If your tune is not in 4 bar phrases, split it up in a way that will make sense just by glancing at it while listening to the tune. **This is very helpful!**
  - \* If it's a whole page of just time, orchestrational notes are helpful. For example, if trombones come in with backgrounds, write "tbn. bkgs."
  - \* Please don't just write "play 16" in the middle of the bar followed by "play 13" in the next. You don't want the drummer focusing on counting to 13, you want them listening! Write out all the bars with slashes or repeat signs, unless you're writing in kicks.
  
- ~ **If you write a rest...the drummer will rest:** I know, it seems obvious, right? Apparently, it's not. If you want the drummer to play, write in slashes or repeats.
  
- ~ **Fills:** A fill is when the drummer veers away from time/groove playing and plays something around the kit. Fills are great for setting up big kicks, marking key formal elements, or filling space that is left by the ensemble. Just write "fill" above the bar where you want the fill, and slashes where the fill would go inside the bar. Write "solo fill" if no one else is playing.
  
- ~ **Double-time, half-time, half-time feel, double-time feel:** Double-time is double the previous tempo, and is written as such (old quarter note equals new half note). Double-time feel is twice as fast as the previous speed but written so the measures are going by at the same rate as the original tempo (old quarter note equals new quarter note, but the new quarter feels like a half note. Chord changes are usually happening at the same speed as the original tempo). Half-time, and half-time feel are the same thing as above, only cutting

in half instead of doubling. These changes often sound better when the drummer hints at the new tempo (write "Hint at double-time", etc.).

~ **Metric modulations:** Be specific, and notate relation between tempos. (quarter note = 1/8th note triplet).

~ **Tempo changes:** Metronome markings help.

~ **Switching between brushes, mallets, and sticks:** Let the drummer know a few bars in advance by writing "To Sticks", etc..

### V : Writing Kicks

~ Kicks are when the drummer reinforces what the rest of the ensemble, in whole or in part, is playing.

~ Rhythmic slash notation is fine, as is writing the rhythms above the staff as cue notes. However, picking one or the other is a little easier to read.

~ Feel free to write in descriptors such as "big", "lightly", etc. to indicate the qualities of the kicks. Dynamics are obviously helpful here, too.

~ If you write a short 8th note, the drummer will play a short sound. Accordingly, a longer note value will get a longer sound from the drummer.

~ With a less experienced drummer, you may want to write in fills and setups for kicks note-for-note in drum notation. **Be careful with this!** I have seen many junior high drummers just get more confused by trying to play some giant fill that the arranger wrote. However, a little guidance in the form of precisely written fills and setups is sometimes called for.

Ex 1

Handwritten musical notation for Ex 1, featuring a staff with notes and a circled "P.P.A." symbol.

Ex 2

**ROCK MARCH**  $\text{♩} = 126$   
SOLO - CALL CADENCE

GORDON GUODWIN

Musical notation for "Rock March" featuring a drum set part with "f" and "ff" dynamics and a "CALL" section.

Ex 3

**BRIGHT LATIN**  $\text{♩} = 138$

Musical notation for "Bright Latin" featuring a drum set part with "f" and "ff" dynamics and circled notes.

Ex 4  
(Don't do this)

**(E) OPEN FOR SOLOS**

1. PLAY 13 (TIME) PLAY 3

2. PLAY 3 (REPEAT TO E)

Handwritten musical notation for Ex 4 with instructions "OPEN FOR SOLOS" and "PLAY 13 (TIME) PLAY 3".

Ex 5

Snare Drum    Cross Stick    Bass Drum    Hi Tom    2nd Tom (opt.)    3rd Tom (opt.)    Low Tom

Musical notation for Ex 5 showing drum set notation for Snare Drum, Cross Stick, Bass Drum, Hi Tom, 2nd Tom, 3rd Tom, and Low Tom.

Drum set Notation

**CYMBALS**

Hi Hat w/ foot (Open)    Hi Hat w/ foot (Closed)    From Open to closed

Hi Hat w/ stick (Closed)    Hi Hat w/ stick (Open)    (Open to closed)

Ride Cymbal    Bell of Ride Cymbal    Crash Cymbal

Musical notation for Ex 5 showing cymbal notation for Hi Hat w/ foot, Hi Hat w/ stick, and Ride Cymbal.

Ex. 1

Rock March  $\text{♩} = 126$   
Solo - Circle Cadence

GORDON GUODWIN

Ex. 2

BRIGHT LATIN  $\text{♩} = 138$

Ex. 3

**(E) (OPEN FOR SOLOS)**

1. PLAY 13 (TIME)      2. PLAY 3      3. PLAY 3

**(REPEAT TO E)**

Ex. 4  
(Don't do this)

Snare Drum    Cross Stick    Bass Drum    Hi Tom    2nd Tom (opt)    3rd Tom (opt)    Low Tom

**CYMBALS**

Hi Hat w/ foot (Open)    Hi Hat w/ foot (Closed)    From Open to closed    Hi Hat w/ stick (Closed)    Hi Hat w/ stick (Open)    (Open to closed)    Ride Cymbal    Bell of Ride Cymbal    Crash Cymbal

Drum set Notation

Look-Inside-Flaredol - Page 101 - in Part 1 of 5

As recorded on NICE 'N' EASY

# april in paris

Words by I. Y. HARBURG  
Music by VERNON DUKE  
Arranged by BOB ADAMS

## DRUMS

The drum score consists of several staves of music. The first staff is marked 'FLAREDOL' and '1112'. It includes various rhythmic patterns and dynamics such as 'mp' and 'f'. Subsequent staves include markings like 'R.C.', 'Rim Shot', and 'f'. The score is annotated with circled numbers (e.g., 13, 21, 23, 31, 41) and includes a copyright notice at the bottom: 'Copyright © 1934 by Vernon Duke. All rights reserved. Printed in the U.S.A.'.

fe  
A  
a  
N  
C.

## Ex. 7 Junior High Drum Chart

a solo fill that is too hard for most junior high drummers.

This is a simplified drum chart for 'April in Paris'. It features a single staff of music with various rhythmic patterns and dynamics. The chart is annotated with circled numbers (84, 85, 86) and includes a bracketed section with the handwritten note 'a solo fill that is too hard for most junior high drummers.' The chart also includes a copyright notice: 'Copyright © 1934 by Vernon Duke. All rights reserved. Printed in the U.S.A.'