

Jazz Time

Definition and Overview

by Marc Dicciani

"Jazz Time", also known as "cymbal time", the "jazz ride pattern", and sometimes just "time", has been played thousands of different ways by thousands of different drummers over many decades of jazz drumming! So, as you can imagine, it is virtually impossible to say exactly what it is and what it isn't.

All professional drummers have a variety of different ways to play and use Jazz Time. Which one they use in any given situation, and how they play it, depends on lots of variables including style of the music, tempo of the piece, size of the ensemble, who they're playing with, the feel they're trying to convey, the equipment and cymbals they're using, and even the mood and personality of the drummer.

But, although there are many different interpretations that work well, almost all of these have some common elements that can be identified and practiced, and that when played together can be considered to sound and 'feel' good.

In this first of three lessons, we'll offer some suggestions and tools to help you begin to practice and develop your jazz time.

Jazz Time

Lesson #1: Accurate Placement of the Quarter Note

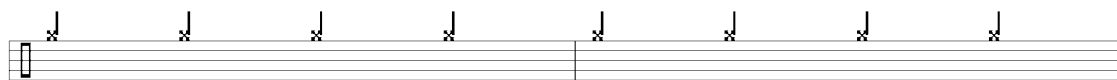
One of the critical factors to playing good jazz time is the accuracy of the rhythm, most importantly in placing the quarter notes. Accurate quarter notes are those played in the exact center of the time, not early or late. Here are some suggestions for practicing and developing an accurate quarter note.

First, [click here](#) to go to my web site so you can download an audio mp3 titled "Bass & Piano: Jazz Blues at 90bpm mpo3 file", and burn it to a CD, or copy it to your mp3 player or other storage device, so you can practice and play along with it.

1) To start to develop good time, listen for, locate, and play the center of the time of the quarter notes that the bass is playing on the audio track. Practice placing your quarters in the center of the attack of the bass note. With a little bit of careful listening and practice you'll soon be able to hear the bass player's "attack" of his finger on the string. That's where you want to place your quarter note.

2) As you begin to locate and play the ride cymbal along with the attack of the bass note, try to develop a smooth, flowing, relaxed, and steady motion in your arm and wrist. Remember,

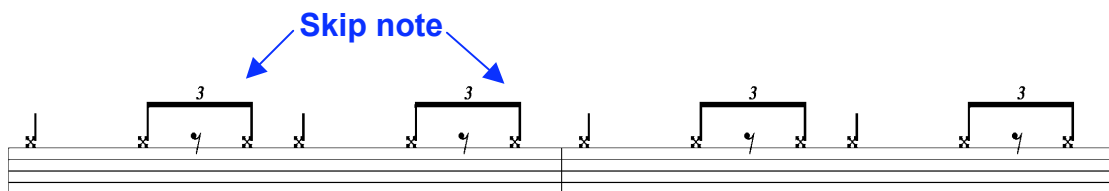
time is motion. A relaxed grip on the stick will allow you to produce the most musical sound from your cymbals and sticks. Try playing quarters along with the bass on the audio track.



Focus on the accuracy and smoothness of your quarter-note time. This is the basis for everything else that will follow, so it's important to devote as much time and energy as possible to getting this step as good as it can be.

Cymbal Note: a good ride cymbal for playing jazz varies with the size and type of ensemble you're performing with, the style of music you're playing, the type of sticks you use, and your own personal taste. Of course, you'll want to have a variety of different ride cymbals for different purposes. For example, you'll need a couple ride cymbals for playing in a big band, maybe a couple different ones for an amplified group, and a couple specifically for playing with an acoustic trio, etc. It's a good idea to have two or more ride cymbals for any jazz situation in which you'll be playing. This will give you more options to change colors and mood along with the form of the song and the arrangement. I recommend a good all-purpose jazz ride to start with, that has a good wash and clear stick definition, and a off-ride that has a bit more wash and sustain, and that can be played at slightly softer volumes. I'll make some specific cymbal recommendations at the end of this article.

3) As you start to feel comfortable with this concept, you can begin to add a "skip note". This is the note that's often played between the 2nd and 3rd quarter, and the 4th and 1st quarter of the next measure. At slower tempos, and in the beginning of your practice, it's easiest to think of this skip note as the third note in a group of 8th note triplets.

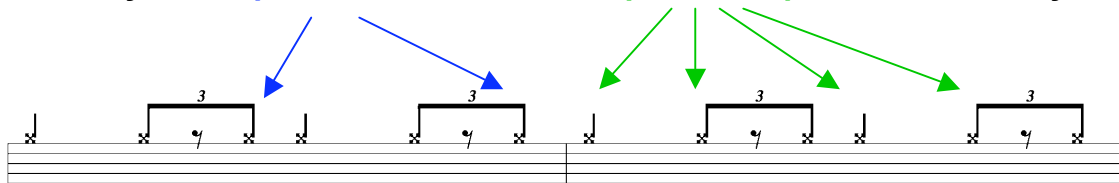


The primary purpose of the 'skip note' is to create a rhythmic sub-division to enhance the feel and flow of the music. At first, practice playing skip notes only at medium-slow tempos (practice along with the mp3 you downloaded). At these slower tempos, you'll be able to clearly hear the triplet basis of the rhythm you're playing. Place the skip note between the 2nd and 3rd, and/or the 4th and 1st beat, as written above.

As you add the skip note, remember that it is critical that you continue to focus your attention on the **accurate placement of the quarter notes**. This can be difficult to hear at

first, but, with practice you'll be able to continue to concentrate on the quarters and not the skips. When young drummers fall into problems with their jazz time feel, it's usually because they're concentrating on the skip note and not on the quarters that precede and follow it.

Play the **skip notes**, but continue to **place the quarters** accurately.



4) Once you're able to play the skip notes while still keeping the placement of the quarter notes centered, you can start to add skip notes where you feel them, and vary them in different places in the measure, according to the music you're playing. Remember, you don't need to play them every other beat, regardless of what is written in the chart or drum part. It's a good idea to listen to some great jazz drummers, like Jack DeJohnette, Carl Allen, and Dave Weckl, and observe the frequency and placement of their skip notes.

Below is an example of how you can vary the skip note. Try practicing and creating your own variations as you develop the ability to "hear it" and play it whenever you like!



Now, for some ride cymbal recommendations! I've been playing Sabian Cymbals exclusively for the past 18 years and I can tell you that they are the most consistently musical sounding cymbals I've ever played. Regardless of whether I'm playing live, in the studio, teaching, or practicing I can always find the right Sabian Cymbal for every situation.

I'm going to give you some guidelines with suggestions on where to start making good choices for cymbals. You should first try to determine what kind of sound characteristics you're looking for in a cymbal (dry, wet, large bell, low volume, etc.), and whether you want to use it in a big band, power trio, piano trio, etc. Your cymbals should sound good both individually AND as a set where differing qualities, such as sustain, definition, wash, and overtones are balanced and represented. This will give you the widest range of expression.

Since this article is about jazz time, my suggestions are for those ride cymbals that will sound consistently good in the greatest number of jazz situations. I like to choose my ride

cymbal first (since that what I'll be playing the most), then select my high hats to match the sound of my ride, then lastly my crash cymbals. Here's a good rule-of-thumb: hand-hammered cymbals tend to sound darker and warmer - sounds that are preferred by many jazz drummers as they tend to blend easier with the style of music. Here is a partial and personal list of Sabian Ride Cymbals, most of which are hand-hammered, that all sound good with jazz:

Type	Type	Weight	Characteristics
<i>Jazz Ride</i>	HH	thin	traditional sound, dark tone
<i>Duo Ride</i>	HH	med. thin	partially dry and wet
<i>Vintage Ride</i>	HH	med. thin	good range of volume, versatile
<i>Medium Ride</i>	HH	medium	warm, 'woody' stick response, musical
<i>Classic Ride</i>	HH	medium	warm, rich stick response, strong bell
<i>Manhattan Jazz Ride</i>	HHX	med. thin	traditional sound, highly responsive
<i>Evolution Ride</i>	HHX	med. thin	bright, crisp attack, low undertone, great bell
<i>Ed Shaughnessy Ride</i>		med. heavy	crisp-response, versatile, big-band to rock
<i>Jack DeJohnette Ride</i>		medium	soft feel, great stick sound

Make sure you check out the Sabian web site for descriptions and a list of all the cymbals they have available. Once there, you'll also find cymbal set-ups of some of world's top drummers, so you can see what they play. Remember, your sound is one of the primary characteristics that defines your uniqueness as a player, so choose your equipment carefully since it identifies your voice as a musician!

Stay tuned! In the next two articles about jazz time, we'll talk about the 'horizontal', or rhythmic, placement of the skip note, after which we'll examine the 'vertical', or volume, placement of the various notes in your jazz time rhythm.

Marc Dicciani is Director of the School of Music at The University of the Arts in Philadelphia, and a Professor of Drumset. He has performed with Randy Brecker, Jon Faddis, Robin Eubanks, Diane Schuur, Phil Woods, Clark Terry, Jimmy Bruno, Charles Fambrough, John Fedchock, Gerald Veasley, Lew Soloff, Sammy Davis Jr., Mel Torme, and Natalie Cole, and worked on sessions with Doc Severinsen, Pete Christlieb, James Moody, Ernie Watts, Stevie Wonder, and Lee Ritenour. He has lectured and conducted countless clinics at colleges including American University, University of Nevada Las Vegas, Villanova University, University of Southern California, Duquense University, Cal State Long Beach, University of Delaware, Temple University, the Liverpool Institute of the Performing Arts, and at conferences for the International Association of Jazz Education, Pennsylvania Music Educators Association, New Jersey Music Educators, New Jersey Association of Jazz Education, and at the Philadelphia Grammy in the Schools Day. Marc is an artist/clinician for Sabian Cymbals, Yamaha Drums, Regal Tip Drum Sticks, and Remo Drum Heads, and writes for *Modern Drummer* and *In-Concert* magazines.