



THE BASS LINE



BASS LINE PHILOSOPHY

Bass drummers play on a single drum that is positioned vertically, as opposed to horizontally like their snare and tenor counterparts. This instrument has playing surfaces on both sides of the drum and is played using Matched Grip. Each drummer plays on a different sized drum which brings melody to the drumline. When the bass line plays together it is called “unison” and when the parts are separated it is called “split”. Since each drum has a different pitch, when all bass drummers play together it creates a full body of sound similar to playing a chord on a piano. When music is played individually each tone is heard separately. Bass drummers are responsible for playing everything the snares do fundamentally, but must also know how to split those demands up and down the drums.

Historically, marching bass drums have been used to provide impacts and anchor the listener to the beat. Modern corps style bass lines have evolved and now play a much bigger role within the ensemble.

Originally drumlines only used a few bass drummers, with the same sized drums, tuned to the same pitch. Today, the use of different sized drums allow the section to be more melodic, musical, and articulate. Depending on the size


of the ensemble, the number of bass performers will vary. (A typical number of basses in 2018 is 5.)

Bass drums sizes can vary greatly, but a typical bass line will range from 18” to 32” drums and connect to the body using a harness.

In this section you will learn about instrument basics, implement details, playing zones, muscle groups, matched grip, positions, heights, dynamics, and hand motions for marching bass drum.

INSTRUMENT BASICS

The bass drum is an instrument with two plastic heads. The heads are stretched over a shell and can be tuned to different pitches. There are a variety of heads with different purposes and you should do your best to match the head to the music you are playing. For example, if your show music is dark and ominous, you might want a head with a darker sound. If your show is happy and uplifting you might want to use heads with a brighter sound. The tuning of the drum will also change the sound significantly.



DRUM CLAW - Snare and tenor drums have metal rims with holes for tension rods. Since bass drums use solid wooden hoops, drum claws hang over the rim with a hole for tensions rods to fit through to tighten the drum head.

TENSION ROD - A screw that tightens and loosens the rim to change the tension of the drum head. The more you tighten the screw the higher the pitch of the instrument.

HOOP - A wooden rim that rests over the drum head to tighten it around the outer edge of the drum shell. This also acts as a playing surface to get unique sounds from the instrument and helps with timing. (NOTE: Use metal "Rim Guards" to help protect the rim from damage.)

LUG - A hollow casing that the tension rod screws into.

HARNES CONNECTOR - All brands will be slightly different, but this piece connects the drum to a harness.

DRUM HEAD - An interchangeable playing surface that can be tuned to change the pitch of the drum. The top head is thicker than the bottom head and has more durability.

SHELL - A circular, hollow shell (Often wooden or carbon fiber) that the drum hardware is connected to. When you strike the drum, air moves through the shell and helps create the sound you hear from the instrument.

DRUM SIZES - Snare and Tenor performers all play the same sized instrument. Bass drummers play on different sized drums per person. The sizes will vary depending on use.



IMPLEMENT DETAILS



MALLET SIZES - Since each bass drum is a different size, there are different sized mallets. Smaller bass drums have the highest head tension so smaller mallets are used for clear articulation. Larger drums have less head tension and use bigger mallets to prevent damaging the drum head.



DRUM 1 - This mallet has a small surface area and provides the most articulate sound.



DRUM 2 - Many top bass drummers (Drums 1 and 2) will use this mallet because it has a little more surface area on the mallet head providing a sound that is more full than a bass 1 mallet.



DRUM 3 - A Bass 3 mallet is great for middle range drums. Drums 3 and 4 can both use this mallet because it is large enough for the size of the drums while still being as light as possible.



DRUM 4 - This mallet has a large surface area and provides a full sound.



DRUM 5 - This mallet has the largest surface area and is best used with the largest drums.