



The Neutral Stroke – New foot technique for single stroke rolls

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A few years ago I started working seriously on my foot technique. My single-kick technique was good but I was not happy with my double bass chops. For many years I had been struggling with speed and although obtaining some results in that area, they were very physically demanding and required a lot of drilling every single day.

Still I felt I could not get my single stroke rolls up to a point where they felt like something I would incorporate into my playing. So instead I relied on double-stroke rolls with the feet. Which is fine up to a point. They can be played very fast and I can monitor the primary strokes and take it easy while pumping out those rolls.

There is a downside to the double stroke rolls though which is the natural Legato feel created by double stroke rolls. Meaning they are soft in comparison to singles and although one can modify that and make them quite crispy, there is still something missing in the overall picture. I wanted to add a solid single stroke roll to my arsenal.

I have worked on the "open/close" method for some years and I wanted to develop a parallel method for the feet.

First; The open/close method is a 2 for 1 stroke method. Two different and independent movements are combined in to one single action. Then those independent movements are overlapped.

- 1) right hand plays the first stroke
- 2) left hand plays the first stroke
- 3) right hand plays the 2nd stroke
- 4) left hand plays the 2nd stroke

The hands are now playing a roll which is two time faster than the primary strokes or single arm movements since stroke 1 and 3 are actually one movement. Still the strokes are completely independent and do not rely on the reaction of the other stroke.

To develop a similar method for the feet I examined a few possibilities.

- 1) Overlapping slides.
- 2) Overlapping the heel/toe method.
- 3) Moeller technique.

It's shaky to name a foot technique Moeller or open/close since the anatomy and function of the feet is quite distinct.

The Moeller (foot) method is a stroke that most people identify with Buddy Rich. The front part of the foot stays on the footboard and the heel moves up and down on the heel plate creating a pumping action.

- 1) The heel drops down to the heel plate and generates the first stroke which is played by the front part of the foot. This stroke can be compared to a "whipping stroke"
- 2) The heel comes back up generating the 2nd stroke also by the front part of the foot.

This is quite easy. It has a great swing built in to it so after the heel stroke the 2nd stroke plays itself quite willingly when the heel is raised up. However the technique relies on the first stroke (whipping stroke/Leg stroke) in order for the 2nd stroke (Tab) to happen as a result of it.

The problem with this technique for me was also that it has too much swing which can be hard to control. It also uses the whole leg and pulls all the way up to the lower back which is not good since it leads with the heels. This method is not too well suited for overlapping which was the idea.



I was looking for a neutral stroke where two separate motions that do not rely on each other can be worked into one single action - like open/close. I wanted a stroke that would lead with the front part of the foot instead of the heel.

The idea was not to come up with a new stroke or pedal manipulation since most methods have now been used. My goal was to determine which multiple-stroke-method would be best suited for overlapping the strokes resulting in a "singled 4" which is the terminology in the open/close hand technique (overlapping was explained earlier in this article).

An important factor in the "Neutral Stroke" is that since it uses mostly the calf and the lower part of the leg whereas Moeller's Leg stroke (whipping stroke) uses the whole leg including the hip, the Neutral stroke is very good for balance and posture.

So finally the solution was reversing the Buddy Rich stroke.



1) The foot starts in the down position, heel goes up to generate the first stroke (except for the first note in the roll which is a simple toe stroke played heel up).

2) The heel goes back down generating the 2nd stroke. (both strokes are actually played by the toe part or the front part of the foot as before).

The key to both the Moeller stroke and this stroke which I call "The Neutral Stroke" is that the toe part of the foot has to stay on the footboard in the same spot throughout the process. The only thing moving is the heel up and down. This is actually an old single pedal action for double strokes.

This foot method is mechanically similar to multi-note stroke hand techniques like Moeller and Open/Close and it applies with Gordy Knutson's books on "open/close". It turns out that my friends in Minneapolis have been working on similar solutions.

"The Neutral Stroke" does not come naturally and it feels very artificial for quite some time. It does not have a built in swing and the movement is not there just waiting for it to be put to use. On the contrary this stroke method has to be constructed and worked on before it starts to feel right.

But I'm happy to say that it's working

I will present it here on my instructional-video in a few weeks.

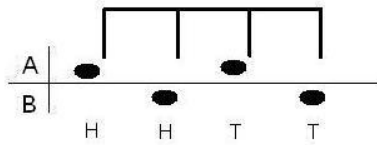
best regards!

Gunnar Waage in Iceland



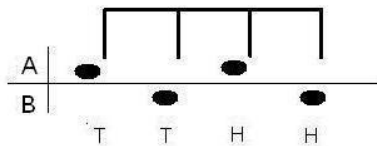
Heel - Toe

The Singled four



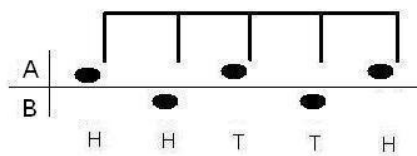
Heel - Toe

The Singled four - Reverse Mode



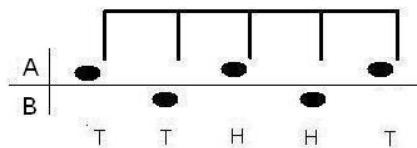
Heel - Toe

The Singled five



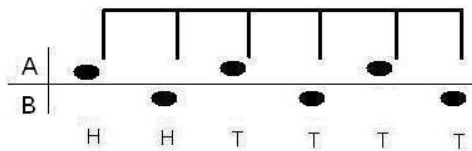
Heel - Toe

The Singled five - Reverse Mode

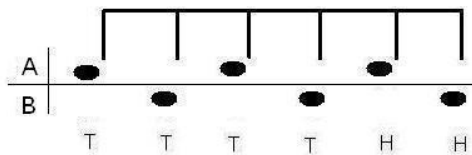




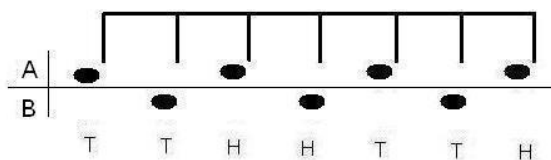
Heel - Toe
The Singled six



Heel - Toe
The Singled six - Reverse Mode



Heel - Toe
The Singled seven



Heel - Toe
The Singled seven - Reverse Mode

