

## Big Band Drumming

### Understanding Fills

by Ron Spagnardi



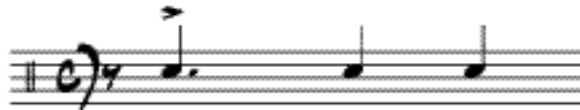
A “fill” is a rhythmic pattern of indeterminate length, played just prior to a section or ensemble figure. The purpose of the fill is to set the band up for the figure and lead them into it. It also serves to add color, intensity, and a sense of forward momentum to the arrangement.

Fills can range from a simple one-beat, four-stroke ruff to one that’s a full bar in length. However, taste and musical sensitivity are *essential* when deciding what to play. Listen to some of the great big band drummers to get an idea of how fills are used to enhance the arrangements.

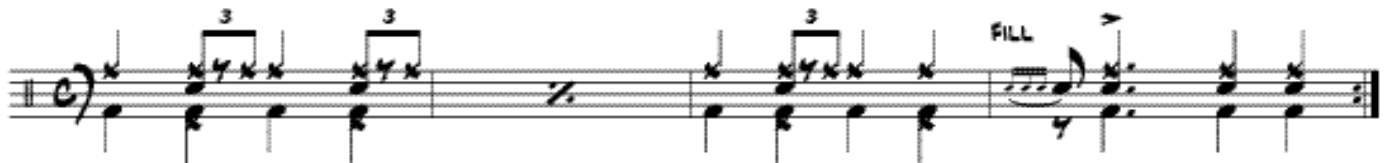
#### Upbeat Fills

One of the most common places to play a fill is just before an upbeat figure (figures that occur on the “&” of 1, 2, 3, and 4). We’ll begin by playing a four-stroke-ruff fill just before a dotted quarter note that falls on the “&” of 1.

#### Upbeat Of 1



#### 8th-Note Fill

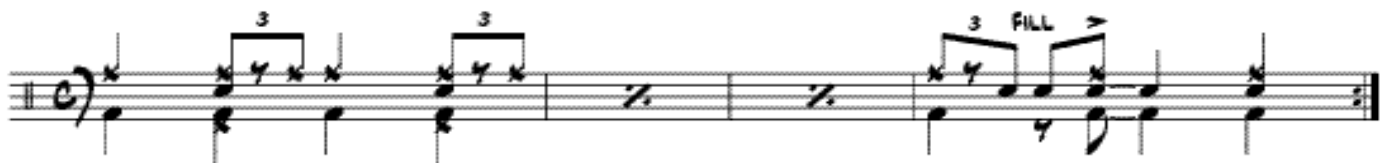


#### Upbeat Of 2



Here’s a fill consisting of two 8th notes prior to the figure on the upbeat of 2.

#### Two-8th-Note Fill



## Upbeat Of 3



This figure on the upbeat of 3 is preceded by a triplet fill.

## Triplet Fill

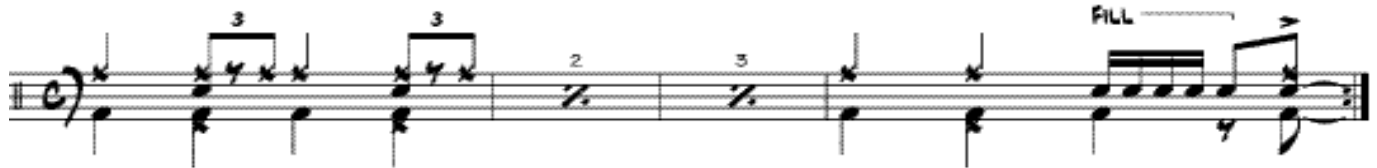


## Upbeat Of 4



A group of four 16th notes leads into this figure on the upbeat of 4.

## Four-16th-Note Fill



## More Advanced Fills

The following examples are of longer, more rhythmically challenging fills, played just prior to two of the four upbeat figures. Feel free to experiment by moving these fills between different drums and cymbals. Also, be sure to practice the exercises at various tempos and dynamic levels. Fills for the remaining upbeat figures can be found in the May 2001 issue of *Modern Drummer*.

## Upbeat Of 1



## Upbeat Of 2

The image displays four staves of drum notation, numbered 1 through 4. Each staff begins with a treble clef and a common time signature (C). The notation is organized into four measures. The first two measures of each staff contain a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes, with the first two notes of each measure grouped as a triplet (indicated by a '3' above the notes). A double bar line with a slash (//) separates the first two measures from the last two. The final two measures of each staff feature a 'FILL' section, indicated by a bracket above the notes. This fill consists of eighth notes, with the first two notes of the fill also grouped as a triplet. The notation includes various drum symbols: 'x' for cymbals, 'y' for snare, and 'z' for bass drum. Accents (>) are placed above certain notes in the fill sections.

See the May 2001 Modern Drummer for the complete lesson.

*Material excerpted from The Big Band Drummer by Ron Spagnardi, published by Modern Drummer Publications, Inc.*

Copyright 2001 by MODERN DRUMMER Publications, Inc. All rights reserved. Reproduction without the permission of the publisher is prohibited.