

Keyboard Mallet Technique Double Strokes

By Kirk Gay



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Mr. Gay marched in Star of Indiana Drum & Bugle Corps from 1986 – 1989 and has taught and written for several corps including: The Crossmen, Phantom Regiment (1996 DCI Champions), Magic of Orlando and The Yokohama Inspires from Japan. He has also written for many high school bands across the country including Cypress Creek (FL), Churchill (TX) and Northrop (IN).

The ability to play double strokes on keyboard is a beneficial tool for any player. Double strokes can help simplify more difficult passages by alleviating excessive movement of the arms. A very good example is Gershwin's, "Porgy and Bess". The excerpt is extremely difficult at the written tempo with a strictly alternating sticking. It becomes much more accessible when you incorporate double strokes. You have to be careful however; they can be deceptively difficult to perform! Learning to play double strokes on keyboard takes guidance, patience, and time. In this article, I hope you will pick up some helpful hints for playing better doubles.

One of the main points to realize is that playing double strokes (or "doubles") on a keyboard instrument is different than playing them on a snare drum. When playing on a keyboard, you have two things working against you: first, the keyboard bar does not have the rebound that a drum head has. Secondly, a keyboard mallet is much more top heavy than a snare stick; therefore, you won't be able to rely on the balance of the mallet to work for you. Because of these factors, your use of fingers and wrists will be altered in comparison to playing on a snare drum.

Your wrists play a much greater role when playing doubles on a keyboard versus playing doubles on a snare drum. You will still use your fingers, slightly, but you must use more of your wrist to help the mallet rebound off of the bar. A good concept to think about is what I like to call "lift." Don't think of playing *down* or *into* the bar. Always think of *up* and *away from* the bar. This concept leaves your mallet in the "up" position, ready for the second note of the double. Be careful to use only wrist and not arm for this motion. Also remember to keep your wrists low, near the bars, and have control of the mallet but don't grip too hard. You should not look like you are tossing a salad behind the mallet instrument!

The most important note of any double stroke is the second note. Even though playing doubles on the keyboard is mechanically different than playing them on a snare drum, the end result should be the same. Both strokes should have an even and full sound. I think that we have all heard people playing double strokes where all you hear is an accented first note and barely a sound from the second.

Using proper technique is of vital importance while playing double strokes on keyboard. It should all look and feel natural. With smart and patient practice, you will feel like you don't have to work so hard to play them! Remember that the end result we are trying to achieve is to sound as if we used an alternating sticking the entire time!

