

# Shifting Gears

## Adjusting Smoothly to Tempo Changes

BY FRANK DERRICK

**W**hen a car has difficulty shifting gears, one usually checks the transmission. When the feel or tempo of music does not shift smoothly, most people check the drummer. The problem may be the conductor, other musicians, the vocalist, the dancers, or even a power outage, but *the beat goes on*.

How do you avoid the “big crash”? Have no fear; there are standard transitions to have in your arsenal that should get you through most situations. The following examples demonstrate some that I have played, and they show how smoothly you can shift gears.

In measure 8 of the first example, the quarter notes set up the half time feel in 4/4. Some arrangements have triplets written in the score, making the transition smoother. In other arrangements, you could use the triplets as a fill to connect the two sections.

The first example consists of two staves of music. The top staff is labeled "SHOW 2" and contains five measures of music in 4/4 time, each measure containing a quarter note followed by a quarter rest. The bottom staff contains eight measures. The first four measures are in 4/4 time, with the first measure containing a quarter note followed by a quarter rest, and the next three measures containing quarter notes. The fifth measure is a triplet of quarter notes. The sixth measure is a triplet of quarter notes. The seventh measure is a triplet of quarter notes. The eighth measure is a triplet of quarter notes. The label "HALF-TIME" is placed above the sixth measure. The bottom staff continues with four measures of music in half-time 4/4, each measure containing a quarter note followed by a quarter rest. The label "ETC." is placed at the end of the eighth measure.

In the next example, the feel goes from funky to swing and back to funky. In measures 9 and 10, use variations of sixteenth notes as a fill between the half notes in the arrangement to set up the feel that is coming.

The second example consists of three staves of music. The top staff is labeled "FUNKY" and contains four measures of music in 4/4 time, each measure containing a quarter note followed by a quarter rest. The bottom staff contains four measures of music in 4/4 time, each measure containing a quarter note followed by a quarter rest. The label "SWING" is placed above the first measure. The bottom staff contains four measures of music in 4/4 time, each measure containing a quarter note followed by a quarter rest. The label "FUNKY" is placed above the first measure. The bottom staff contains four measures of music in 4/4 time, each measure containing a quarter note followed by a quarter rest. The label "FILL" is placed above the first measure. The bottom staff contains four measures of music in 4/4 time, each measure containing a quarter note followed by a quarter rest.

The following example begins with a basic rock groove. In measures 5 through 8, although the time signature stays the same, it feels like double time. As in the previous examples, the fill in measure 8 makes the transition into the feel of the music to come.

1

7

ETC.

The final example is similar to a part I played in a Broadway show. (The number of measures in each section was considerably greater.) In the middle of the piece, a slow swing came “out of nowhere” and then the piece returned to the funky 6/8 jazz groove. Notice at the end, although the time signature is 4/4, the feeling is double time. Some arrangers use this method of notation to save measures and to cut down on page turns.

1

6

10

I encourage you to remember these examples. Many times in our musical travels we come across paths that we’ve crossed before. That’s how you define experience. The next time a similar passage comes along, you’ll play it better because you’ve “been there, done that.” This is the reason many drummers can sit down, read the chart, and sound like they’ve been playing it for years. They probably have!

Frank Derrick, a member of the PAS Drumset Committee, has performed on Broadway in *Bubbling Brown Sugar*, *The Wiz*, *Ain’t Misbehavin’*, *Sophisticated Ladies*, *Big River*, *Catskills*, and *Bring in Da Noise Bring in Da Funk*. He was Cab Calloway’s drummer for ten years and the drummer for the original *David Letterman Show* on NBC. His current activities include working as assistant conductor and drummer for the Palm Beach Pops, and appearances with Maureen McGovern, the Louis Armstrong Legacy Band, the Hi-De-Ho Orchestra, and as a solo guest artist. He is also the author of *Focus on Technique for Drummers* (Hal Leonard Corp.)

PN