

Chops & Grooves

Intermediate and advanced bodhran players rely on two playing techniques to make their performances come alive. Learn these “chops & grooves” and you’ll play with the best. The tools required are patience, persistence, practice, a metronome, a bodhran and tippers. Master these chops & grooves and you’ll have command of the bodhran and become an inventive player.

In a WORD document, Cntl+Click to view these sections

[Chops](#)
page 1

[Grooves](#)
page 2

[Reels](#)
Page 2

[Jigs](#)
page 5

[Slip Jigs](#)
page 9

[Specialty
grooves](#)
page 10

[Hornpipes](#)
Page 5

[Slides](#)
page 10

Chops

Intermediate and advanced bodhran players rely on six core techniques to embellish their playing: 1) rim shots, 2) triplets and rolls, 3) tonality, 4) dynamics, 5) use of specialized tippers and 6) playing the shell. To become a master of the drum, you’ll need to be able to perform each of these techniques at will.

1. Rim Shots “Clicks and Sticks”

A rim shot is performed by striking the side of the drum rather than the drum head. Generally the rim shot is done on an upbeat. It’s easier to do the rim shot if the tipper is positioned near the bottom of the drum.

A word of caution. If your drum head is not taped be careful about how energetic you get with rim shots. Too many and too hard can actually cut the hide over time.

2. Triplets and Rolls

A triplet crams three eighth-notes into the time span of a quarter-note. A roll is merely a succession of triplets. See the detailed notes on how to produce triplets and rolls.

3. Tonality

The pitch of the drum can be changed at will by placing the non-drumming hand inside the rim and pressing on the head. This raises and lowers the pitch of the drum. It is possible to produce short melodic lines, swoops and punctuations with tonality techniques. See the detailed notes on how to produce tonality on a bodhran. ***Note:*** It is next to impossible to produce tonality on a drum with a synthetic head. If you want to have pitch control, you will need a natural hide head on the bodhran. Synthetic head drums can produce effective open and closed tones but they cannot vary the pitch of the drum very much.

4. Dynamics

To create interesting, moving musical performances, players modulate their volume levels. Too many bodhran players happily thump away as loud as possible. A master player has control over

volume at all times. Sometimes the strike is a full-throated, honking boom. Other times the strike is a gentle tap. Great players carefully modulate volume during performances. It takes practice to develop dynamic control. This is especially true for controlling the volume of up-strokes. Often the up-stroke will be emphasized by increasing the volume of the stroke. Most players have to work at getting crisp, loud up-strokes.

5. Specialized Tippers

Tipper makers are always at work designing new tools. The essential tipper variations include: rod tippers, split tippers, single-end bush tippers and combination tippers that have a brush on one end and a solid tipper on the other. Top end players tend to prefer light weight tippers. Kerry-style players tend to like tippers with a lot of mass.

6. Playing the Shell


Some love and other hate this sound. By hitting the shell of the drum or the nails that hold the head in place, the voice of the bodhran becomes a sort of “clickity-clack”. Nice for a brief change. Draws attention to the performance. This style opens the music. But employ it judiciously. A little goes a long way. To play the rim, move the drum head toward your chest. Make the usual movements with your tipper hand, but strike either on the shell of the drum or on the nails. Note that over time playing the shell may scar the drum. Many players who use this technique strike the nails rather than the wood of the shell.

Grooves

Below is a short, incomplete, list of grooves that many intermediate players rely upon. Master these, make use of the six chops, and you’ll become an indispensable session player.

Reels









2|2 and 4|4 time signature

The time signature for a reel is usually given as 4|4 [called “common time”]. Playing a reel in this time signature often makes for a choppy performance. Most traditional musicians play reels in the time signature of 2|2 [called “cut time”, , or *alla breve*].









In 2|2 time, emphasis falls on beats 1 and 1. To be honest, bodhran players are subdividing the beats of 2|2 in such a way that it counts like playing in 4|4. This may seem like a tempest in a teapot discussion. But, it’s very important to understand how rhythm works in practice. All the reel grooves below are explained assuming a time signature of 2|2.

Many players find it helpful to remind themselves of the rhythm of a reel by speaking words that have four syllables. Such words span two measures of 2|2 time. “**Wa-ter Mel-lon**” or if you are mathematically inclined say “**Log-a-ri-thm**”. These can be helpful to bodhran players in locating the position of up and down strokes and rests within a measure. Saying such words aloud as you play may help to place the emphasis on the first beat of each measure.

1. Reel Groove– with Stops









Measure 1				Measure 2			
1	and	2	and	1	and	2	and
open	open	closed	closed	open	open	closed	closed
DOWN	up	down	up	DOWN	up	down	up
							

2. Reel Groove – Add silence

Measure 1				Measure 2			
1	and	2	and	1	and	2	and
DOWN	rest	down	up	DOWN	rest	down	up
							









3. Reel Groove – Silence with rim shot

Use a down-stroke for the rim shot.

Measure 1				Measure 2			
1	and	2	and	1	and	2	and
Rim Shot	rest	down	up	down	up	down	up
							









4. Reel Groove - with Tonality (Not the same as a “stop”. Get a pitch out of the drum)

This groove will really propel the music. Try keeping your interior hand in the same place when producing the high pitch. It is way too much work, at high speed to move your hand all over the back of the drum head!









Measure 1				Measure 2			
1	and	2	and	1	and	2	and
DOWN	up	down	up	DOWN	up	down	up
Low Tone		High Tone		Low Tone		High Tone	
							

5. Reel Groove – With silence and swoop (Not possible on synthetic heads)

This is a great way to draw attention to the rhythm. Works best at moderate tempos.

Measure 1				Measure 2			
1	and	2	and	1	and	2	and
Swoop	<i>rest</i>	down	up	down	up	down	up
							

6. Reel Turn-around Groove – descending tonality









Measure 1				Measure 2			
1	and	2	and	1	and	2	and
DOWN	up	down	up	down	up	down	up
							
high pitch				low pitch			

7. Reel Turn-around Groove – descending tonality with a roll

This turn around groove is even more effective when descending tonality is added.

Measure 1		Measure 2	
1	2	1	2
Triplet	Triplet	Triplet	Triplet

8. Reel Turn-around Groove – descending tonality with strong backbeats

Measure 1				Measure 2			
1	and	2	and	1	and	2	and
DOWN	up	down	UP	down	up	down	up
							
high pitch				low			
pitch							

The Hornpipe

2|2, 4|4 or 3|2

Hornpipe grooves are essentially the same as reel grooves. The rhythmic pattern of the hornpipe has a swing to it and the tempo is slower than that of a reel. The form dates back to 16th century England and became codified during the late 18th century.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sJIDkdhrf5s>

The Northumbrian and lowland Scotland hornpipe was a livelier dance noted in 3|2. It's often called a "treble hornpipe". This form is popular with players of Northumbrian smallpipes.

Even the great composer Handel placed a hornpipe in his famous composition *Water Music*:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8EpcpNRVqXA>

The groove of a hornpipe is LONG – short – LONG – short. A common way to feel the rhythm is to say **HOL** - ly **I** - vy, **HOL** – y **I** - vy. To play the pattern make the 1st and 3rd strokes longer than those in a reel and make the 2nd and 4th strokes shorter than those in a reel. All other chops can be deployed when playing the hornpipe.

Hornpipe takes its name from a musical instrument made from the horn of an animal. The hornpipe was a reed instrument, often made with double reeds. The hornpipe is the ancestor of reed instruments with conical bores – the oboe and the clarinet.

Jigs







6|8 time signature for the most common form of jig – the "double jig"

The term "jig" encompasses many different dances including, the double jigs, light jigs, hop jigs, slip jigs, slides, single jigs, and treble jigs. While dancers make distinctions among these forms, the music is similar, except for the time signature, in most of these forms. All jig forms employ compound meters such as 6|8, 9|8 and 12|8.







The double jig is counted as two beats per measure with three eighth-notes played on each beat. That's why it is called a "double jig". Some players recall the jig pattern by saying the words "jig-i-ty jig-i-ty jig-i-ty jig-i-ty" Or "apricot pineapple apricot pineapple". Any three syllable word will work to recall the jig pattern.

Single jigs are the least common of all jigs. The general form of melody is a quarter-note followed by an eighth-note. This pattern repeats twice in each 6|8 measure. The double jig has a pattern of three eighth-notes on each dominate beat of the measure, and this pattern repeats twice in each 6|8 measure. The double jig grooves work for single jigs too. However, it is also effective to let the bodhran strokes follow the quarter-note and eighth-note pattern. That makes the stroke pattern in each measure: LONG - short LONG – short.

1. Basic Jig Groove

One measure in 6/8					
1			2		
1	2	3	4	5	6
DOWN	up	down	UP	down	up
					

2. The Go-To Jig Groove – add a rest







One measure in 6/8					
1			2		
1	2	3	4	5	6
DOWN	rest	down	Up	down	up
					

3. Jig Groove – with rest and rim shot





When playing a jig, players often put rim shots in a double jig on the fourth beat of a measure. If you count the 6/8 jig as two beats per measure, the rim shot is on the second beat. That beat is usually played as an upstroke. ① Down – Up – Down ② RIM SHOT – Down – Up. Or ① Down – Down ② RIM SHOT – Down – Up. The rim shot occurs on the fourth of the six eight-notes in the measure, but on the second beat of the way the measure is usually counted and always felt. Another rim shot pattern for double jigs is ① Down – Down ② Up – Down – RIM SHOT. Rim shots can be placed on any beat. Usually they have more power on the up-beat.

Tilt the drum a little away from your body and you can play rim shots on both the down and up strokes.





Don't be over-zealous about rim shots. It is easy to have the drum take the stick right out of your hand.

One measure in 6/8					
1			2		
1	2	3	4	5	6
DOWN	rest	down	Rim Shot	down	up
					






4. Jig Groove – with rest and a closed stroke

One measure in 6/8					
1			2		
1	2	3	4	5	6
DOWN	rest	down	TONE	down	up
	γ		High pitch or closed sound. Emphasize		

5. Jig Groove –Go-To Groove a rest and a swoop and a tone or a rim shot












One measure in 6/8					
1			2		
1	2	3	4	5	6
Swoop	rest	down	TONE or Rim Shot	down	up
	γ		High. Emphasize		

6. Jig Groove– Go-To Groove with a pitch drop








One measure in 6/8					
1			2		
1	2	3	4	5	6
DOWN	rest	down	Up	down	up
	γ				
open or low tone			high pitch → low pitch		

7. Jig Turn-Around - Off Beat Accents

This is a good pattern for the turnaround points in a jig. Use heavy accents on all the up-strokes. The final two down beats on counts 5 and 6 of measure two should be at the lowest pitch of the drum. Accents can appear anywhere in the pattern but are most effective when they are off beat. A great way to play this sort of turnaround is to emulate the clave rhythm that is so popular in Afro-Cuban music.

1st measure						2nd measure					
1			2			1			2		
1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
DOWN	rest	down	UP	down	UP	down	UP	down	UP	down	down
	γ										
Low pitch		Low pitch	high pitch	→ low pitch							

8. Jig Turn-Around Off Beat Accents - Standard seven-stroke African Bell Pattern
Some players find this pattern easier if played with all down strokes.

1st measure						2nd measure					
1			2			1			2		
1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6
DOWN	rest	down	rest	UP	down	rest	DOWN	rest	DOWN	rest	UP
	γ		γ			γ		γ		γ	
Low pitch		Low pitch	high pitch	→ low pitch							

9. Jig Turn-Around – a Roll

A very common practice is to fill the turn-around measures with a continuous roll.

Slip Jigs

9/8 time signature

1. Slip Jig Basic Groove

The 9/8 time signature divides into three groups of three eighth-notes in each measure. Musicians and dancers feel the pulse in counts of three. The simple arithmetic of the odd-numbered count means that the tipper begins each measure on a different stroke. While the pattern is simple, it is easy to lose track of the downbeat.

Measure 1									Measure 2								
Beat 1			Beat 2			Beat 3			Beat 1			Beat 2			Beat 3		
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
DOWN	up	down	UP	down	up	DOWN	up	down	UP	down	up	DOWN	up	down	UP	down	up

2. Slip Jig Groove - Every Bar begins on a DOWN Stroke

Measure 1									Measure 2								
Beat 1			Beat 2			Beat 3			Beat 1			Beat 2			Beat 3		
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
DOWN	rest	up	DOWN	up	down	UP	down	up	DOWN	rest	up	DOWN	up	down	UP	down	up
	γ									γ							

3. Slip Jig Groove – the go-to jig groove adapted to 9/8 time

Measure 1									Measure 2								
Beat 1			Beat 2			Beat 3			Beat 1			Beat 2			Beat 3		
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
DOWN	rest	down	UP	down	up	DOWN	rest	up	DOWN	rest	down	UP	down	up	DOWN	rest	up
	γ						γ			γ						γ	










4. Chops & Grooves

All of these slip jig patterns can be enhanced by inserting rim shots, tonality, swoops, and triplets.

Slides

12|8

The slide form is another jig. The compound meter is treated just like all other jigs. But in the case of slides there are twelve eighth-notes in each measure. So, the count in each measure is four with three eighth-notes played on each count. The slide is about the fastest tempo of all traditional Irish music. The tempo usually runs about 150 bpm.

One Measure of 12 8											
1			2			3			4		
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
DOWN	rest	up	DOWN	rest	up	DOWN	rest	up	DOWN	up	DOWN
	γ			γ			γ				

Specialty Grooves

1. Reflection









Careful listening is a skill that all intermediate and advanced bodhran players exhibit. It's true that the drum keeps the rhythm. However, the job of a bodhran player also entails making the lead voices sound great. One of the ways to do this is to listen closely to the rhythmic patterns of the melody or the rhythm guitarist. Emulate those patterns in the stroke patterns selected to support the performance. The emulation does not have to be one-for-one every time. Copy the rhythm patterns a measure or so at a time. This will break up the bodhran performance and heighten listener interest in the ensemble.

Rock-n-Roll – Pop – Country

4|4

I use some variant of this groove when playing with singer-songwriters, pop, or country musicians. Think of the human heartbeat, that “lub – dub” rhythm. Insert that into the performance. Almost anywhere will work. Don't forget the “chops”! Tone, triplets and all those techniques work well in these grooves. I also prefer playing these patterns with a brush rather than a solid tipper. Some tipper makers offer brushes. I have one. But, you can get a bookbinding glue brush that works very well for a lot less money. A book binding glue brush costs about \$10.

Where there are two DOWN strokes the technique is called “double down”. The first down-stroke does not follow through. It is only half a stroke. Some call this first half-down stroke a “flat” stroke. The second follows through on a down-stroke. DO NOT reposition the tipper at the top of the drum. The second down stroke simply follows through from the first.

One Measure of 4/4							
1	and	2	and	3	and	4	and
DOWN	up	down	up	DOWN	DOWN	up	DOWN
							







Mazurkas

3/4

The common waltz is in 3/4 meter with the emphasis on beat one of each measure. In the worst case, it becomes oom – pha music. Mazurkas are also in 3/4 time. But the accents come either on the second or third beat of the measure. The tempo of a mazurka is generally fast. Mazurkas originated in Poland. Chopin began composing them in about 1825 and made them quite popular. In Ireland, mazurkas tend to be played mostly in County Donegal. The mazurka is a couple's dance.





1. Basic Mazurka

Move the heavy down stroke to beat 3 for a change or to follow the melodic line.

One Measure in 3/4					
1	and	2	and	3	and
down	up	DOWN	up	down	up
					

2. Basic Mazurka – double beat accent

Try putting a triplet on beats one, three or two in order to keep the groove interesting.

One Measure in 3/4					
1	and	2	and	3	and
down	rest	DOWN	up	DOWN	rest
	γ				γ

7/8 meter

Thanks go to the fabulous percussionist Lucy Randall who developed these grooves. See her beautiful performance with Brendan Powers on harmonica at this link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=avTlwH122mI>

Watch her explain her 7/8 groove at this link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZNNLVX74tcc>

These patterns demand a lot of attention and practice. However, these are great skill builders. And you never know when you might meet a harmonica player from Bulgaria!

1. 7/8 Basic Groove

Double Down on the 7th beat so that beat 1 is always on the down beat even though the measure has an odd number of beats

One Measure in 7/8							One Measure in 7/8						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
D	U	D	U	D	U	D	D	U	D	U	D	U	D

A more sophisticated approach is to break up the groove into three groups of 2 and one group of 3 with the accent always on beat 1.

2. 7/8 Double down on group 3

Group 1		Group 2		Group 3			Group 1		Group 2		Group 3		
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
D	U	D	U	D	U	D	D	U	D	U	D	U	D

3. 7/8 Change the order - double down on group 1

Group 1			Group 2		Group 3		Group 1			Group 2		Group 3	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
D	U	D	D	U	D	U	D	U	D	D	U	D	U

4. 7/8 Change the order - double down on group 2

Group 1		Group 2			Group 3		Group 1		Group 2			Group 3	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
D	U	D	U	D	D	U	D	U	D	U	D	D	U

5|4 Basic Groove

Another complex time signature is 5|4. Think of this as one measure in 3|4 followed by one measure in 2|2

Group 1 as though in 3 4 meter						Group 2 as though in 2 2 meter			
1	and	2	and	3	and	4	and	5	and
D	U	D	U	D	U	D	rest	D	rest

To vary the groove, move group 2 to the beginning of the measure. That makes the order 2|2 and 3|4.