

Interpreting Roll Passages In 6/8

By Jeff Hoke

As a result of fundamental material being initially introduced to students in quarter based time signatures, there is often confusion when transferring this material to eighth based time signatures, specifically 6/8.

One challenging aspect of performing snare drum literature in 6/8 is the interpretation of roll passages. An initial consideration should be tempo. If the tempo is such that the six pulses per measure are comfortably felt and counted, the rolls should be executed with the lead hand playing the pulse.

The notation shows a 6/8 time signature. The first part, labeled "Hand motion", consists of two measures of eighth notes. The first measure has six notes with a bracket above them, and the second measure has six notes with a bracket above them. The notes are labeled R, L, R, L, R, L, R, L, R, L, R, L, R. The second part, labeled "Roll", shows a single measure with a roll starting on the first eighth note and ending on the sixth eighth note, with a bracket above it. The notes are labeled R and R.

If the tempo is brighter and an "in 2" feel is used, each hand motion would represent a beat of the measure.

The notation shows a 6/8 time signature with "(In 2)" above it. The first part, labeled "Hand motion", consists of two measures of eighth notes. The first measure has four notes with a bracket above them, and the second measure has two notes with a bracket above them. The notes are labeled R, L, R, L, R, L, R. The second part, labeled "Roll", shows a single measure with a roll starting on the first eighth note and ending on the sixth eighth note, with a bracket above it. The notes are labeled R and R.

Alternatively, the use of duple groupings (groups of four or eight notes) may be used in order to achieve a good quality of sound by means of a comfortable physical motion.

The notation shows a 6/8 time signature. The first part, labeled "Moderato", consists of two measures. The first measure has four notes with a bracket above them labeled "4", and the second measure has two notes with a bracket above them labeled "4". The notes are labeled R, L, R, L, R, R. The second part, labeled "Largo", consists of two measures. The first measure has eight notes with a bracket above them labeled "8", and the second measure has two notes with a bracket above them labeled "8". The notes are labeled R, L, R, L, R, L, R, L, R, R.

An additional consideration should be that of style. If the material is to be performed as part of a symphonic or orchestral work, then the roll should be interpreted as a closed stroke roll. If the work is more rudimental in nature, then the roll would be interpreted as an open stroke roll.

Once tempo and style have been taken into consideration, the next step is to draw a direct relationship between rolls in quarter and cut time with that of 6/8 and 6/8 in two. This interpretative process is what I refer to as "parallel interpretation". Using this approach, the student draws upon previously learned material as a means of interpreting that which is new. The following examples will clarify specific

relationships.

Let's begin with the half note roll. This roll is played as a 17 stroke roll in 2/4 and 6/8 and as a 9 stroke roll in cut time and 6/8 in 2.

The first row shows two musical staves. The left staff is in 2/4 time with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). It contains a half note roll starting on G4, with the number '17' above it. The right staff is in cut time (C) with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). It contains a half note roll starting on G4, with the number '9' above it. The second row shows two musical staves. The left staff is in 6/8 time with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). It contains a half note roll starting on G4, with the number '17' above it. The right staff is in 6/8 in 2 time with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). It contains a half note roll starting on G4, with the number '9' above it and '(In 2)' written above the staff.

Next, the dotted quarter note roll. Here the roll is played as a 13 stroke roll in 2/4 and 6/8 and as a 7 stroke in cut time and 6/8 in 2.

The first row shows two musical staves. The left staff is in 2/4 time with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). It contains a dotted quarter note roll starting on G4, with the number '13' above it. The right staff is in cut time (C) with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). It contains a dotted quarter note roll starting on G4, with the number '7' above it. The second row shows two musical staves. The left staff is in 6/8 time with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). It contains a dotted quarter note roll starting on G4, with the number '13' above it. The right staff is in 6/8 in 2 time with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). It contains a dotted quarter note roll starting on G4, with the number '7' above it and '(In 2)' written above the staff.

In the case of the quarter note roll, the roll is played as a 9 stroke in 2/4 and 6/8 and as a 5 stroke in cut time and 6/8 in 2.

The first row shows two musical staves. The left staff is in 2/4 time with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). It contains two quarter note rolls starting on G4, with the number '9' above each. The right staff is in cut time (C) with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). It contains two quarter note rolls starting on G4, with the number '5' above each. The second row shows two musical staves. The left staff is in 6/8 time with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). It contains two quarter note rolls starting on G4, with the number '9' above each. The right staff is in 6/8 in 2 time with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). It contains two quarter note rolls starting on G4, with the number '5' above each and '(in 2)' written above the staff.

Finally, the eighth note roll, which is played as a 5 stroke roll in 2/4 and 6/8 and as an isolated "buzz" stroke or double stroke in cut time and 6/8 in 2.

The image contains two musical staves. The first staff is in 2/4 time and shows an eighth note roll with stroke order R R L R R. Above the first two notes is a bracket with the number '5'. To the right, an isolated 'buzz' stroke is shown with stroke order R L R L R. The second staff is in 6/8 time and shows an eighth note roll with stroke order R R L R R L R. Above the first two notes is a bracket with the number '5'. To the right, an isolated 'buzz' stroke is shown with stroke order R L R L R L R. Above this second staff is the text '(in 2)'.

If, in the future, your students experience confusion interpreting roll passages in 6/8 and understanding their direct relationship to those with which they are familiar, perhaps the above will be a means of clarification. Best of luck!

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