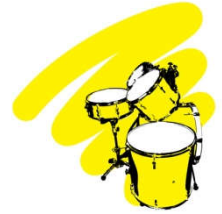


# Master Class

By Richard Best

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## *Tricky Things, Those Quarter Notes*

Steve Gadd says that he concentrates mainly on the quarter notes, i.e. the *pulse*. You'd think by this stage of his career he'd have that down and wouldn't have to give it a second thought. But, he says, that's where the *time* is. And he's not the only top player who points to the pulse and says that it's the single most important thing!

Putting the quarter notes in the right spot is called, simply, playing good time, and it's every musician's first responsibly. But what about all those notes in between? They're important too, and if your quarter notes aren't where they're supposed to be, nothing else will be either. If you're not consistently hitting the beats with the rest of the band, then everything suffers — time, groove, career opportunities. The importance of playing good time cannot be over stressed, and learning to play steady time is the quickest and shortest path to playing with the better players and landing the better gigs.

I knew a young drummer whose sensitivity to time was quite poor. I suggested he work out with a metronome, but he had a ready come-back: "When we get in the studio we'll use a click track". Actually, if you've never worked with a metronome, playing with a click track might be a challenge. But a bigger problem is that if you aren't able to play in time, you'll likely never get anywhere near a studio. Period.

There is no shortcut to improving your time. Regular practice with a metronome is a must. Also be conscious of other players' time. Stick with the good time keepers and avoid the bad ones. And listen. The easiest way to stay in time is to listen to and become part of the team. Singers and bass players are particularly good at staying in time. Singers are usually very aware of the time, and if it goes awry they are quick to pick up on it — if only observing that "something isn't right". Bass players often consider it their solemn duty to lay down a solid foundation. In fact, many top drummers form tight professional and personal relationships with good bass players. Together, drums and bass can often work miracles.

So break out that metronome (or buy one) and make it a regular part of your practice routine. Be aware of the time ... all the time. And especially be aware of your own time. The best description of good time is trying to put your quarter notes "in the bass player's back pocket". Of course it's easier said than done, but with practice and attentiveness, it will happen.