

SETTING UP OUR DRUMS, PART ONE PETE LOCKETT

We often smirk with great humour when we see a one man band, bass drum strapped to their back, cymbals on their head and a snare drum poking from their front like a dart players belly. Have we however truly reflected on ourselves, perched behind those drums, bashing one with a foot pedal and crossing our hands to play the hi hat in the most illogical manner?

Like it or lump it, this is our lot and we have to find a way to set up our kit that suits us ergonomically and makes our performance energy effective. "Oh, it doesn't matter" I can hear from some parts of the room, "I'll set up however I want without putting much thought into it" All well and good but when you are onstage for a two hour, high energy gig you want to be reaching out of your arms length every time you hit a cymbal.

Conceptualising and organising your drum set up is a very important first step towards a good performance. One very important factor in this is that you do not have to conform to the norm and set up the kit like every one else. We are so used to looking at the average four drum set up with the hi hat to the left of the snare, the floor to the right, the small tom on the bass drum with the ride to the right and the snare in front of us. It is in many ways un-musical and illogical. Take the hi hat for example. Why do we cross our hands over one another like that? Traditionally the hi hats were just the hats and were tiny foot cymbals which came six inches or so off the ground. In those early days the time was played on the ride cymbal with the right hand and the foot 'hats' (so called because the large bell made them look like hats) played off beat 'chicks' to compliment it. Then one day one bright spark thought of making the 'hat' stand higher, enabling the drummer to hit them with the sticks and opening up all those possibilities with them that we hear today.

Back then, (early last century. The drum kit is a very young instrument!) There was not such an emphasis on the snare drum back beat and so the hi hat stayed where it was, on the left of the snare. Because the time was played mainly on the ride, that hand was the one that switched to the hi hat, thereby causing the situation we have now where we cross hands to play the hi hat. This is much more of a problem now because of the emphasis of the snare drum back beat with the left hand. (Right handed players) It led to Keith Moon not even using a hi hat at all for most of his career, opting for two bass drums and eight thousand drums and cymbals instead!

There are now alternatives. Playing open handed is one. Open handed means playing the hi hat with the left hand and the snare drum with the right, giving a lot more power to your back beat. Then you can have a ride to your left above the hi hat which you can also play with your left hand. Players famous for this are Billy Cobham and Gary Husband. You could also have the ride on the right and play conventionally when you use the ride and with the open handed technique when you are on the hi hat. Whatever you choose, this is a great way to practice and develop your left hand and ambidextrous abilities.

The other alternative is to use one of the new 'remote' hi hats. This is the bottom section of a hi hat pedal linked to the top part with a cable, like a motorbike clutch cable. This means you can put the top part with the hi hats anywhere and avoid the hand crossing situation. The cables can be up to eight-foot long meaning that you could put it across with the ride cymbal on the right if you wanted.

One player famous for regular use of the remote hi hat is Bill Bruford. Of all drummers set ups, it would have to be Bills that I would single out as the most logical and ergonomically satisfying. Have a look in the picture. His set up, (10" x 9",

12" x 11", 13" x 12" Toms. 16" x 16" Floor Tom, 22" x 16" Bass Drum) are arranged symmetrically around a central snare with the remote hi-hat positioned immediately in front of it. This easily opens up a strong back beat on the snare and the possibility to articulate eighth notes with either hand or hand to hand sixteenth notes on the hi hat. There are then 2 toms and 2 cymbals on the left, mirrored by the same (different pitches) on the right. All the drums are flat on the same plain, like a timpanist with 5 tympani.



He finds the movement a few inches to the left to find the high tom easier than moving forward and up, as on the standard set. The movement is more a swivel at the hips to get round the semi-circle of drums. Getting rid of the old right-hand-over-the-left-to-reach-the-hi-hat routine also opens up the left side of the kit considerably. The drums are not set up in descending pitch order either, so the well known sound of a descending roll round the drums is usually avoided and a more creative approach can be more easily nurtured.

The final thought and yardstick is this, if it works for you and sounds good then it is fine, even if you want to set your hi hat and snare inside the floor tom which itself is inside the bass drum and you run round like a hamster on a running wheel to play it.



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