

# 25 Practical Rock Grooves & Fills for the Beginner Drummer

## Play your favorite songs quickly by learning the essential building blocks

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### Let's Get Started

Getting started on the drums can feel daunting and overwhelming, so let's make this as simple and easy as possible!

If you're a beginner, you most likely want to just get up and running as fast as possible so that you can have fun on the drums and play your favorite songs.

This guide will help you do just that - by giving you the most common, most heard, and most used grooves and fills in rock and any groove-based musical style.

### Practice these diligently, and here's what will happen...

- You'll be surprised by how quickly you start sounding like a real drummer!
- Fills will become much less mystical and random, because you'll now have clear examples of what to play (*and when to play it!*)
- You'll build the confidence you need to have a blast nailing songs in your bedroom, basement, jam session, church, or any gig.

**So if you're ready to jumpstart your drumming growth, let's dive in.**

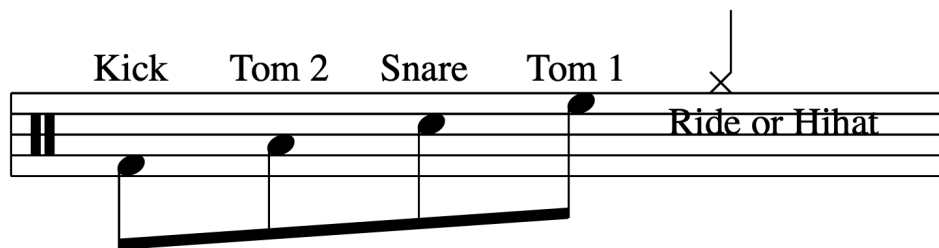
***YOU CAN DO THIS!***

### **\*\*\*Spoiler Alert\*\*\***

*This guide actually contains 34 grooves & 34 fills. I had a hard time narrowing down. Enjoy :)*

## ***A couple of notes as you get started...***

- **Click any of the groove or fill titles to listen to the recording.** Each title is a link that jumps straight over to an audio file via Google Drive.
- **Practice everything with a metronome,** and start at the bottom of the range of recommended tempos I give you. Feel free to practice no metronome as you're first figuring out the groove/fill, but add the click back in as soon as you can.
- **In case you're new to notation, spend time listening to the recordings while following along.** I think you'll catch on pretty fast, since notation is very simple, logical, and mathematical. **Be sure to reference the key here when in doubt** - This will especially come in handy when you get to the fills, though we're never using more than 4 drums and a cymbal.



- **Stickings are written in when appropriate so that you know exactly how to play each fill.** Follow those stickings, which generally follow a “right hand lead approach.” This means that you start with your right hand so that you finish with your right hand. This keeps things easy and straightforward and makes sure you finish your fills cleanly.
- **We're assuming that each fill ends with a cymbal crash that would be in the following measure on beat one.** Or you'd jump straight back into the groove immediately upon finishing the fill. Do this however you'd like. Most fills in most songs end on beat 1.

# Simple Grooves in 4/4 Time

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These are the grooves you'll play the most. Learn just these simple, 8th-note-based grooves, and you'll be playing 90% of what you might encounter on a typical rock or pop gig. There's a reason why our first, simplest groove is called the "money beat." :)

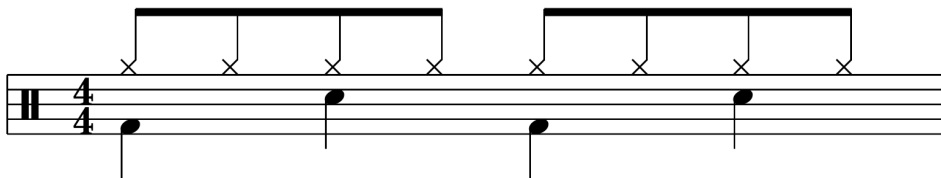
## Tempos

I recommend practicing these in the **60-90bpm** range, though many of these very simple grooves are found in songs that are **120bpm and faster**. Make 120+ a goal, but know that these grooves show up in plenty of slow songs as well.

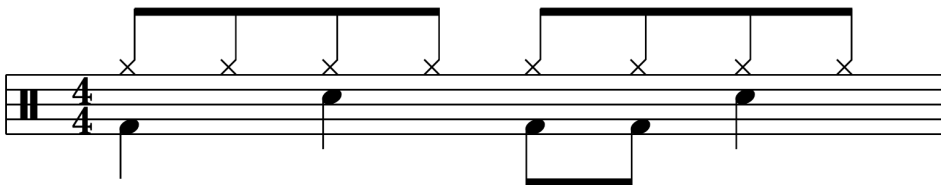
Practice with your metronome, prioritizing tightness and precision. Get each groove feeling good. Pay attention to how you sound. Record or video yourself! There's no better way to self-evaluate.

And of course, have fun! Challenge yourself by finding how many favorite songs you can use these grooves in.

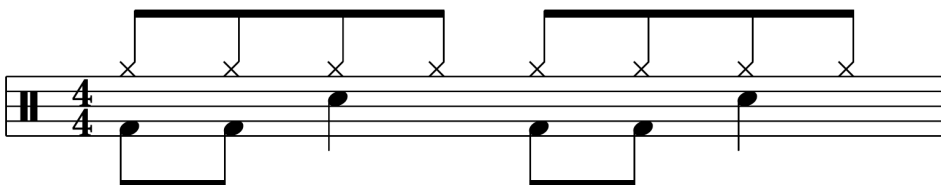
## The "Money Beat"



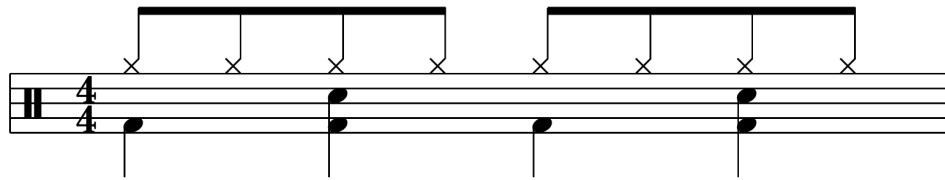
+ *Kick on "and of 3"*



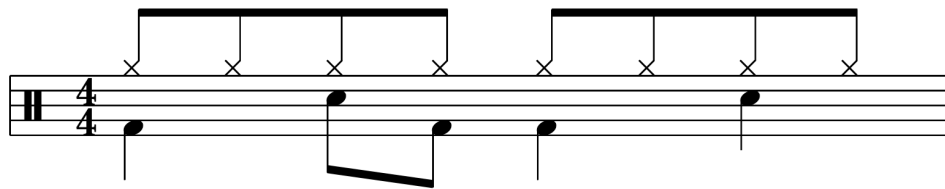
+ *Kick on "and of 1"*



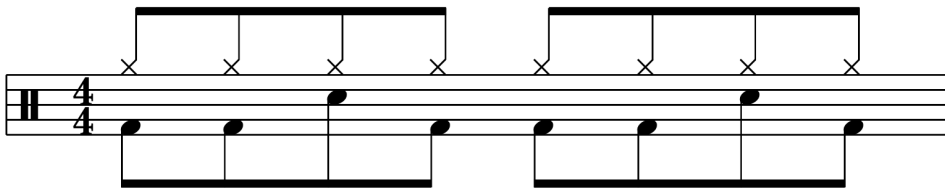
The "4-on-the-floor"



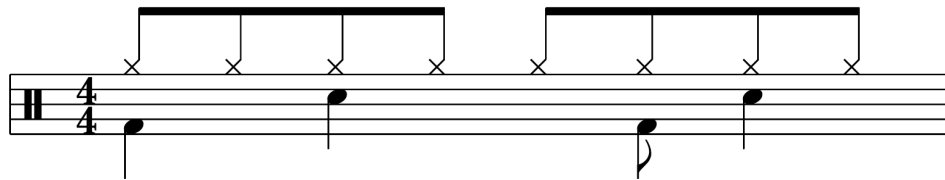
The "Rock Ballad"



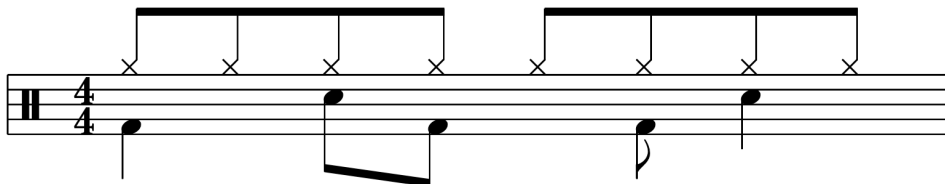
The "8th Note Drive"



The "Relaxed, with Space"

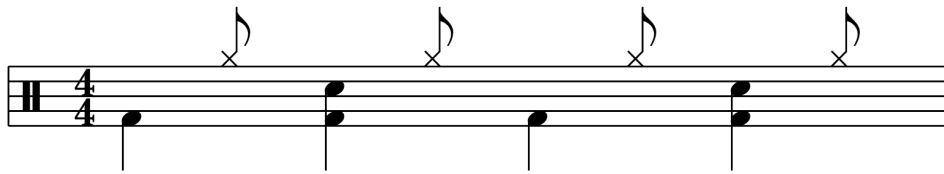


The "and of 2"

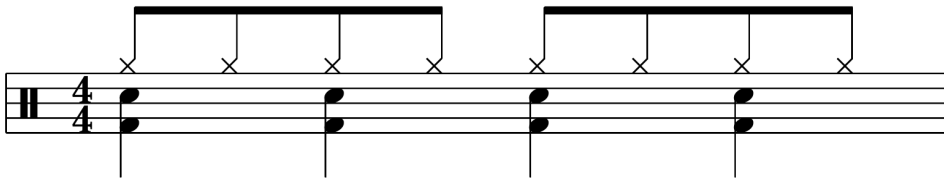


### The "Disco"

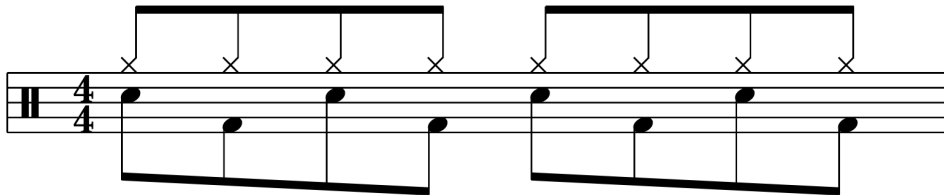
Play the right hand part (happening on the "ands") on the hihat.



### The "Motown"

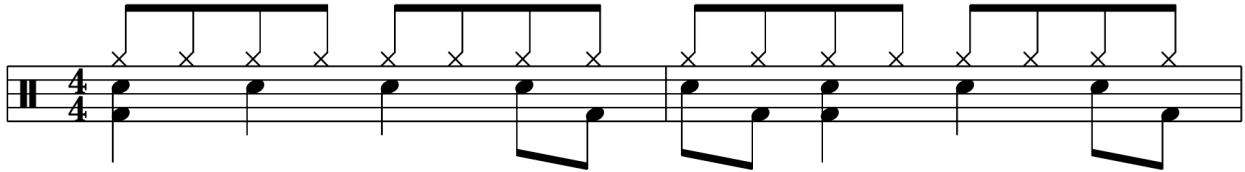


### The "Pounding Drive"



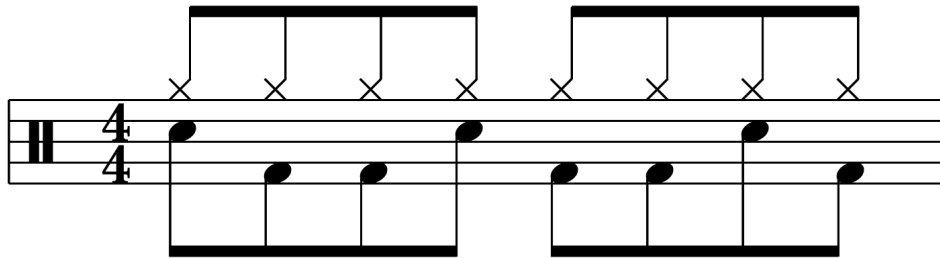
### The “Billy Joel”

I give this groove this title because it’s modeled after what you hear Liberty DeVitto play in “Easy Money” by Billy Joel. This type of pattern shows up in a lot of “Motown-ish,” fast songs.



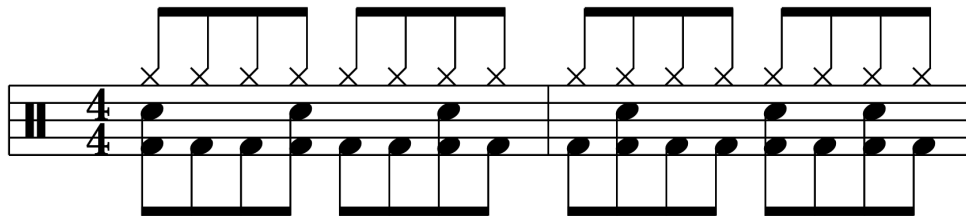
### The “Coldplay”

This is the drum part from “Clocks,” and though it’s unique it’s actually fairly common in rock songs.



### The “U2”

This is the chorus drum part from “Beautiful Day.” This pattern is interesting because of its syncopated, across-the-barline kind of feel. A great one to learn!



## Syncopated Kick Patterns in 4/4

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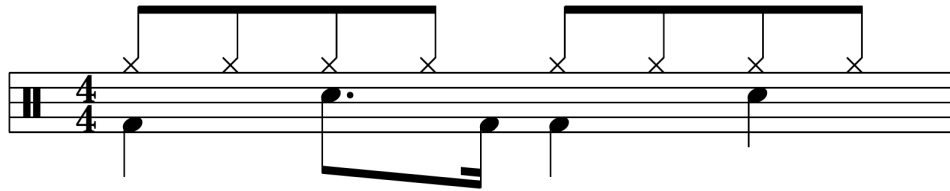
By definition, “syncopation” is playing a note where you wouldn’t normally play one. In our case it just means that we’re placing notes on weird “subdivisions” of the beat, like the “a’ of 2” or the “e’ of 4.”

This sounds complicated, but it’s not once you listen to these. These kick patterns are still super common and show up in tons of songs you’ve probably heard.

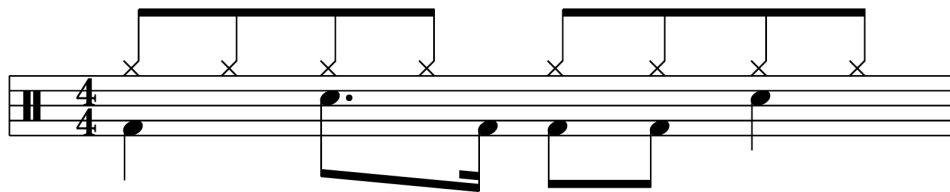
Definitely focus on slow practice here, staying in that 60-90bpm range.

### The “Pocket”

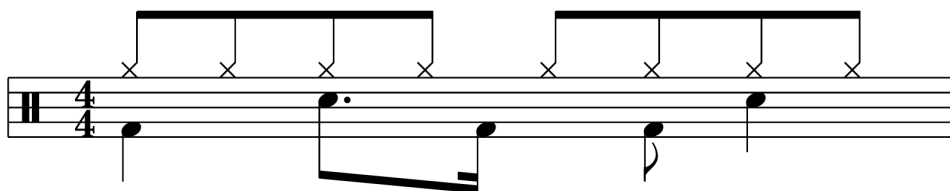
This is basically the money beat with one tiny addition, which gives it this super tight feel that you find in numerous 70s dance tunes (*think “Rock With You” by Michael Jackson*)



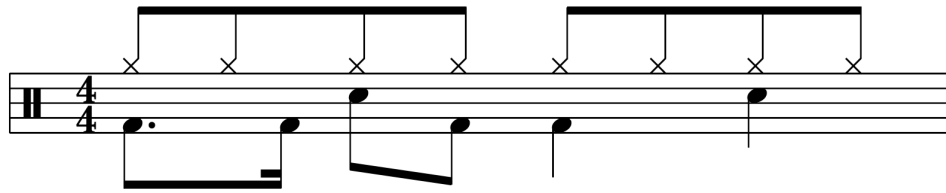
### The “Hopping Along”



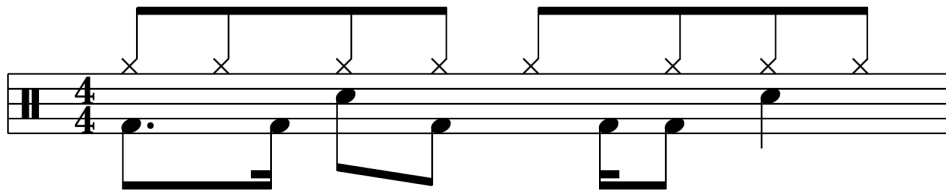
### The “a’ of 2”



**The “Rock Ballad”** *(with a little more momentum)*

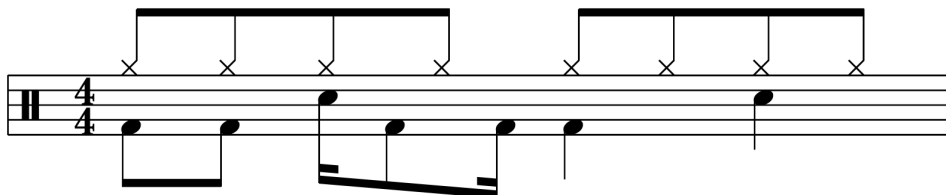


**The “HipHop”**



**The “Lovely Day”**

This is the groove in “Lovely Day by Bill Withers,” and it also shows up in several other soul/funk songs from the 70s.

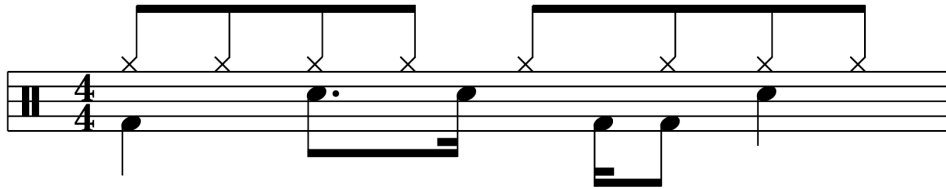


## Syncopated Snare Patterns in 4/4

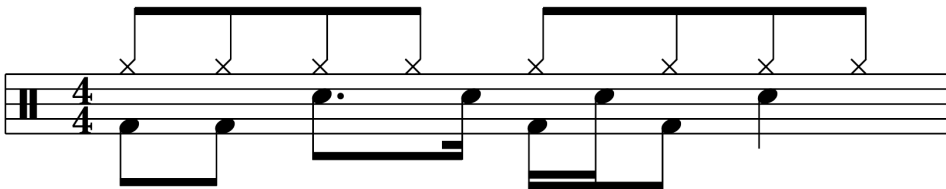
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Now the possibilities are endless as we add in syncopated snare notes, so I'll just give you two very common examples to get you started. These two grooves will definitely sound familiar.

### The "Snare Syncopation with Space"



### The "Driving Snare"



## 6/8 Grooves

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We're getting into what could be called "odd time signatures," but 6/8 songs are so common that there's really not anything odd here.

(*Odd would be something in 7/8, 11/16, or a song by Tool. :)*)

If you're not familiar with grooving "in 6" instead of "in 4," just go listen to these songs that you've probably heard before:

- "We Are the Champions" (Queen)
- "Open Arms" (Journey)
- "Hallelujah" (Jeff Buckley)
- "Iris" (Goo Goo Dolls)

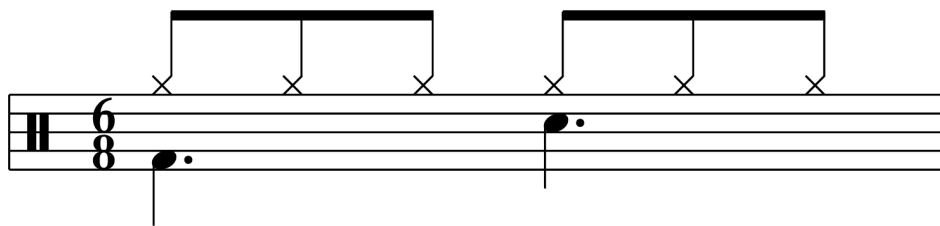
The list could go on and on, but start with these. As soon as you get that 6/8 feel in your head, you'll be good to go!

### "Music theory" note:

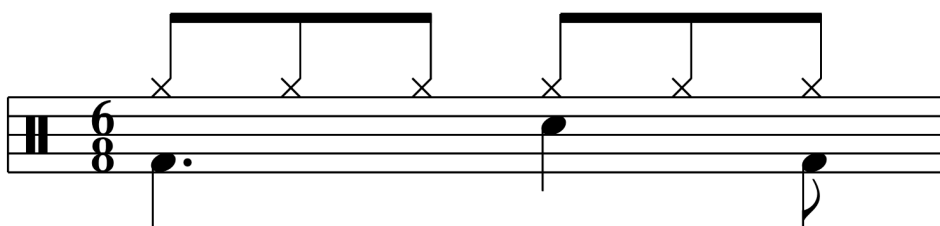
In 4/4 time, the quarter note gets the beat - and there are four quarter notes in a measure.

In 6/8 time, the 8th note gets the beat - and there are six 8th notes in a measure.

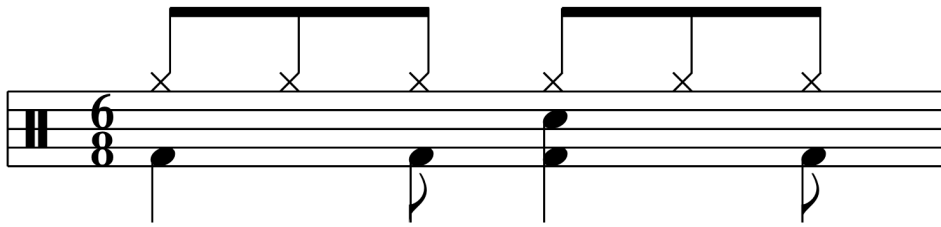
### The "6/8 Money Beat"



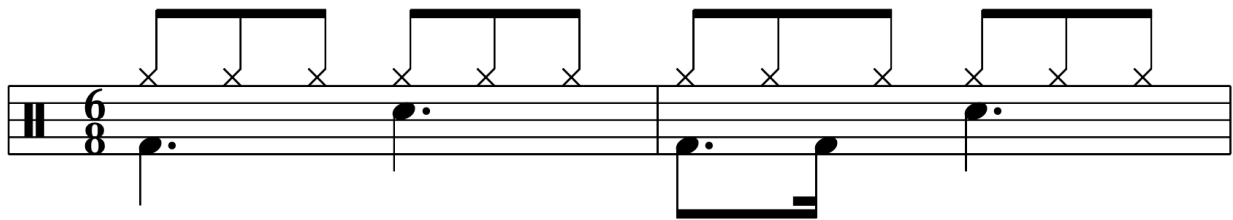
+ *and extra kick note*



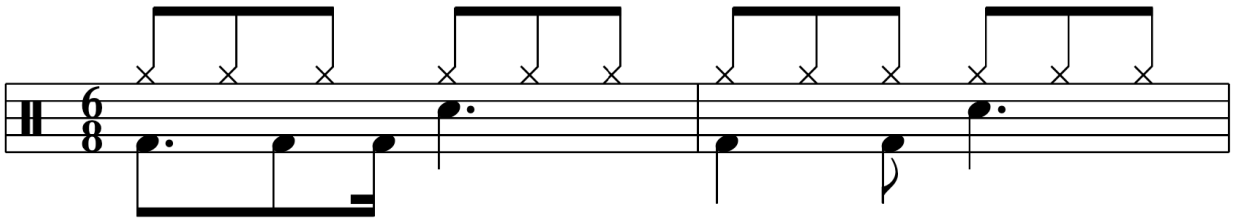
The "Blues"



The "and' of 2 Kick"



The "Busy 6/8"



## 3/4 Grooves

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It's possible you'll never play a song that's in 3/4. *BUT...* if you play in church a bunch you're bound to encounter this one.

A lot of hymns are in 3, especially if they have an "Irish" kind of feel. Here are some examples you church drummers may know:

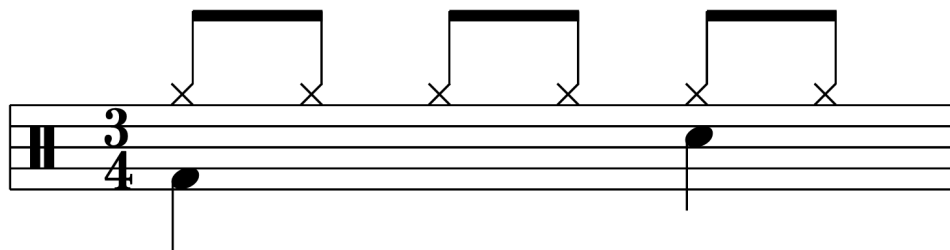
- "In Christ Alone"
- "Be Thou My Vision"
- "Come Thou Fount"
- "Jesus Paid It All"

Definitely check those out if you're unfamiliar with playing in 3. As you might guess, though, all we're doing is removing the fourth beat of a 4/4 measure.

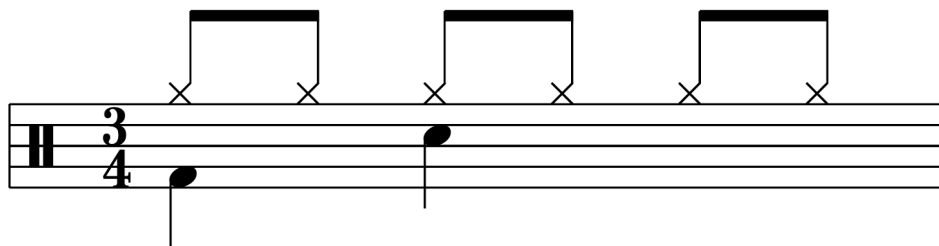
Our measure now has 3 beats instead of 4, which gives it a completely different feel.

Most of the time you'll hit the snare (*play a "backbeat"*) on beat 3 when in 3/4, though every once and a while you'll hear a song where the drummer plays the backbeat on beat 2. It's worth practicing both!

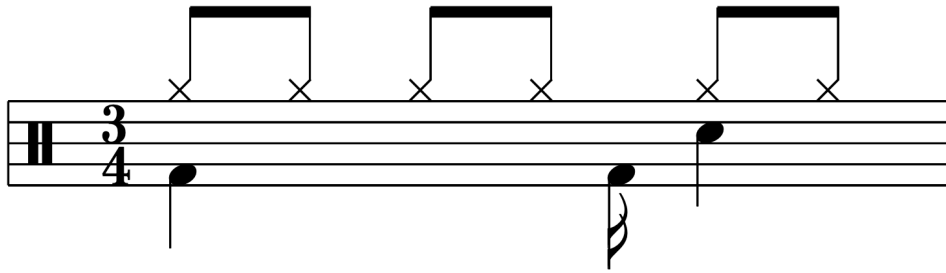
### The "Simple Backbeat on 3"



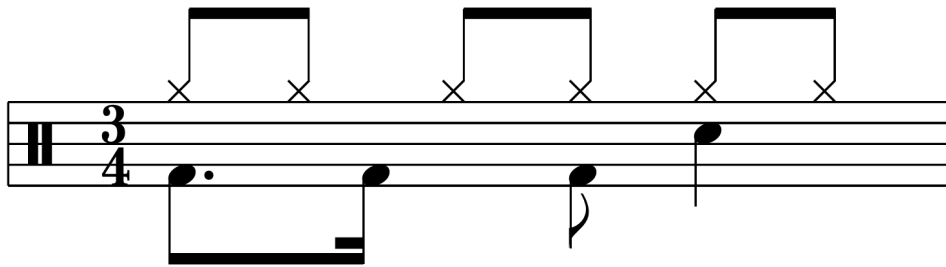
### The "Simple Backbeat on 2"



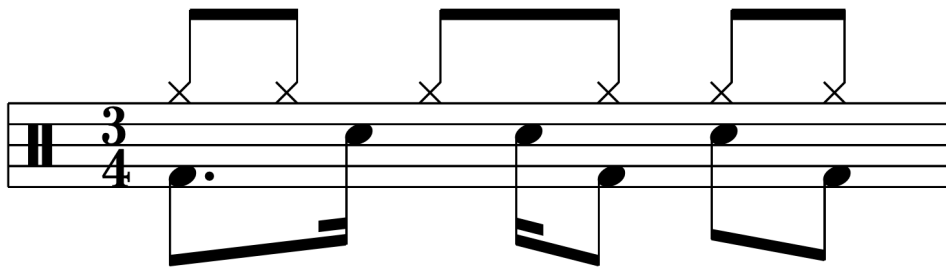
The “Backbeat on 3 with Momentum”



The “Dotted 8th-16th”



The “Busy & Driving”



## Special Grooves

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These two grooves are unique, yet still pretty common. They're a little more complex than most of the grooves we've covered so far, which is why I saved them for this section.

The alternating hihat 16th groove is simple and very common, but playing it smoothly without clumsiness or rushing can take some time. Just practice your slow alternating 16ths (RLRL) on the hats, and you'll be fine.

The tom groove is basically the "worship toms" groove that you encounter all the time if you play in church a bunch. :) Otherwise this one isn't super common in pop & rock. It's a great challenge in getting your hands operating independently of your kick foot, however, which is a fantastic skill to build.

Practice both of these very slowly at **60bpm**, working up to **90bpm**. The tom groove works well in the **70-80bpm** range, though the hihat groove works slowly AND at much quicker tempos.

### The "Alternating 16th Money Beat"

The notation shows a 4/4 time signature. The hihat part is represented by 'x' marks on a line with a thick black bar above it, indicating a continuous sound. The sequence of hihat strikes is: R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L. The kick drum part is shown as a series of quarter notes on the bottom line of the staff, with a dotted quarter note on the first beat and quarter notes on the other three beats.

### The "Worship Toms"

The notation shows a 4/4 time signature. The tom groove is represented by a series of eighth notes on the top line of the staff, with a dotted quarter note on the first beat and quarter notes on the other three beats. The sequence of tom strikes is: L R L R L R L.

## Beat 4 Snare Fills

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These are the most played, most heard, best-fitting, and simplest fills there are. Remember that the simpler the fill, the more versatile and useful it generally is.

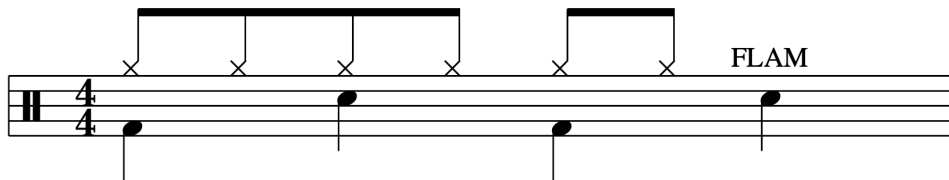
These beat 4 fills all maintain the snare “backbeats” on 2 & 4, which makes these fills less “abrupt” or “intrusive.”

*(Btw, all fills in this guide are written in the context of the “money beat.” This is to show you exactly how you’d get into the fill from a groove.)*

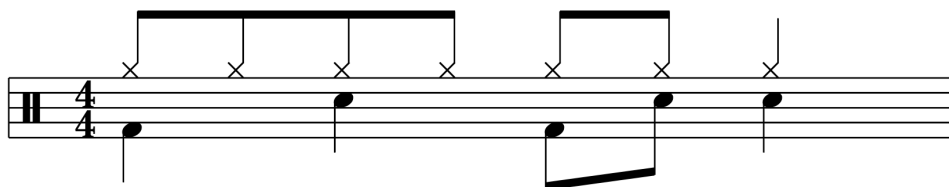
### Practical Applications (*where / when to use these fills*)

- Near the beginning of a song
- Going into a verse or a first chorus
- In the middle of a verse or chorus
- Anywhere you want to throw in a small lick that doesn’t “steal” too much attention

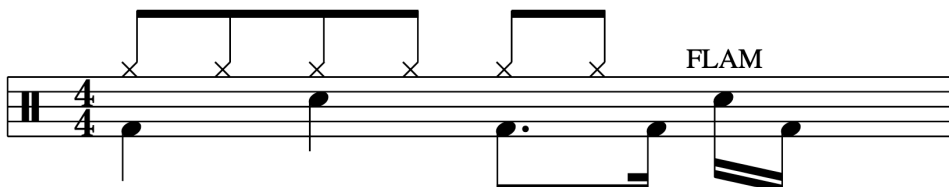
**The “Flam”** | Sometimes it’s more what you DON’T play than what you DO play. This fill works great when you want a dramatic pause before a big chorus.



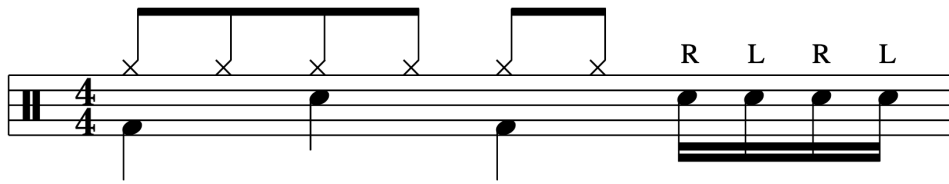
**The “And 4”** | This fill feels like a period at the end of a sentence and works well in the middle of a chorus or verse to mark the end of a musical phrase.



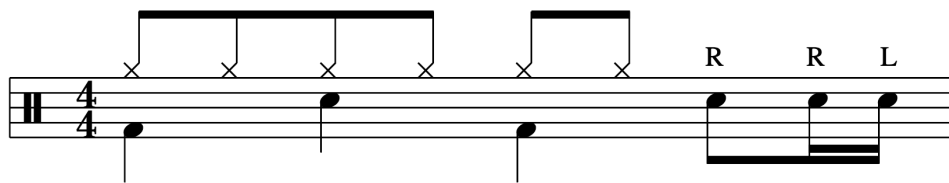
**The “Chewbacca”** | A big brother to the “flam” fill, this one just adds some kick interest :)



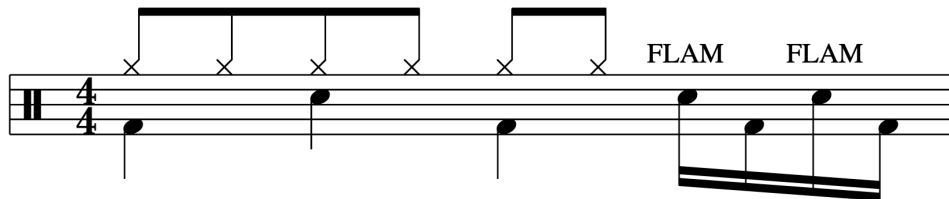
**The “KA-KA-KA-KA”** | The classic RLRL snare fill we’ve heard a million times going into a chorus...yet that’s still useful and never gets old.



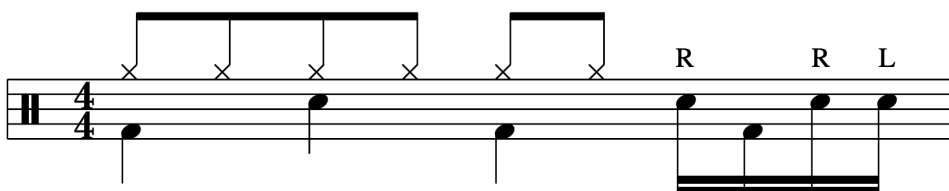
**The “KAA...KA-KA”** | This one’s a nice, less in-your-face variation of the previous fill, and it makes for a great fill out of a chorus or back into a verse.



**The “FLAM-FLAM”** | This one deserves to be in the rock fills hall of fame, because it’s so fun and satisfying to play - and it drives the band into something big.



**The “KAA...KA-KA 2.0”** | Here we throw in a kick note on the “e” of 4, which adds a layer of challenge and gives this simple fill a linear feel. Practice it very slowly.



## Beat 4 Snare & Tom Fills

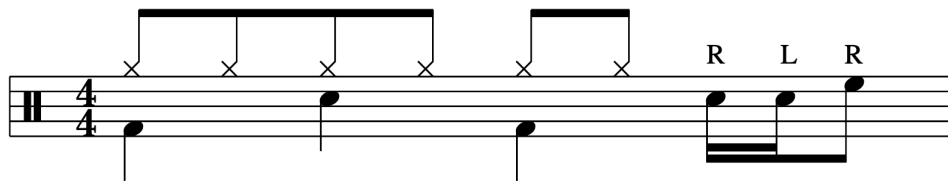
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These fills are pretty much the same rhythms from the snare fills in the previous section, but with some tom thrown in to make them more interesting.

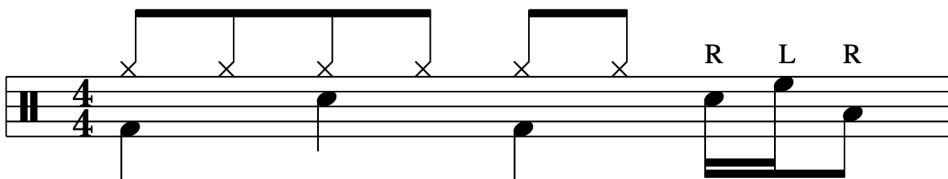
I find that simple beat 4 fills that stay on the snare are most useful when you want to throw in something subtle and “unobtrusive.” But a beat 4 fill with a tom note or two makes the fill feel a little “bigger.”

This makes these fills most useful for going into and out of choruses, and they’re great for bigger transition points in a song. They’re still super simple though. Have fun!

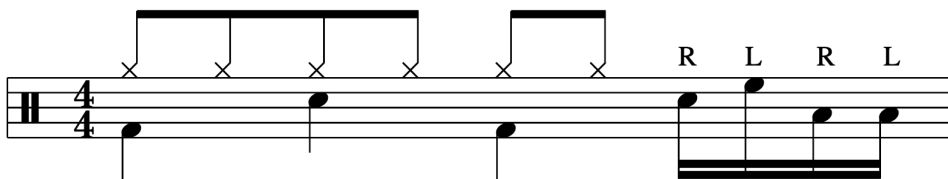
**The “Debbie-Boone”** | This one works perfectly gliding into the first chorus of a relaxed rock song.



**The “Debbie-Boone” + Floor Tom** | Just a slightly different orchestration of the previous fill.



**The “KA - DOO-DOO-DOO”** | Now we’re just adding an additional floor tom note to fill out the rest of the beat.



**The “KA - DOO-DOO-DOO with Kick”** | Now we’re replacing that last floor tom note with kick, which allows our hands to more quickly move from the fill to wherever we’re going next.

Musical notation for the “KA - DOO-DOO-DOO with Kick” fill. It is written on a single staff in 4/4 time. The first measure contains four eighth notes with 'x' marks above them, grouped by a bracket. The second measure contains two eighth notes with 'x' marks above them, also bracketed. The third measure contains a quarter note. The fourth measure contains a quarter note, a quarter note, and a quarter note, with 'R', 'L', and 'R' written above them respectively. A thick black bar is drawn under the notes in the fourth measure, indicating a kick drum hit.

**The “KA-DUH-DOOOO”** | This versatile fill works well for “dropping down” out of a chorus, though it can also work well for building up into something.

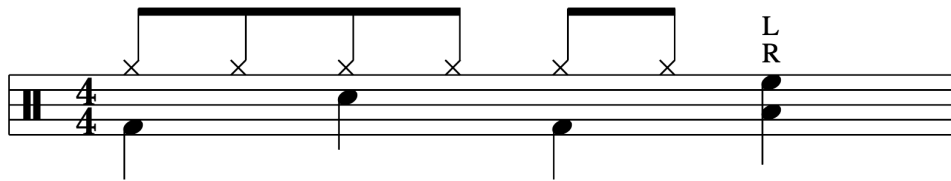
Musical notation for the “KA-DUH-DOOOO” fill. It is written on a single staff in 4/4 time. The first measure contains four eighth notes with 'x' marks above them, grouped by a bracket. The second measure contains two eighth notes with 'x' marks above them, also bracketed. The third measure contains a quarter note. The fourth measure contains a quarter note, a quarter note, and a quarter note, with 'FLAM' written above them. The fifth measure contains a quarter note, a quarter note, and a quarter note, with 'L' and 'R' written above them. A thick black bar is drawn under the notes in the fifth measure, indicating a kick drum hit.

## Beat 4 Tom Fills

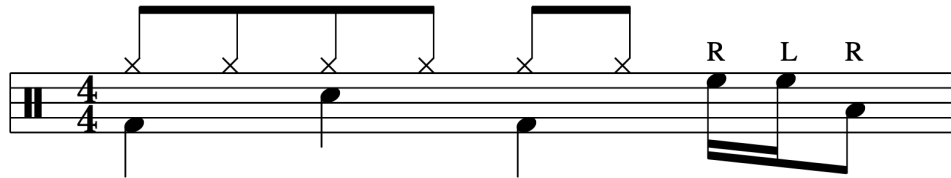
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These fills are unique compared to all the previous ones, because we're now removing the snare "backbeat" on beat 4. This makes these fills less subtle and more "noticed" within a song, so these work well for dropping down and marking the end of a "big" part of a song.

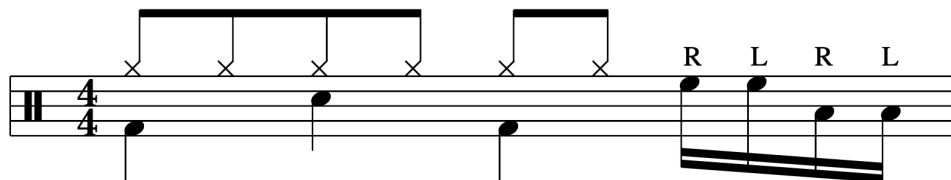
**The "DOOOOHHH"** | This one is a very strong "period" at the end of the sentence, potentially marking the very end of a song.



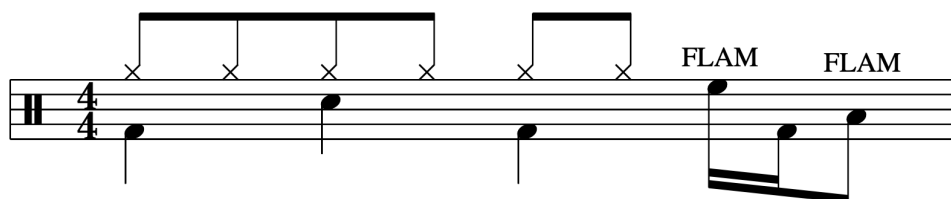
**The "Debbie-Boone on Toms"** | The classic lick from the previous section, on just the toms.



**The "DA-DA-DOO-DOO"** | Classic 4-e-and-a fill only on toms.



**The "FLAM-FLAM on Toms"** | This fill has a very distinct, "dropping down" feeling to it great for bringing the band down dynamically.



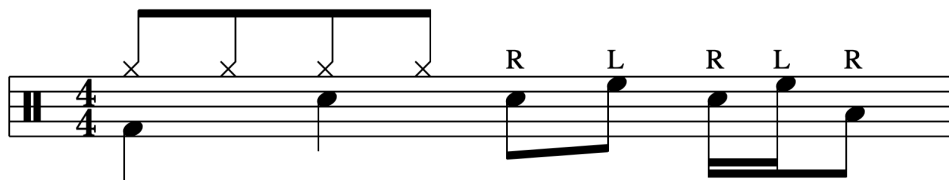
## Beat 3 Fills

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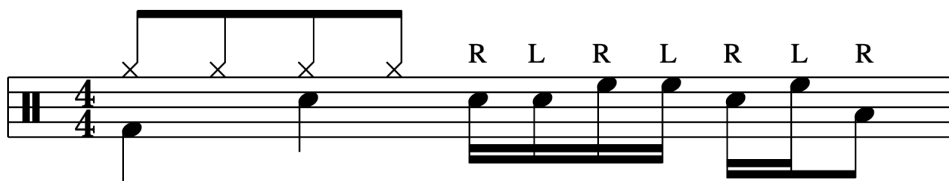
Honestly, the majority of the fills you'll play are very short, simple, beat 4 fills. But there are plenty of times when you need something bigger and more in-your-face to really take the song somewhere energetic. That's where these fills come in.

Btw, we don't have any full measure fills in this guide. That's because there are SO, SO many endless possibilities of full measure fills...plus they tend to get a little more complex and less versatile. Full measure fills are more song-specific and often don't work so well across the board. Everything we're covering here should work pretty well across the board.

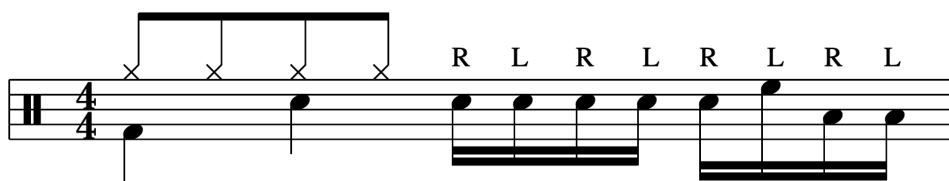
**The "Pat-Boone-Debbie-Boone"** | This one is the true classic, and it's a fantastic option for kicking the band into gear and leading the song into a big intro or chorus.



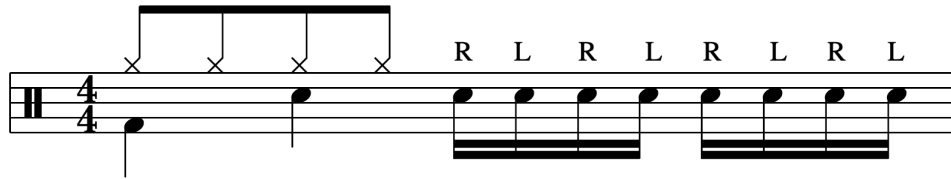
**The "Busier Pat-Boone-Debbie-Boone"** | This one contains the same rhythm, but we're adding in extra snare notes. You could use this one the second time around if you used the simpler one going into the first chorus.



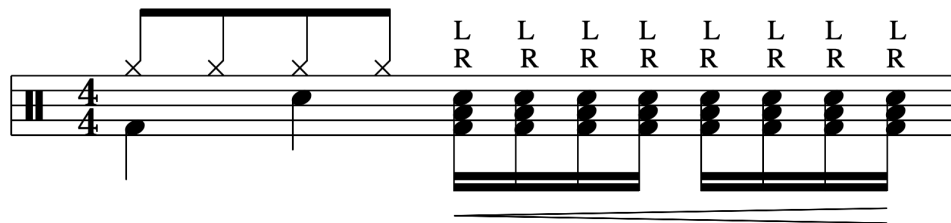
**The "Classic Around the Kit"** | Can't argue with this simple, around the kit, 2-beat fill.



**The “KA-KA-KA-KA-KA-KA-KA-KA”** | There’s not really a great name for this one. :) But it’s a great variation on the previous fill when you want something full and energetic - but slightly different.



**The “Build”** | Because this one uses both hands playing in sync with the kick, this type of fill works best in songs under 80bpm. This is a great way to ramp things up energy-wise.



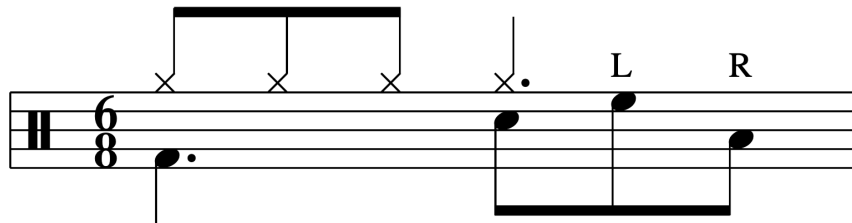
## 6/8 Fills

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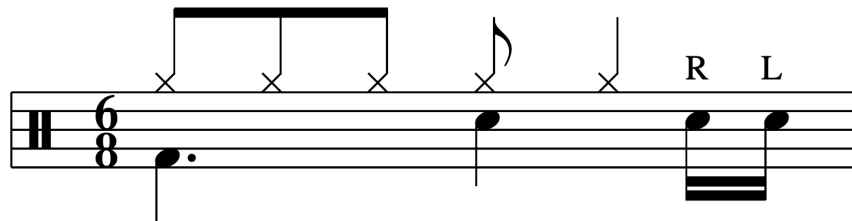
Because so many songs are in 6/8 (and this is the most represented time signature outside our standard 4/4), I feel like we should throw in some 6/8 fills.

We're basically playing some of the same simple fills from 4/4, just starting them in different places so that they fit into 6/8 time.

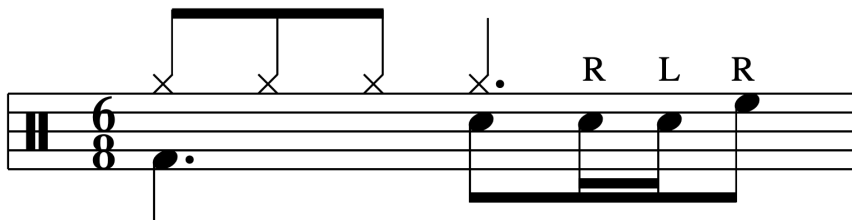
**The "Classic"** | Classic in its simplicity, this fill is great when playing a faster 6/8 song - especially if it's a blues tune.



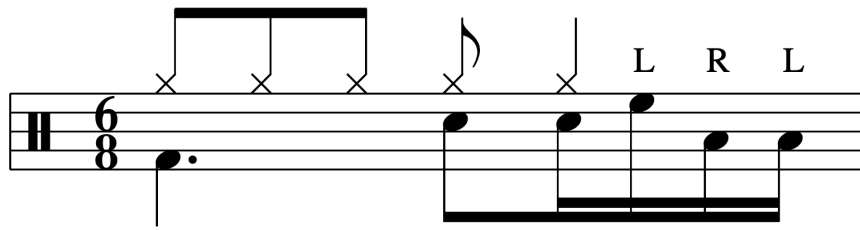
**The "KA-KA"** | A great little fill for the beginning of a verse - or anywhere in the middle of a verse or chorus.



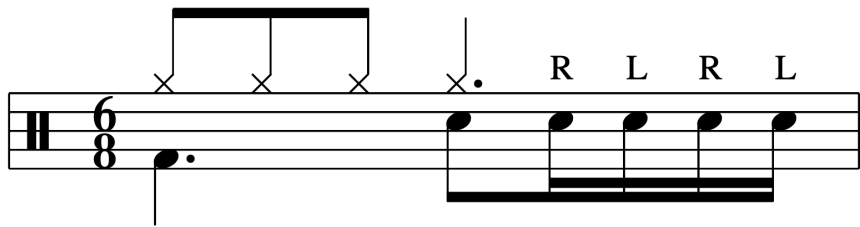
**The "Boone-Debbie-Boone"** | This one's great for cueing the band into a verse or a chorus.



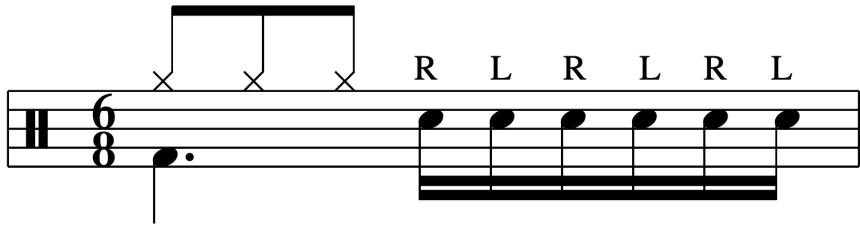
**The “KA - KA-DOO-DOO-DOO”** | Bigger-feeling than the previous fill, this one either launches the band into a big, energetic song intro or a powerful chorus or jam section.



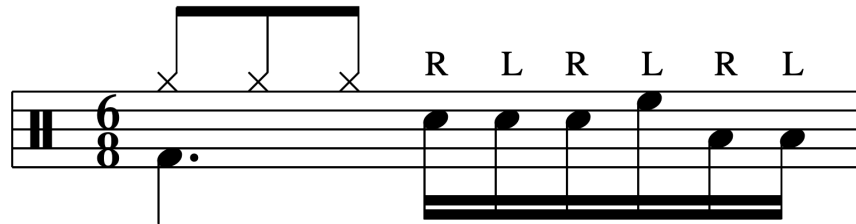
**The “KA - KA-KA-KA-KA”** | Can’t go wrong with this one for cueing a chorus.



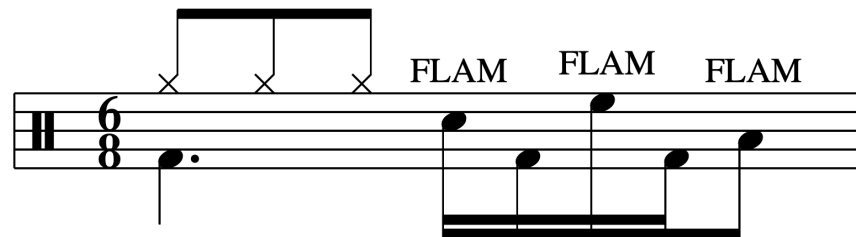
**The “KA-KA-KA-KA-KA-KA”** | This one feels like a “ok here comes the second chorus” kind of fill - Too big for a first time around, but just right for a second time into a chorus.



**The “Classic Around the Kit”** | Another great variation that launches the band into something big and energetic.



**The “Triple Flam”** | I think this one’s pretty versatile. You could use it to bring things down or even to go into a big chorus. I’d default to the “classic” (above) for dropping things down, but depending on the song this one can work too.



## 8th Fills for Faster Songs

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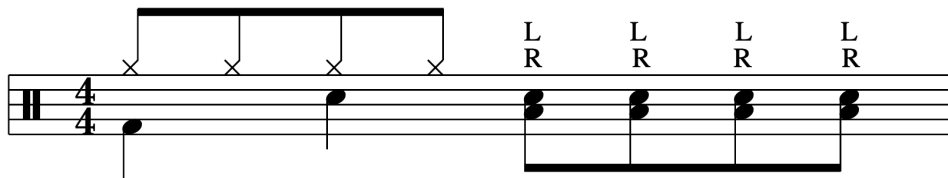
What about when the song's really fast - too fast for a 16th fill? Or what if a 16th fill might be cool... but you're not sure you can really pull it off that fast?

I gotcha covered. :)

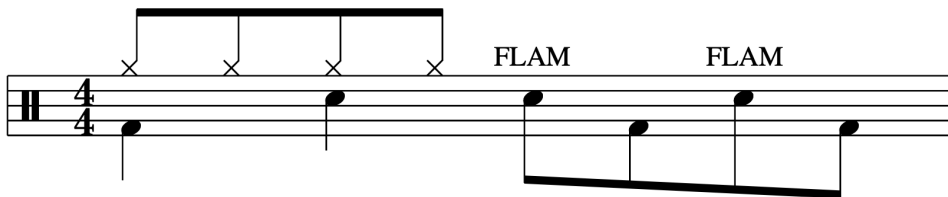
These are some simple 8th-based fills that work great at fast tempos, and they're they're "twice as easy to play" since they're 8ths instead of 16ths.

Have fun!

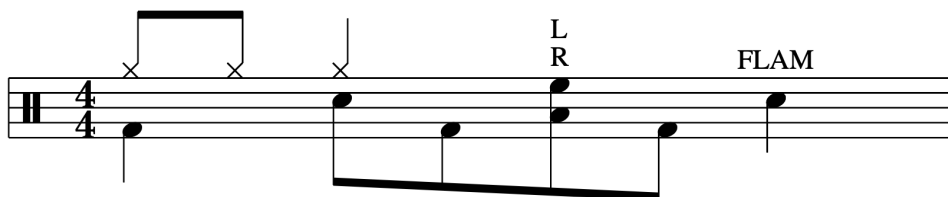
**The "Country"** | You can hear this one in so much pop-rock country, usually going into a chorus or maybe the turn right after a chorus.



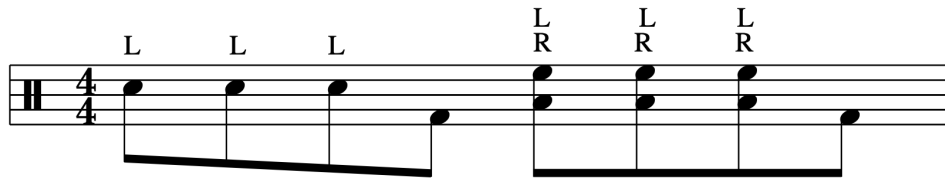
**The "Flam-Flam Fast"** | Use this the same way you would its 16th-based cousin - great for launching into a chorus.



**The "Flam-on-4-Setup"** | I like fills that end on beat 4 (or that leave space on beat 4). This is a unique way to close out a chorus or any main song section.



**The “8th-Note-Drive”** | Here we use the kick on the “and of 2” and the “and of 4” to shake things up a little even as we pound out 8ths.



**The “Clocks” (in fill form)** | Essentially the groove pattern from Coldplay’s “Clocks,” this fill takes on a similar feel. You also hear this in “When You Were Young” by the Killers. This is a great way to close out a chorus.

