

5 Ways to Improve Ji Playing

The ji, or underlying groove (sometimes called base beat), is one of the most important ingredients of a taiko ensemble. It can be thought of as the accompaniment role, with equal value to the melody or solo. The ji player has the influence to provide a steady tempo and establish a great feel. It is recommended that you practice playing ji patterns on various types of taiko and percussion instruments for better control and sound consistency. Here are five additional ways to improve your ji playing:

1. Hold the stick mainly with the thumb and first finger - strive to keep the thumb in a straight line with the stick and the first finger directly across from it. The other fingers should loosely cradle the stick. This technique can be used on all taiko and stick sizes from shimedaiko to odaiko.

2. Tap your foot on the pulse - this is a great way to help internalize the pulse. Tapping the foot also makes it easier to lock in with the metronome or other players. Bringing together everyone's pulse is the first step in creating a cohesive ensemble.

3. Practice both right hand and left hand lead - adding this routine to your practice schedule will improve strength and control of the 'weak' hand. Make sure that both versions sound good.

4. Use at least 5 dynamic levels - practice from the softest level 1 (one inch off the head) to the loudest level 5 (eye level). Aim for five distinct volume levels and practice crescendo and decrescendo. Playing at the appropriate dynamic level is crucial to being a mindful and effective accompanist.

5. Practice with a metronome - the regular use of a metronome is one of the best ways to improve your tempo control and groove consistency. It can help track the progress of technique as well as train the ear to hear inconsistencies in finer detail. Playing along with recorded music is another good way to work on these skills.

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