

In reels, then, there are eight eighth-note beats per measure. The pulse we have been talking about falls on the first and fifth of these beats. But the third and seventh beats carry some special weight too, though not as much as the first and fifth. Thus, there are two pulses existing concurrently in reels, the primary pulse on one and five and a secondary pulse on three and seven. In jigs, the pulse falls on the first and fourth eighth-note beats and there is no secondary pulse. To keep things fairly simple we will only look at reels and jigs for now. See Figure 10-11 below.

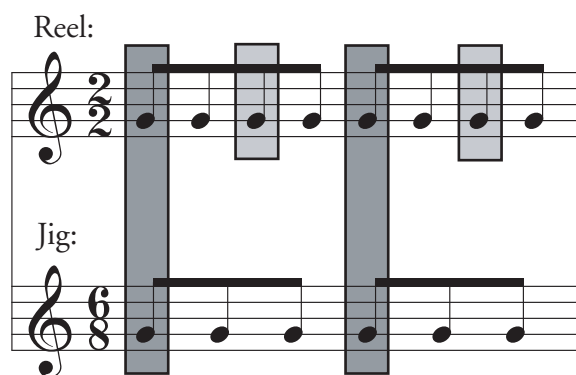


Figure 10-11. The pulse and its subdivisions in a reel and a jig. The dark shaded areas show the two pulses of the jig and the two primary pulses of the reel, which coincide. The lighter shaded areas show the two secondary pulses of the reel.

As I alluded to above, it is possible to give emphasis to the different notes of the long roll using the breath and differing ways of playing cuts and strikes. Why would we want to do this? Because rolls can occur in a variety of different contexts in relation to the pulse. In our practice of rolls so far we have only been playing them such that the first note of the roll falls on a strong pulse. This is one way that we encounter rolls in tunes, but very often a pulse coincides with the cut (second) note or the struck (third) note of the long roll instead. Soon I will give you a variety of examples.

I feel that rolls sound more musical when you give a bit of emphasis to the note that falls on the pulse. To this same end it helps to make the off-pulse notes a bit more gentle.

I have alluded to how you can accomplish this with breath emphasis. You can “lean into” the on-pulse note with your breath, blowing just a bit harder and louder, taking care not to appreciably raise the pitch of the note.

Now let’s take a closer look at some subtleties of the cut and strike that can also help in this regard. Note that these are very advanced refinements that should only be attempted after you have achieved considerable mastery of regular cuts and strikes.

#### VARYING THE “STRENGTH” OF THE CUT

In the chapter on cuts we saw how the good cut must be brief enough to fall below a threshold of perception such that our ears do not perceive them as notes unto themselves. We didn’t talk about the fact that the brevity of cuts, once below that threshold, can still vary. I find that, among cuts that do fall below that threshold, the shorter ones sound more subtle, or less emphatic to our ears. Thus, once you truly master the cut, you can vary its length to achieve differing degrees of strength. The shorter, less emphatic cuts are produced by a smaller lift of the finger. Since the lift covers less distance it can be shorter in time. These shorter cuts require a higher level of mastery of the physical movement involved.

When the cut (second) note of a long roll falls on the pulse you should try using the longer, stronger cut. When the first or third note of the roll falls on the pulse, the cut (second) note necessarily falls on a weak beat. That is a time to use the shorter, less emphatic cut.