

TECHNIQUE 12

Miking the Kick Drum

OVERVIEW: The sound of the drumset in any recording defines the genre. It establishes the energy and gives the listener insight into the musical encounter they're about to experience. What's more, the sound of the kick drum, also called the bass drum, is especially foundational to the stylistic sound of the kit. The way the kick drum is miked determines the potential of recorded sound that eventually ends up in the mix.

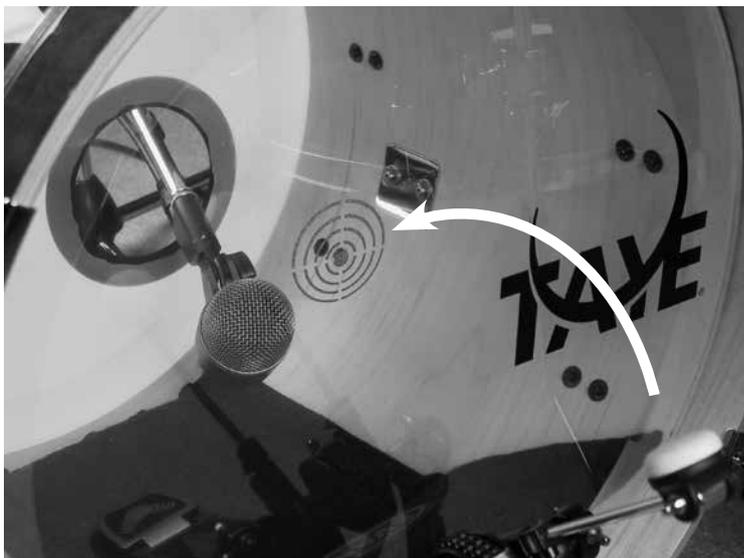
CHALLENGE: A little informed technique can go a long way when it comes to getting close-miked drums to sound defined and full. Isolation, separation, and control during mixdown are important, but they're not the only important considerations. It is fundamentally important to use good technique to capture great sounds. And whenever possible, it's a good idea to record multiple mics on the kick drum during tracking to provide options when it comes time to commit to the final kick drum sound during mixdown.

SOLUTION: Most kick drums have a hole in the front head that provides access for microphones to be placed inside the drum, which is where you'll find lots of opportunities for achieving a good solid kick sound. Once you have the mic inside the kick drum, there are two principles to remember:

1. Point the mic at the spot where the beater of the bass drum pedal hits the drum head for the clearest attack.
2. Point the mic toward the shell for a more resonant tone.

The sound you're looking for can usually be found by moving the mic around inside the kick drum between the shell and the point where the beater hits the head. It's best to have a helper move the mic while you listen for the sound that fits the music best.

Since the kick sound is so definitive, and the range of appropriate sounds so diverse, the best sound might be just outside the drum or a few feet away from the drum. These two photos demonstrate some well-tested ideas for capturing a great kick drum sound:



Notice the mic to the left is inside the kick and aimed at the point where the beater strikes the head. This approach provides a sound with the clearest attack.

The mic below is aimed toward the shell, which is the location that provides a more resonant tone.

Ask a helper to move the mic between these two locations to find the sound that works best for the music you're recording.





The kick drum to the left is being miked from the front of the head rather than from inside the drum. This approach doesn't provide as much isolation compared to miking inside the kick and the resulting sound isn't typically as tight and punchy. For some genres, such as jazz and other more organic styles, this technique captures the perfect sound for the music.

If there are enough available channels, it never hurts to give yourself some options for mixdown. On this kick drum, I used a Shure Beta 52 inside the kick, a classic Sony C-500 large-diaphragm condenser mic on the outside (the light-colored mic with the large head), and a very cool subkick mic called the "LoFrEQ" from Solomon Mics (the mic that looks like a tiny snare drum on the short stand). If you record each mic to a separate track, then you can blend them together for a great sound when it's time to mix. The mic inside provides a nice attack, the outside condenser mic provides a great tone, and the LoFrEQ provides a great low-end boom.



TIP: If the kick drum tone has too much ring, place something soft inside the drum such as a packing blanket, down pillow, or even a puffy jacket. Let it lean just enough on the batter head to get the tight and punchy sound you want. Use a mic stand base or a cinder block to lock everything in place.