

Beat Box *a musical scene for young audiences*

Karim Al-Zand
(2010)

Directions

Two characters come across a musical machine, a “beat box,” bathed in a bluish light and emitting a machine-like humming sound. Ensemble plays **Machine Hum**

On a screen behind the ensemble a message is displayed: *Beat Box: Awaiting Input!*

Eventually the characters turn on the beat box: the contrabass initiates a steady beat. **Standby Mode**

On the screen appears the prompt: *Subdivide the Beat!* along with five levers labeled 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6. A long vertical slider is also on the screen, set at its lowest position.

In the course of the performance, the characters manipulate the five levers—first singly, then in various combinations—and discuss the resulting sounds. **Beat Box**

The numbers on the levers represent divisions of the beat, each corresponding to an instrumental part in the following way:

[beat = contrabass]
beat subdivided in 2 = bass drum and hi-hat
beat subdivided in 3 = clarinet
beat subdivided in 4 = washboard
beat subdivided in 5 = piano
beat subdivided in 6 = trumpet

The activation of a lever immediately triggers the corresponding instrumental line. The first lever to be activated during standby mode cues measure 3. Subsequent levers cue their corresponding line regardless of where in the music they are triggered. (Thus, the “complete” score is given in each individual part, so players can follow along.) Nonetheless, the characters should attempt to flip a lever only *on a beat*. An automated “click” sound produced from external speakers might facilitate the musical entrances.

Levers can be flipped on and off. Once a subdivision has been activated, players should continue playing until their lever has been deactivated. The characters can facilitate cues by verbally indicating what they are doing.

After a pre-arranged number of repetitions, or at predetermined points in the script, the contrabass and washboard play a lead-in to the refrain. **Cue Refrain**

Following the refrain, the original beat (and tempo) is rearticulated and the beat box returns to **Standby Mode**. The first lever to be activated cues measure 3 again. **Beat Box**

Eventually, the characters decide to activate all the levers simultaneously. They then begin pushing up the slider (unused to this point). The slider, they discover, increases the tempo. A progressive accelerando begins. The tempo increases until the beat box becomes unhinged, out of control. Musically, the individually patterns should break down in a suitably chaotic way, with improvised mayhem followed by gradual disintegration and stop. On the screen a red, flashing *Danger: Accelerando!* can enhance the destructive effect, as can an explosive sound on an external speaker.

Machine Hum

Standby Mode

Steady; assertive ♩ = 60

Beat Box

Like so many moving parts; somewhat mechanical (same tempo)

Cl. beat/3 *mf* straight mute

Trpt. beat/6 *mf* tap

beat/4 Perc. RH LH *mf* sim.

beat/2

Pno. beat/5 *mf* (pizz.)

Cb. beat *mf*

Cue

Refrain

Standby Mode

Quickly; coming together, rousing and vigorous! $\text{♩} = 90$ ($\text{♩} = 180$)

$\text{♩} = \text{♩} = 60$ to Beat Box

Cl. *f*

Trpt. *f* open

Perc. *f*

Pno. *f*

Cb. *f* arco *pizz.* as before *mf*