

## TIPS for JAZZ DRUMMING

Dr. Sherrie Maricle

- I) READING and INDEPENDENCE
- II) KICKS, HITS, FILLS and SET-UPS
- III) TIME
- IV) STYLISTIC INTERPRETATION
- V) SOLOING and TECHNIQUE

### I) READING and INDEPENDENCE

**A) READING** is a required skill for all serious musicians in most of today's musical environments. One way to become a good reader is to read (sight read) a lot of music during your practice sessions (don't practice, just read) and if you make a mistake keep going. Recovering from mistakes is an important aspect being a successful reader. The music you choose to "practice-read" should be played in a predetermined style and tempo. (Ex: legit snare drum, jazz feel, funk feel, etc.) A common ability shared by good readers is the immediate recognition of rhythmic motives and phrases (groups of rhythmic figures). When you acquire this ability your identification of, and reaction to "the music" will be instantaneous and precise.

Two excellent books for practicing reading skills are: *Modern Reading Text in 4/4* by Louis Bellson and *Syncopation* by Ted Reed. These books are also a primary source for **INDEPENDENCE** exercises. Independence allows you to respond freely to the music you are reading and interpreting. To that end I suggest practicing within the context of a **Basic Jazz Groove** while reading the written lines as follows:

- 1.) Snare Drum
- 2.) Bass Drum
- 3.) Eighth notes on the SD, Quarter notes on the BD
- 4.) Eighth notes on the BD, Quarter notes on the SD. Tom-Toms can be substituted for the SD at your discretion.

If you want to further expand these exercises read the written line as follows:

- 1.) Hi-Hat (you may double the ride cymbal and SD)
- 2.) Quarter notes on the HH, Eighth notes on the BD
- 3.) Quarter notes on the BD, Eighth notes on the HH
- 4.) You may exchange any foot for any hand part in either a predetermined pattern or freely

One of my favorite books for practicing independence is *Stick Control* by George Lawrence Stone. Within the context of a **Basic Jazz Groove** play all notes marked with an "R" (right) on the BD. Simultaneously take all notes marked with an "L" (left) and play it on the SD or Tom-Toms. You may also practice the "R" and "L" as BD and HH or exchange any "L" note (freely or in a predetermined pattern) between the HH and SD/Toms.

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**B) CHART READING** requires you to follow the form (road map) of the piece being played. Drum parts are notated in many ways. There is no "standard" notation that you can study/memorize that will apply to every chart you encounter. Some charts are very clear, precise and easy to follow with all necessary information included. Other times parts may be nothing more than a sketch (play 8 bars at A, 16 bars at B etc.), a rhythm section lead sheet or a copy of a horn part. Steve Houghton's book *Studio and Big Band Drumming* provides excellent examples of several possible chart variations. No matter what kind of chart you are given, you are expected to accurately read the written music and, more importantly to interpret, improvise, be creative and make the music sound and feel good. Ultimately your goal is to memorize the chart(s) so you no longer have to read. *Keep the music in your head, not your head in the music.* Section II discusses the basic "how to" of chart interpretation.

## **II) KICKS, HITS, SET-UPS, FILLS, and PUNCHES**

To kick, set-up, punch, hit, fill or "catch" a written figure means to accent, support and/or "frame" that figure in a musical and stylistically appropriate manner. Being successful at this requires going well beyond the notation. It requires creativity, improvisation, musical taste and **INTENTION** (what is your set-up suppose to accomplish?). Figure interpretation can be loosely divided into 2 categories. **Hits and Punches** usually occur during light ensemble, soli or background sections and may be played as part of the on going beat pattern. **Kicks, Fills and Set-ups** occur during tutti or shout sections. You may be required to "catch" figures from both categories simultaneously. It is up to you to determine what type of kick, hit, punch, fill or set-up is required. Keep in mind your job is to enhance, support and prepare ensemble entrances. The way in which the drummer sets up a shout section or catches the figures of a given chart often determines the feel, style, phrasing and dynamics for the entire ensemble, whether it's a trio or big band. Good set-ups will make the ensemble entrances powerful, clear and precise. A bad set-up may cause a "train wreck". All kicks, fills, set-ups, punches and hits should be in the style of the music you are playing (no Virgil Donati fills for a Count Basie chart) and executed with solid time and a good feel.

**There are three basic ways to learn figure interpretation.** First, find recordings of music for which you have the drum part, listen to them and transcribe what you hear, even if it isn't 100% accurate. Second, aurally identify common figures and their accompanying kicks, set-ups, etc. on recordings or from live performances (without the drum part) and memorize them, make them part of your musical vocabulary. Third, isolate a particular rhythmic motive or phrase (perhaps from a reading exercise) and practice catching or setting-up that motive/phrase within a variety of tempi, styles and musical situations. Your ears are a major factor in developing your musical ability. Transcribing and stealing "licks" is not bad, it is a crucial step in your musical development. Some of my favorite Big Band drummers are Mel Lewis, Buddy Rich, Jeff Hamilton and Dennis Mackrel.

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### III) TIME

All drummers know that their primary function is to keep good time. You may have all the technique (chops) in the world, but if you can't lay down a solid groove that feels good, you have very little hope for employment. As Baby Dodds said "*you must play for the benefit of the band*". Time keeping is a skill that should develop into an intuitive (natural) ability. Good time creates a stability of feel and flow that should be established on the downbeat and stop on the cutoff. It is not only an essential element of the basic beat in ensemble and solo sections, but also necessary for fills, kicks, catching figures and drum solos. *The TIME should never stop, no matter what musical event is taking place.*

**Practice "basic" time in a variety of styles at various tempos.** It is very important to practice your "TIME" for several minutes...not measures! How many songs do you know have a duration of 8-16 measures? Suggestions for practicing time:

- 1.) Within a select style practice your "simple" groove for 5 - 10 minutes.
- 2.) Alternate phrases between a set tempo and double time; 8 measure of Bossa Nova into 16 measures of Samba.
- 3.) Alternate phrases of varying feels; 8 measures of Swing into 8 measures of Baiao.
- 4.) Alternate phrases of time with phrases of soloing; trading 4's or 8's or entire choruses.

Make sure all components of your time flow together in a smooth and connected manner. The beats (notes and rests) should always be legato!

### IV) STYLISTIC INTERPRETATION

You have to know the style in which you are playing. This seems obvious, but this detail is not always given the appropriate musical attention. Detailed, precise interpretation allows you to be "true" to the style and intention of the music. As a general starting point stylistic interpretation can be as simple as deciding if the music is Jazz, Rock or Latin. However, in order to achieve an authentic interpretation, the understanding of specific styles within these general categories needs much deeper investigation. There are literally hundreds of possibilities within each. For example **JAZZ** includes Dixieland, 1940's Swing, Be-Bop, Hard Bop, Fusion etc. **ROCK** includes 1950's, Rock-n-Roll, Motown, Funk, Hip-Hop, etc. **LATIN** includes Samba, Bossa Nova, Baiao, Bembe, Rhumba, Mozambique, etc. This list does not approach being complete. Musical styles are constantly being invented and redefined. The following books are excellent sources for studying prevalent styles of music. *Afro-Cuban Rhythms for Drum set* by Frank Malabe and Bob Weiner, *The Art of Bop Drumming and Beyond Bop Drumming* by John Riley, *Advanced Funk Studies* by Rick Latham, *The New Breed* by Gary Chester and *Brazilian Rhythms for Drum Set* by Duduka Da Fonseca and Bob Weiner.

***THE BEST WAY TO LEARN, interpret and understand various styles of music is to LISTEN DAILY as part of your practice regime. Once you can identify and play a certain style (music) or groove (drummer) check out the variations within. For example: play an exercise as Gene Krupa (Swing), then as Philly Joe Jones (Be-Bop) and then as Elvin Jones (Modern Jazz). I also suggest keeping a listening log or journal. This will help you keep track of areas in your listening that may need more attention. It will also generate an extensive "listening list" to share with others.***

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## V) SOLOING

The two general types of soloing include soloing **IN TIME** or **OUT OF TIME**.

**AN IN TIME SOLO** can be any length of time from a 1 measure (solo fill) to soloing on the form of a tune, to soloing on an unstructured form. The major, obvious requirement for an in time solo is that it be in the **TIME** of the tune you are playing. In the freest situations the time can be manipulated (double-time/half-time) and the groove can change (latin to swing to rock), but the underlying pulse should always be identifiable. If you are playing within a particular style, structure or form your solo should reflect and embody characteristics specific to that musical situation. I also suggest playing **Jazz Standards** on the drum set, both the melody and soloing. An excellent example of this style of soloing is Jeff Hamilton's solo version of *Caravan* on his trio recording, *It's Hamilton Time*. Finally, it is extremely helpful for developing your soloing ability to transcribe (and play) numerous solos of varying length and styles.

**THE OUT OF TIME** or open solo is often one of the most exciting opportunities for a drummer. You are given an empty space of indeterminate length (often indicated by a fermata) and expected to play something **AMAZING**. An open solo is the perfect opportunity for the drummer to express their *musicality* (connectedness with the music being played), *creativity* (fresh ideas of sound and color) and *technique* (show-off your chops) in anyway you choose.

**IDEAS FOR SOLOING**, as for an in time solo can be discovered (and hopefully applied) from doing a lot of listening/transcribing of both drum and other instrumental solos. To further develop solo ideas I suggest selecting **ONE** basic element of music such as rhythm, melody, harmony, dynamics, orchestration, form, sound (color, touch and balance), phrasing, emotion, technique, etc. and exploring as many aspects of that selected element as possible. As your confidence and ability grows, combine the "elements" together as you choose. Although none of these elements exist in a vacuum and often occur simultaneously, it's important to **begin simple**, remember this is an **EXERCISE**. Let your ideas grow slowly and naturally along with your creativity and intuitiveness.

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## TECHNIQUE

1.) Practice the standard 26 drum rudiments (and their variations) as a means to develop a **solid foundation** for your technique. There are many ways to orchestrate and apply rudiments to the drum set. **Example:** play all measured rolls (5, 7, 9, 10, 11, 13, 15, and 17) in an orchestrated manner around the set while keeping a Samba pattern in your feet. You can play the rolls as eighth notes, sixteenth notes, triplets, etc. Although rudimental drumming is primarily concerned with single and double stroke combinations, it is also important to practice orchestral or "buzz", "crushed" rolls. I recommend the following books for technical development: *Stick Control* (Stone), *Wrist and Finger Control and Swingin' the 26* by Charlie Wilcoxon and *Accent on Accents 1 and 2* by Elliot Fine and Marv Dahlgren.

2.) For developing **single strokes** and a deeper understanding of basic rhythmic subdivisions practice the following exercise. In 4/4 play the BD in quarter notes and the HH on beats 2 and 4. As a starting point set the metronome between 60 -80 and on the SD play 4 measures of whole notes, followed by 4 mm. of half notes, half note triplets, quarter notes, quarter note triplets, eighth notes, eighth note triplets, sixteenth notes, sixteenth note triplets and 32<sup>nd</sup> notes. Then repeat and orchestrate around the drum set. Notice you are going from 1 to 2 then 3, 4, 6, 8, 12, 16, 24 then 32 notes per measure. Keep all subdivisions even, smooth, connected and flowing. Increase the tempo as your chops develop. You can also play this exercise with double strokes and paradiddle stickings. Eventually you can add quintuplets and septuplets in their appropriate sequential order.

3.) **Bass Drum and Hi-Hat technique** can be developed by practicing the single stroke exercise described above. As you orchestrate elements of technique exercise 1 and 2 make sure to include either the bass drum or hi-hat as a component of the orchestration.

***Please remember that technique develops simultaneously with independence, time, reading, interpretation and soloing practice. The 3 suggestions listed above are intended to help you create a strong technical foundation on which to build creative musical ideas.***

Finally, to be **JAZZ DRUMMER** it is important to practice with BRUSHES as well as sticks. Many of the exercises listed here may be applied to brush playing, **BUT** brushes have unique characteristics and technical requirements that must be studied separately.

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## **SELECT VIDEO LIST**

### **INSTRUCTIONAL VIDEO**

<i>South American, Caribbean, African and American Jazz for Drum Set</i>	Alex Acuna
<i>Latin Rhythms</i>	Steve Berrios
<i>Mastering The Art of Afro-Cuban Drumming</i>	Ignacio Berroa
<i>The Living Art of Brushes</i>	Clayton Cameron
<i>Ragtime and Beyond</i>	Herlin Riley
<i>On Jazz Drumming</i>	Ed Thigpen
<i>Drumset Technique/History of the US Beat</i>	Steve Smith

### **HISTORICAL VIDEO**

<i>BUDDY RICH</i> - Jazz Legend, parts 1 and 2	(DCI)
<i>LEGENDS OF JAZZ DRUMMING</i> - parts 1 and 2	(DCI)

### **RELATED TEXT BOOKS**

<i>Drummin' Men 1 and 2</i>	Burt Korall
<i>Traps the Drum Wonder (Buddy Rich)</i>	Mel Torme

## **SELECT METHOD BOOKS**

### **JAZZ**

<i>Advanced Techniques for the Modern Drummer</i>	Jim Chapin
<i>Rhythmic Patterns for the Modern Drummer</i>	Joe Cusatis
<i>Studio and Big Band Drumming</i>	Steve Houghton
<i>The Art of Bop Drumming and BeBop and Beyond</i>	John Riley

### **LATIN**

<i>Afro-Cuban Rhythms for Drumset</i>	Frankie Malabe/Bob Weiner
<i>Brazilian Rhythms for Drumset</i>	DuDuka Da Fonseca/Bob Weiner
<i>Afro/Latin Rhythmic Dictionary</i>	Thomas A. Brown

### **FUNK/CONTEMPORARY**

<i>The New Breed</i>	Gary Chester
<i>Advanced Funk Studies</i>	Rick Latham
<i>Contemporary Drum set Technique</i>	Rick Latham

### **READING/TECHNIQUE**

<i>Modern Reading Text in 4/4</i>	Louis Bellson/Gil Breine
<i>Accent on Accents (Books 1 and 2)</i>	Elliot Fine/Marvin Dahlgren
<i>Syncopation for the Modern Drummer</i>	Ted Reed
<i>Stick Control</i>	George Lawrence Stone
<i>Swingin' the 26</i>	Charley Wilcoxon

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