

# INNER DRUMMING

## DRUMSET EXERCISES FOR DEVELOPING BODY/MIND AWARENESS

*by George Marsh*

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# Author's Preface

**E**ver since I started playing the drums at age twelve, I have been on a search to help myself become a better musician. The great drummers of the 1950s were my teachers. By going to Jazz At The Philharmonic concerts and frequenting Peacock Alley in St. Louis, I was able to see and hear Gene Krupa, Buddy Rich, Papa Jo Jones, Philly Joe Jones, Art Blakey, Elvin Jones, Louis Bellson, and many others. This worked great at first, but when I was in my twenties I started to feel the need to connect to a deeper place inside myself and to develop the connection of my body to the music I was playing. What I found initially was that by using simple relaxation techniques, my playing improved dramatically. My time feel became more grounded, my ability to memorize patterns increased and my rhythmic/melodic sense flowered. I started to integrate relaxation with the study of basic rudiments, and the process of relaxation became the place where the rudiments lived. My connection to the drumset became a whole-body experience in which I could express the feelings of both my heart and my intellect.

I decided to re-learn the drums using principles I had learned from my study of T'ai chi ch'uan. T'ai chi is a Chinese martial art that has fluidity of movement and openness of all the joints as an essential aspect of its techniques. A T'ai chi master can release tremendous amounts of energy and never tighten up. The T'ai chi master uses the force of the opponent by using the principle of adherence, thereby becoming one with the opponent. I knew I could apply this principle on the drumset.

My first experiences with these principles were during my studies with Robert Amacker, a master teacher in San Francisco. He showed me that power does not come from tightening, but rather from connectedness throughout the

whole body. This connectedness comes from feeling an aligned and open suppleness in all the joints. To apply this to the drumset, I started over again learning how to do simple, basic drum strokes, making sure I didn't tighten in the hand, the shoulder, or anywhere that wasn't absolutely necessary. Staying loose, and staying connected to the stick allowed me to use the force of gravity on the downstroke, and to receive the energy on the upstroke via the rebound. I was learning not only T'ai chi, but aligned suppleness.

I was also learning that it is essential to be aware of the flow of energy from limb to limb—a process I call scanning—when performing the various moves. Awareness brought about more effective T'ai chi, and conversely, non-awareness caused the moves to be imperfect and weak. After observing the effect that scanning had on my T'ai chi ch'uan, it became obvious that I needed to explore scanning as applied to drumming.

I thought it would first be useful to scan between the various combinations of two limbs. This led to the exploration of the six combinations that incorporate two limbs: right foot-right hand; right foot-left hand; right foot-left foot; left foot-left hand; left foot-right hand; and left foot-right foot. This inspired me to write the first *Inner Drumming* book. As a result of this exploration I was able to learn complex patterns more easily. My drumming became more relaxed and centered, and I was able to play more melodically because energy was flowing freely inside my body. At last, here was a method that helped me develop the internal body feelings that occur while playing the drumset. And in a non-competitive, relaxing, and fun way.

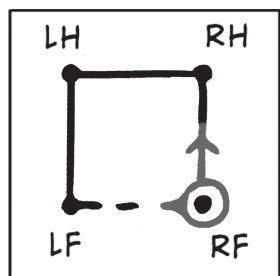


# Essentials FOR GETTING STARTED WITH *INNER DRUMMING*

**W**hen you play the drums you are already experiencing Inner Drumming, if not consciously, then subconsciously. The easiest way to experience this is to play a simple rhythm with two hands. Playing hand to hand is basic to all drumming and all drummers do it naturally. As you play hand to hand, slow the motions way down while feeling deeply what's going on inside your body, what's happening between the strokes. In deep slow-motion, be internally aware of your movement from limb to limb. **This increased awareness is what I call Inner Drumming.**

This book is an instruction manual that offers ways to enhance internal awareness while playing with one, two, three and finally all four limbs. The method allows the drummer to de-condition pathways of inappropriate reflexive responses that often appear when body energy is not flowing most efficiently. The entire study uses a single principle that organizes movement in a way that increases awareness of the flow of energy as it moves through the body. This single principle is the act of inner scanning from limb to limb. Inner scanning allows for an open and creative response to any musical situation.

The diagrams of Inner Drumming guide the drummer in scanning through specific limb-to-limb combinations. Below is an example, in standard notation, of a four-limb rhythm in 2/4 time. The sequence is bass drum—floor tom—snare drum—high hat. Following that is an example of the same sequence using an Inner Drumming diagram.



The lines in the diagram on the left, below, show the direction of movement inside the body from limb to limb, and give the drummer the choice of where and how to play the strokes. The dashed line indicates the last scan of a particular flow and the starting point of the next one. Standard notation can be quite specific but it does not indicate the direction of internal energy flow. The study of internal flow will enhance relaxed, focused, and sensitive playing. This awareness also expands melodic and rhythmic possibilities, allowing the musical ideas to flow more easily.

## WHOLE-BODY INSTRUMENT

The principles behind these drumming techniques have, as their main inspiration, the thousand-year-old martial art Tai-chi-ch'uan. In the Author's Preface, I mention how Tai chi has influenced the most rudimentary aspect of my playing by enhancing my whole-body connection to the drumset. The complexities of drum set playing are due in part to the fact that there are so many combinations of two, three, and four limbs. It is important that the drummer has a thorough knowledge of these combinations and has the experience of feeling them inside the body. The exercises in this book have been worked through in private lessons and classes with hundreds of students for well over three decades with excellent results. Through them you will work consciously with your energy from the inside to the outside and back again.

## STYLE-SPECIFIC RHYTHMS

The well-rounded drummer needs to learn the basic rhythms intrinsic to various styles of music. These style-specific rhythms are important because they help you to participate in the shared languages of the musics you love, and to interact with like-minded musicians. The concepts explored here will train your reflexes to listen in new ways and respond freely inside these various styles—and beyond them as well. The exercises will prepare you for spontaneous listening, thinking, and playing. As you work through the book you will notice your musical vocabulary becoming more and more inclusive.

**B**egin the study of *Inner Drumming* by adjusting your posture and giving attention to each limb, beginning with the bass drum. Sitting at the drums, ground yourself by visualizing energy coming from the center of the earth through your lower belly and out to the leg, ankle, and foot. Play a few simple strokes on the bass drum. Notice how the muscles feel as you make the strokes. Pause and play a single stroke. Let your foot and leg relax while listening to the sound as it dies away. As you listen to this, visualize the energy moving back up through your foot, ankle, leg, and lower belly, and then back down to the center of the earth. Next, repeat slowly and let your focus travel back and forth between your foot to your lower belly. **This would be a good time to check out the Appendix on page 163 for an in-depth look at some optimized techniques for each limb.**

## LISTENING WITH THE LIMBS

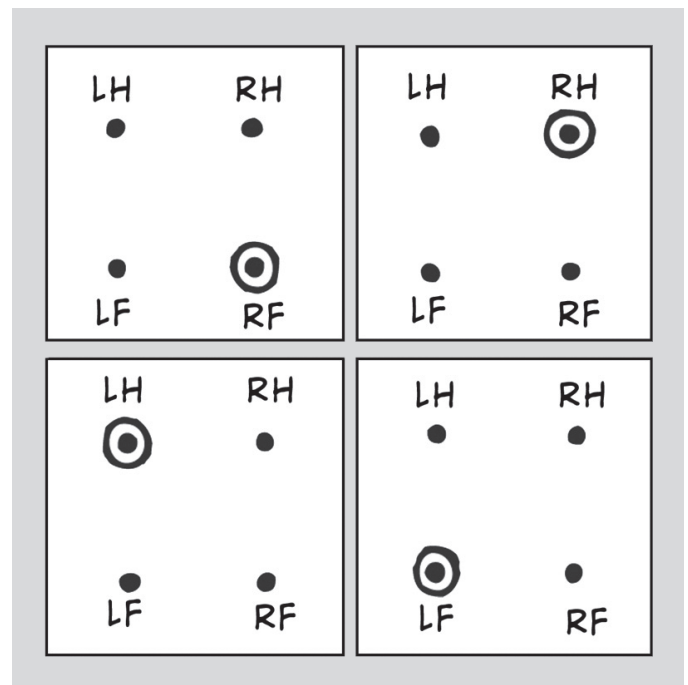
When making a stroke, the internal visualization, the sound itself, and the relaxation before and afterward create what I call **listening with the limbs. This is the single most important principle in this whole book.** Experience this (it's not difficult) and all of the diagrams will make sense. You will become aware of not just the sound that's coming from the bass drum but also with the whole scanning process *plus* the sound.

At first this is done very slowly, until a natural groove appears. This slow groove should be played with full attention to the movement of internal energy. As you do this, continue to listen to the sound coming from the bass drum.

Next, play a slightly faster tempo with the same attention to energy flow. Continue increasing the pace until you reach a tempo that's slightly uncomfortable. Breathe and relax until it feels smooth and effortless again. Continue the study by playing with the right hand next (RH). Then the left hand (LH), and finally the left foot (LF).

## NEW NOTATION SYSTEM

I've been using a simple notation system (see below) in which four dots represent the four limbs. RF is the right foot, RH the right hand, LH the left hand and LF the left foot. The circled dot indicates the starting point for each stroke or event. When working with any particular limb it is important to try many different types of strokes and rhythms. I have found that each limb will develop its own "music" that reveals itself when internal awareness is enhanced.



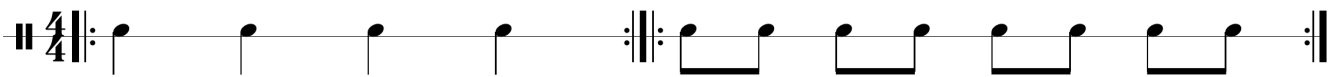
## PLAY YOUR FAVORITE RHYTHMS

After working with simple pulses, pick a favorite rhythm to play. Begin slowly and continue to feel internally as you play the rhythm. Experiment with accents, dynamics, and timbres, while staying aware of the internal movement of energy as much as possible. When playing faster, just let the rhythms happen and pay attention to the sounds that are being made. When you think you're ready, bring your attention to another limb, and repeat the process. Continue until you've explored all four limbs individually.

### USE THE METRONOME AT FIRST

I suggest setting a metronome at 50–60 and playing quarter notes for a while, then eighths, eighth-note triplets, and then sixteenths. The following exercises and rhythms below and on the next few pages will give you a good start, and help develop reflexes. Be sure to add your own accents and dynamics in a creative, relaxed, musical way.

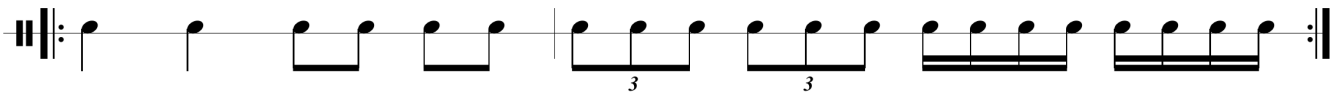
Metronomes are a great teaching tool to help you stay on track when learning new material. I also highly recommend playing the exercises in this book without the use of a metronome. This helps strengthen your internal, human, steady time.



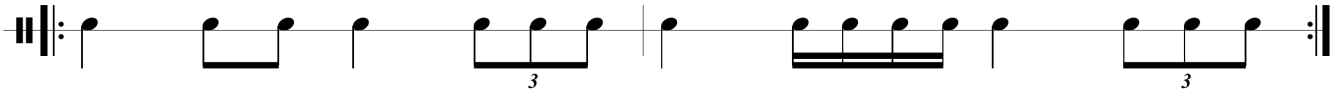
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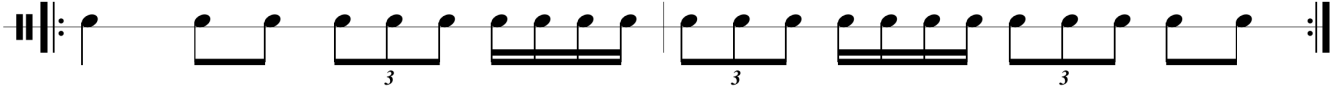
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