

THE ART OF BOP DRUMMING

by John Riley

edited by Dan Thress

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About the Author

Well-known for his creative flexibility and musicianship, John Riley has worked with such jazz mainstays as Stan Getz, Red Rodney, Dizzy Gillespie, Miles Davis, Quincy Jones, Jimmy Heath, Milt Jackson, Miroslav Vitous, Toots Thielemans, Randy Brecker, Gary Peacock, and the big bands of Woody Herman, Bob Mintzer, and the Vanguard Jazz Orchestra. His focus on original music ensembles has lead to work with guitarists, John Scofield, Mike Stern, John Abercrombie and Steve Khan, and saxophonists Joe Lovano, Bob Berg and Dave Liebman.

Equally active in the Jazz Education field, John received a Bachelor of Music degree in jazz performance from the University of North Texas, where he played in the One o'clock Lab Band, and went on to receive a Masters degree from Manhattan School of Music. He is currently on the faculty of New York University, William Patterson College and The Manhattan School of Music. As a freelance educator he has given master classes and drum clinics around the world.

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Contents

Time Playing 6

- The Ride Cymbal 7
- Phrasing 8
- The Jazz Drum Sound 10
- The Bass Drum & Hi-hat 11
- Cymbals 12
- Practicing 14

Comping 16

- Interdependence 17
- Comp Example 1 18
- Pacing 20
- Rhythmic Transposition 21
- Comp Example 2 22
- Comping with the Bass Drum 24
- Comp Example 3 26
- Comp Example 4 28
- Accompanying a Soloist 30
- Listening/Song Structure 32
- Awareness 33

Soloing 34

- Solo Structure 35
- One-bar Phrases 36
- Developing Musical Phrases 37
- Three-beat Phrases 40
- Developing Longer Solos 44
- Question and Answer Solo 45

Brushes 47

- Basic Pattern 48
- Ballad Patterns 49
- Uptempo Patterns 50
- The "Figure 8" 51
- "3 Against 2" Feel 51
- Brush Patterns in 3/4 52

More Jazz Essentials 55

- The Shuffle 56
- Playing in "2" 57
- 3/4 Waltz 58
- Samba 59
- 12/8 Feel 59
- Mambo 60
- Uptempo Playing 60

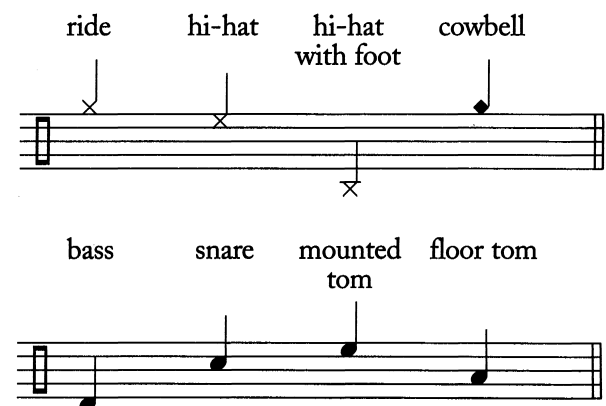
Charts 62

- School Days (medium) 64
- Last Week (shuffle and "2" feel) 65
- What Is This Thing Called? (medium-up) 66
- October (ballad) 67
- Satch and Diz (3/4, 4/4) 68
- Out In The Open (uptempo) 69

Appendix 70

- Recommended Listening 71
- General Discography 78
- Books & Videos 80

Key



Introduction

So you want to play drums, jazz drums, huh? Maybe you became interested in jazz drumming because you heard a concert or recording, attended a clinic or read an interview by one of the more prominent drummers of the last thirty years such as Dennis Chambers, Vinnie Colaiuta, Dave Weckl, Peter Erskine, Steve Gadd, David Garibaldi, Billy Cobham, Jack DeJohnette, Tony Williams or Elvin Jones. But where do you start? These drummers sound so different from one another. They use different tunings, cymbals, touch, technique and grooves, and they play different types of music. Yet all of them attribute a large part of their musicality to a thorough study and knowledge of the master drummers who preceded them.

Vinnie Colaiuta credits Steve Gadd, Billy Cobham and Tony Williams. Billy Cobham credits Tony Williams and Buddy Rich. Tony Williams credits Max Roach, Art Blakey, Philly Joe Jones, Jimmy Cobb and Roy Haynes.

All these drummers form a continuum that leads back to the be-bop era of the 1940s and '50s, and even earlier. The purpose of this book is to help you discover, and learn from, the masters of be-bop. Early innovators such as Baby Dodds, Zutty Singleton, Gene Krupa and Jo Jones, were exceptions to the old saying, "five musicians and a drummer" but all successful "bop" players were knowledgeable musicians as well as gifted drummers.

The leaders of the be-bop movement were Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Bud Powell and Thelonious Monk. Their compositions challenged drummers like no others had before. They combined rhythmically intricate melodies and sophisticated harmonies (at times played as slowly — or rapidly — as imaginable) in ways that continue to captivate players today.

This music requires more from a drummer than just timekeeping. When you listen to some of the masters of the idiom, you hear not only a great feel, but an acknowledgement of the melody and the harmonic form, musical accompaniment, and logical solos. If you dig even deeper, you may find that more than one of the "newest, hippest" phrases was already being played by a drummer in your grandfather's day!

I hope this book will shed some light on this important music, and will help you put down the same kind of musical roots many musicians so deeply value. Subsequent volumes in this series will address the musical innovations of the '60s and '70s, as well as chart reading and interpretation.

Enjoy!

John Riley

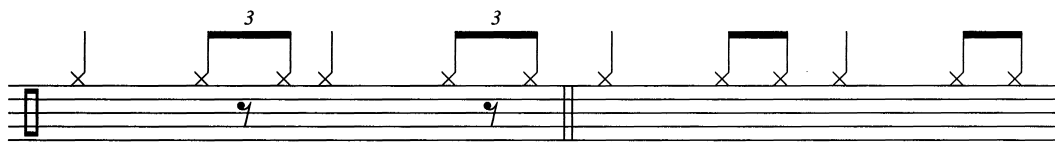
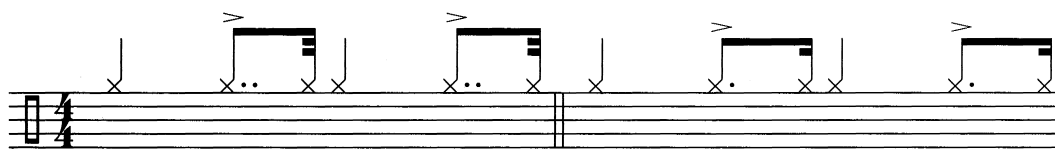
"People try to get into drums today, and after a year, they're working on their own style. You must first spend a long time doing everything that the great drummers do... Drumming is like an evolutionary pattern."

Tony Williams
Modern Drummer
June 1984

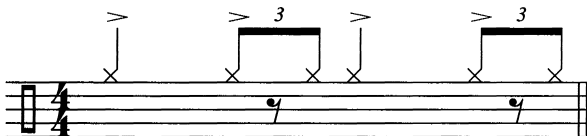
The Ride Cymbal

To a drummer, the key to playing any style of music well is recognizing and developing the fundamental elements that make the time flow. In contemporary popular music, the time flow is locked in by “1” and “3” on the bass drum and backbeats on “2” and “4” with the snare drum. In Latin music, the time flow is determined by the *clave*. While Latin drummers are notorious for rhythmic adventurousness, risks are not taken at the expense of the *clave*. Similarly, in rock or funk music, although it isn’t imperative that the bass drum be played on downbeats and the snare drum on backbeats, it is essential that the band feel that pulse. In jazz, the time flow comes from the phrasing of the ride cymbal pattern.

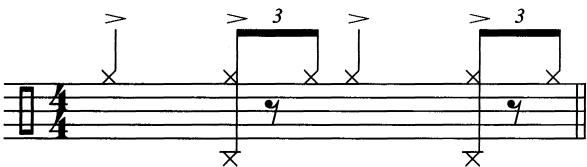
The pulse of jazz is a quarter-note feel with an eighth-note triplet subdivision. Over the years, different rhythmic phrases have been written to represent this pattern. Here are the four most common ways of notating the jazz ride cymbal pattern:



While none of these notations is completely accurate, the third example with the triplet phrasing is fairly close to the way most jazz drummers think of the ride pattern. The quarter-note pulse is paramount, because it gives the music a sense of forward motion. With this in mind, the phrasing begins to take shape and sounds like this:



Adding the hi-hat on beats 2 and 4 gives those beats more “weight,” as suggested in the other ride cymbal notations.



Rhythmic Transposition



Groups of four-bar phrases are the basis of almost all jazz tunes. In the early days, jazz musicians would start their solo ideas at the beginning of each four-bar phrase. As the musicians became more sophisticated, the phrasing began to change. Solo ideas became less predictable or symmetrical because they started at different points within the four-bar phrase.



Notice that the ideas you played in bars 1 and 2 of the first four-bar phrase sound quite different when played in bars 2 and 3 of the second four-bar phrase. In order to hear the difference, you must feel beat 1 of each four-bar phrase. Don't feel the beginning of each comping idea as the "1" of each phrase. This idea of moving identical rhythms from one place to another is called *rhythmic transposition*.

Check out these rhythmic transpositions:



Now go through each phrase in *Comp Exercise 1*, transposing the rhythm in the three different ways I just described. Count out loud to be sure that you are feeling both of the four-bar phrases and the way the comping ideas "lay" over the time. Make sure that the ride cymbal is swinging throughout. Once this is comfortable, spend some time improvising in this manner. Play along with CD track 4.