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# Introduction

Learning to play jazz drums can be a bit intimidating to those not familiar with the style. First, to anyone born after the late 1960s, jazz was not heard as often as in previous decades. Prior to this time, jazz music was played constantly on the radio, on the television, and in the movies. Furthermore, all of the movie and television studios had staff orchestras made up of excellent classical and jazz musicians. These orchestras were heard all over the media, exposing an entire generation to the sound of jazz. After the late 1960s, popular music transitioned into a straight-8th note pop/rock style, and jazz was not heard as much.

Let's take a moment and look at the differences between jazz/swing time feels and rock/funk time. Understanding these differences will help to make you a better player in both styles.

Element	Jazz/Swing	Rock/Funk
subdivision	triplets	8th or 16th notes
articulation	more legato	more staccato
most accents	upbeats	downbeats
direction	horizontal	vertical
time feel played on	ride cymbal	snare and bass

The other hurdle to overcome is the loose and improvisational nature of playing jazz time. If you teach an entry-level drummer a basic rock groove, usually they can usually repeat it over and over easily. Everything feels comfortable, and they are up and running very quickly. The hands and feet each have a prescribed, static part to play. Jazz, on the other hand, has less static parts within the groove. This is not to imply that jazz is harder or superior to rock, but it is tougher to grasp at the beginning stages. Playing jazz often feels like you're looking into a huge, dark aircraft hangar, and there's nothing inside it! So, how do you approach each of the tracks on the CD, and what do you do to become comfortable at each of these tempos?

First of all, listen to recorded examples of great players (in great bands). Nothing beats listening to music to learn how to play music! The written examples can give you something to help your concepts, and to help you develop coordination patterns, but nothing comes close to actually hearing great musicians in learning to apply those patterns. If you are unfamiliar with the various bands, do some internet research and/or ask your teacher (if you have one).

Next, play the written examples slowly to become familiar with some common patterns in the jazz style. Try playing these patterns with a metronome on beats 2 and 4 to develop a swing feel. Be sure to play one pattern until it becomes totally comfortable and all four limbs feel natural and balanced.

Also, try playing a pattern or two with one of the slower tracks on the CD. Keep things simple and basic, and stick to one or two patterns until you're comfortable. You should never play something with other players in a band if you're not comfortable playing it in the practice room to a CD. Also try singing the comping rhythm examples. If you can sing it, you can play it.

Finally, record yourself playing. If you've got a sophisticated recording setup, you can mix the tracks with a microphone input of yourself playing and get the full effect! If not, make a simple recording of just yourself and listen back to it. Does the time feel comfortable? Are the various parts of the set balanced evenly? Another great thought is to videotape yourself and look at your approach. Do you look comfortable?

You really have two sides to your playing: the technical side and the musical side. Always remember that your technique is there to allow you to express yourself musically—not the other way around. Practice the patterns and exercises to get comfortable with the coordination needed to express yourself, and then play along with the tracks to develop real musical skills. It's kind of like learning to play a single-stroke roll; it's something that helps you express yourself at the instrument, but no one ever hired you to play a gig of single-stroke rolls!

I remember taking French in school, and after a short period of time, my French teacher stopped using all English in class. From the moment we walked into class, we would speak only French. It became natural and fluid to speak and think in French. Many fourth-year French classes go to France for a few weeks as a summer trip just to become comfortable with the language. Nothing beats having to ask directions, order from a menu, or having to ask where the toilet is in a foreign country to make you learn a language.

That same principle applies to learning how to play jazz. Nothing beats listening to the great jazz masters to understand the many feels, styles, and tempos that are needed to play this music. If a bandleader says that a feel is a “medium Basie groove,” your brain should immediately get a mental “computer printout” of what that would feel like. It should give you an instant mental concept of what Papa Jo, Sonny Payne, or Harold Jones would sound like playing drums with the Count Basie Orchestra. If you mention the Bill Evans Trio, your mind should hear what Paul Motian or Joe LaBarbera did to create the loose, fluid time feel in that trio. This ability is the real essence of making music. Practice the examples until comfortable and listen to the suggested recordings to get a feel for each style. Then, put on the headphones and start playing along with various recordings. The ultimate goal is to play music!

Enjoy!



Jazz pioneer Baby Dodds

# Jazz Time

## The Ride Cymbal

The ride cymbal is the instrument that most carries the groove in jazz drumming. Strong cymbal (or brush) time provides pulse and propulsion for the other musicians. Playing a cymbal pattern weakly or with time fluctuations destroys the feeling of the music. In this case, a little imperfection kills everything. Therefore, much time and concentration must be placed on practicing the various ride patterns. There are also dynamic considerations. We need to be able to play all patterns from a whisper to a roar!! Tempo is another challenge in jazz, and bands can play any tempo between 50-400 BPM! A good drummer knows which patterns sound and feel good at each tempo.

## Repeated Ride Patterns versus Non-Repeated Ride Patterns

Many jazz drummers in the 1940s through the late 1950s played the repeated jazz ride pattern. However, by the early 1960s, most of the leading drummers started to vary their ride patterns. The variation of the ride patterns has become the standard sound in jazz. However, a good student of the music should be able to perform both repeated and non-repeated patterns. This skill gives the drummer more flexibility in his concepts.

Don't let any comping note in the snare or bass disrupt the feeling of the groove in the cymbal. Practice to make each exercise feel perfect!

## Practicing the Ride Cymbal

I suggest spending time concentrating only on the ride cymbal pattern with the hi-hat played on beats 2 and 4. Play along with the included CD, the metronome, and other CDs that you like. Start with the repeated ride pattern:



The tempos on the CD are ♩ = 100  
 120  
 140  
 160  
 190  
 210  
 240  
 265  
 290  
 310

Concentrate on each of these tempos. If the tempo is too fast, practice working up to that speed.

## Jazz Coordination - Comping Patterns

After you spend some time practicing the ride cymbal and hi-hat at the various song tempos, add some comping figures. I suggest that you take a small group of patterns and play them until you can remember them. Remember that the faster the tempo gets, the more challenging the comping figures become. Think about adding comping notes at each of the eleven CD tempos, and realize that certain figures work well at certain tempos. Decrease the complexity of the comping figures as the tempo increases.

## Basic Combinations

Learn these upbeat and downbeat figures, and play them at a variety of tempos.

The page contains 13 figures of rhythmic patterns, each shown on a staff with a treble clef and a common time signature (C). The notation includes rhythmic stems, flags, and 'x' marks indicating fretted notes. The figures are arranged in rows, with some having multiple variations labeled with letters like '1A', '1B', '1C', etc.

- FIGURE 1: 1A, 1B, 1C
- FIGURE 2: 2A, 2B, 2C
- FIGURE 3: 3A, 3B, 3C
- FIGURE 4: 4A, 4B, 4C
- FIGURE 5: 5A, 5B, 5C
- FIGURE 6: 6A, 6B, 6C
- FIGURE 7: 7A, 7B, 7C
- FIGURE 8: 8A, 8B, 8C
- FIGURE 9: 9A, 9B, 9C
- FIGURE 10: 10A, 10B, 10C
- FIGURE 11: 11A, 11B, 11C
- FIGURE 12: 12A, 12B, 12C
- FIGURE 13: 13A, 13B, 13C

**Jazz Coordination Part 1 - Combinations**

After you can play the Basic Combinations, combine these figures. Begin to memorize these figures and find combinations you like. Play the hi-hat on beats 2 and 4.

The image displays ten staves of musical notation for a jazz coordination exercise. Each staff is in 4/4 time and begins with a treble clef. The first staff includes a common time signature 'C'. The notation consists of rhythmic patterns using eighth and sixteenth notes, with 'x' marks indicating specific rhythmic accents or patterns. The patterns are organized into four-measure phrases across the ten staves.