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About The Author:



Dave DiCenso has performed and/or recorded with a diverse array of renowned artists including Josh Groban, John Petrucci (Dream Theater), Hiromi, Duran Duran, Steve Morse (Deep Purple/Dixie Dregs), Gary Cherone (Van Halen/Extreme), Judith Hill, Carole King, Johnny A, Cro-Mags, Shelter, Two Ton Shoe, and many others.

An equally skilled educator, Dave has personally mentored hundreds of drummers, many of whom have achieved world-wide recognition. He is a Professor of Percussion at Berklee College of Music, and the author of the method books *Rhythm and Drumming Demystified* and *Universal Rhythms for Drum Set*.

Dave endorses Ludwig drums, Zildjian cymbals, Remo drumheads, Vater drumsticks, DW pedals and hardware, and Puresound snare wires.

Acknowledgments:

This book is dedicated in loving memory to my father, Richard DiCenso, who introduced me to the world of drumming, and was an unerring source of support and inspiration for me throughout my life and career in music.

I also extend my deep gratitude to Rob Wallis, Joe Bergamini, Terry Branam, Matt Marzola, and Dan Caron for their time, effort, and dedication to making this book the best it could be.

Introduction

In Search of the “Right” Fill

Early in my career, after failed attempts to “make it” with a couple of local bands, I decided I would need to become a hired gun in order to prevent myself from having to earn a living outside of music. In doing so, I discovered I had a knack for being able to show up to a pre-production or recording session, quickly get to the heart of what a song needed, and produce the desired results. However, it wasn’t long before I began to notice I had at least one handicap; my struggle to consistently create what I thought was the “right” fill for any given situation.

I realized, too, that because of this creative limitation, I was leaning too much on what I already knew or could “borrow”, and thus was repeating myself too often. Moreover, this condition left me susceptible to “pasting” fills onto the music, like: “We need a fill here and I can’t think of one, so I’ll just fit this lick I know into this spot.” It makes sense that this would produce a feeling of something being *stuck on* to, rather than being *woven in* to the music.

Eventually, my dissatisfaction inspired me to create methods that would prove effective in addressing these shortcomings. My first course of action was to figure out how to generate new vocabulary, thinking that having more options to choose from would make it easier to create and play effective fills.

Expanding My Vocabulary

To expand my fill vocabulary, I began to lean on a system of interpreting rhythmic figures with rudiments, first shown to me by my dad when I was a teen. He showed me how to play a single stroke roll while accenting the rhythmic figures derived from permutating a quarter note, based on an eighth-note triplet grid. Interpreting that system of rhythms on the drums in this manner was eye-opening in that it offered immediate, complementary phrasing options while playing only single strokes. Now, several years later, I had expanded my practice repertoire by creating additional systems and modes of interpretation. I would eventually come to call these systems of figures **Rhythm Codes**.

In my book *Rhythm and Drumming Demystified*, I share **Rhythm Codes 1 through 5**, which are based on a half note permuted on an eighth-note grid, a quarter note permuted on a sixteenth-note grid, a quarter note permuted on an eighth-note triplet grid, a dotted quarter note permuted on a sixteenth-note grid, and a dotted half note permuted on an eighth-note grid, respectively.

Interpreting Rhythm Codes 1 through 5 around the drum set would have been of great value for its multiplying effect on my vocabulary alone. However, this work also forced me to become more conscious of the *rhythms* I was playing, and less conscious of the *stickings* I was using to interpret them. This had an awesome effect on both my creative and physical flow as it began to free me from having to micro-manage my vocabulary.

A good analogy for this paradigm would be storytelling. In the rendering of a story, one maintains focus on and is led by an idea, as words, in the endeavor to convey the idea, flow from the mouth with little to no conscious effort. I like to think drummers are the same as the storyteller, except our ideas come in the form of rhythms, and our words in the form of stickings.

In an effort to capitalize on the rewards of this type of work, my practice continued to evolve, resulting in my devising and working within an *essential rhythmic context* I call the **One-Bar Clave Codes** (OBCCs). While derived from Rhythm Codes 1 through 5, the OBCCs offer longer, more syncopated and “conversational” rhythms.

I chose the OBCCs as the rhythmic context for this book as I have found these rhythms to be the most widely played in all genres and eras of Western music. These rhythms make up the dialogue, the phrasing that *all* instrumentalists—including vocalists—are using as a basis from which to converse. This underscores why it is so crucial to be able to identify, interpret, and play them. Working with these rhythms, I was able to more clearly recognize the lingual nature of rhythm, further expand my fill vocabulary, and improve my ability to execute it fluidly.

Diversifying My Vocabulary

Still feeling some limitation, I designed another system that helped me make my vocabulary more flexible and easier to phrase with. I call it the **Last to First Method** (LTFM).

The LTFM requires you to play stickings as fills starting from different points in the time, based on a rhythm. This process forces you to depart from the time (groove) at multiple, pertinent junctures within a phrase, thus increasing the functionality of a sticking. Add devices like anticipating the downbeat and playing over the bar line, and the LTFM becomes an extremely fun and highly effective discipline for creating adaptable and flowing fill vocabulary.

Beyond Vocabulary: Becoming a More Musical Drummer

Now, as I said, my work at this time was not just about vocabulary and flow. It was also about devising a way to work on my ability to consciously listen to what was going on outside of what I was playing. While having a larger, more adaptable vocabulary was helpful, I knew I'd still struggle to consistently play the "right" fills if I couldn't hear myself in the context of the music.

So, eventually, I designed what I call **Above the Neck Disciplines** (ATNDs). ATNDs are exercises that develop our ability to consciously listen to, process, and manage the pulse, space, and rhythmic "shapes" or "structures" that exist within the music we play. I call this skill **aural-cerebral coordination**. For musicians, it is the most important kind of coordination to attain, once we have enough physical coordination to function.

ATNDs offer a way to practice playing from a "*mind leads, body follows*" mentality. In this way they aim to help you operate as a musician as you operate in life. In life and music, flow is attained when the mind creates, and the body acts out the mind's creation.

The ATNDs are effective in training the mind to lead in this way because they require us to *name* each of the three components of the time as we play and, eventually, be able to consciously listen to what we are saying and playing, simultaneously. It is through the acts of naming and listening we are able to go beyond just *feeling* the time-environment, to *knowing* it. While feeling is, of course, crucial, it is knowing that gives us ultimate control.

The ATNDs will require you to use your voice both in tandem and counter to what you are playing. To achieve the ability to listen to both your voice and the drums simultaneously, it will almost always be necessary to put one component on auto-pilot and focus on the other. Repeating this process alternating which component is on auto-pilot will eventually allow you to bring both into your consciousness at once. I call this "dove-tailing the dialogue."

In addition to improved listening skills, repeated use of the ATNDs fortifies us with an “inner-quantizer” that improves our ability to place notes more accurately in the time. It also develops in us a sort of “GPS” that allows us to see the “landscape” of the time, without seeing it written. Thus, we know where we are, where we are going, and, as such, find it easier to contribute relevant, complementary ideas to the music we play.

Finally, understand that being conscious of the time-environment as you practice is a means to an end. The goal, for example, is not to be counting in performance any more than it is to be conscious of the alphabet when you speak.

Along with playing and listening to music, the methods, concepts, and disciplines provided in this book are ones that have best helped me to expand and diversify my fill vocabulary, and learn to use it more fluidly, musically, and with greater control. My hope is you will have the same experience!

LESSON 18

Sixteenth-Note Triplet Stickings

Exercise 1

Rhythm

1 n d + n d 2 n d + n d 3 n d + n d 4 n d + n d

Stickings

- 1) $\overline{R} L R L R \overline{L} R L R \overline{L} R L R L R \overline{L} R L R L R \overline{L} R L R L$
- 2) $\overline{R} L R R L \overline{R} L R R \overline{L} R L L R R \overline{L} R L L R \overline{L} R L L$
- 3) $\overline{R} L L R R \overline{L} R R L \overline{R} L L R R L \overline{R} L L R R \overline{L} R R L$
- 4) $\overline{R} R L R L \overline{R} R L R \overline{L} L R L R L \overline{R} R L R L \overline{R} R L L$
- 5) $\overline{R} R L L F \overline{F} R L L \overline{R} L L R R L \overline{F} R L L F \overline{F} R L L$
5 4 6 5 4

Exercise 2

Rhythm

1 n d + n d 2 n d + n d 3 n d + n d 4 n d + n d

Stickings

- 1) $R L R \overline{L} R L \overline{R} L R L R L R L \overline{R} L R L \overline{R} L R L R L$
- 2) $R R L \overline{L} R R \overline{L} L R R L L R R \overline{L} L R R \overline{L} L R R L L$
- 3) $R F F \overline{R} L F \overline{R} L L F R L F F \overline{R} L L F \overline{R} L L F R L$
- 4) $L L F \overline{F} R L \overline{R} R L F F R L F \overline{R} R L F \overline{R} R L F F R$
3 8 4 9

LESSON 29

Sixteenth-Note Triplet Fills

Exercise 3

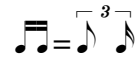
Rhythm

1 n d + n d 2 n d + n d 3 n d + n d 4 n d + n d

R R L L F F R L L R L L R R L F R L L F F R L L

Application: Funk

♩ = 75/100



1.

F R L L

2.

F R L L F F R L L

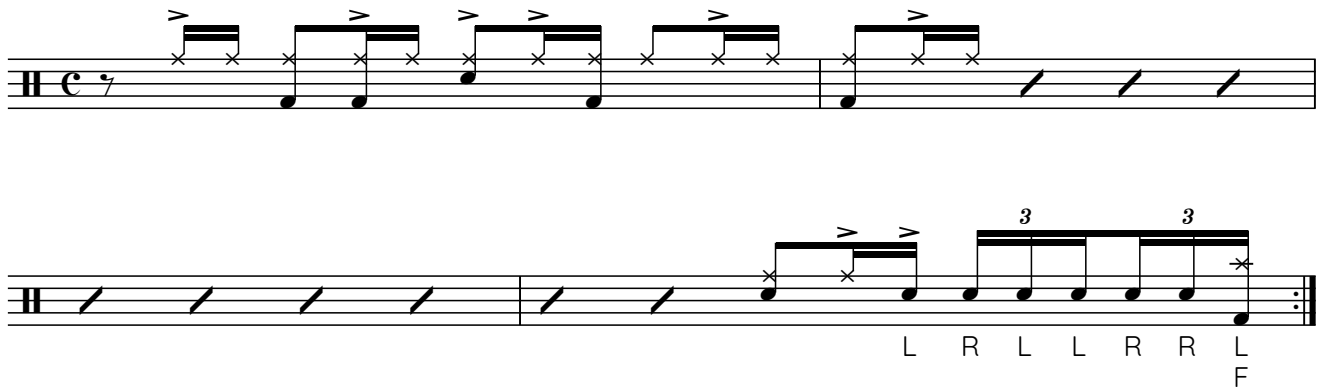
3.

R L L R R L F R L L F F R L L

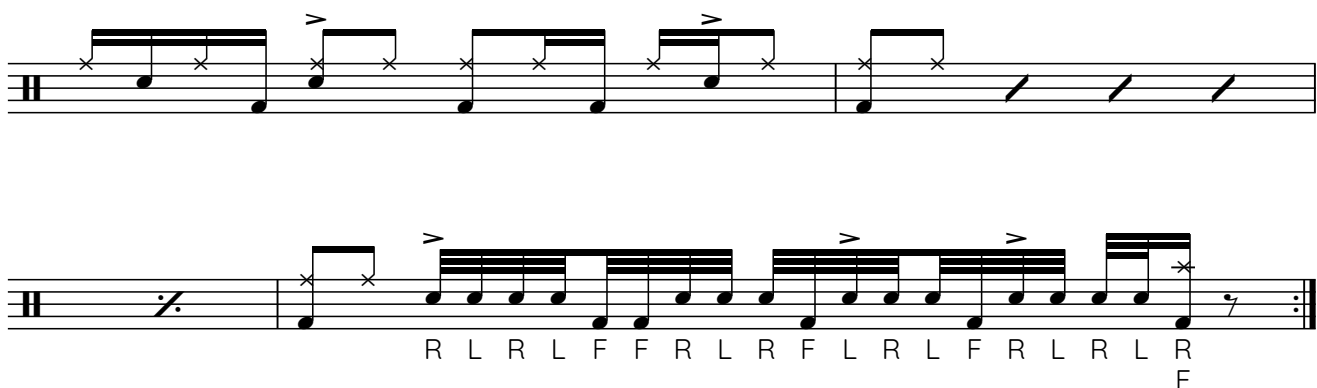
4.

F R L L R L L R R L F R L L F F R L L

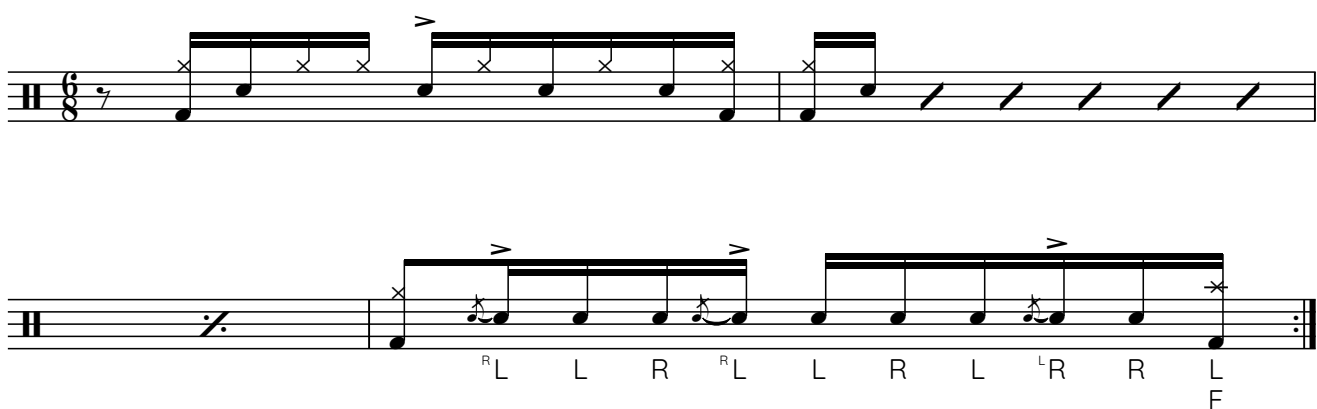
Exercise 7 - Exercise 1 from Lesson 29 resolved to the "a of 4" 



Exercise 8 - Exercise 3 from Lesson 30 resolved to the "e of 4"



Exercise 9 - Exercise 2 from Lesson 31 resolved to the "+" of 6" 



LESSON 35

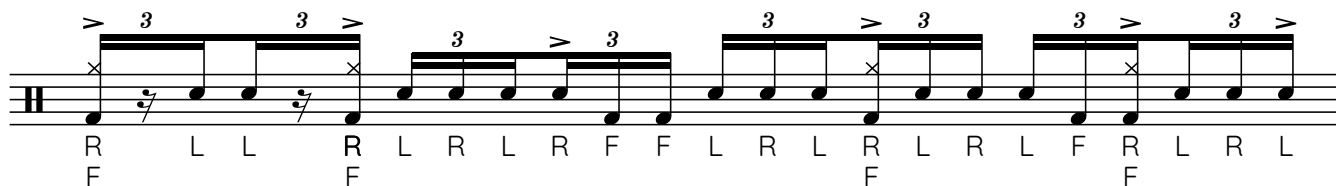
Addition, Subtraction, Substitution, and Layering

Exercise 7 - Exercise 3 from Lesson 29



Musical notation for Exercise 7, Exercise 3 from Lesson 29. The exercise consists of four measures of music on a single staff. Each measure contains a triplet of eighth notes. The first measure has a triplet of eighth notes starting on G4, with a dynamic accent (>) over the first note. The second measure has a triplet of eighth notes starting on A4, with a dynamic accent (>) over the first note. The third measure has a triplet of eighth notes starting on B4, with a dynamic accent (>) over the first note. The fourth measure has a triplet of eighth notes starting on C5, with a dynamic accent (>) over the first note. The fingerings for each measure are: R R L L F F, R L L R L L, R R L F R L, and L F F R L L.

Exercise 7A - Exercise 3 from Lesson 29, Tooled



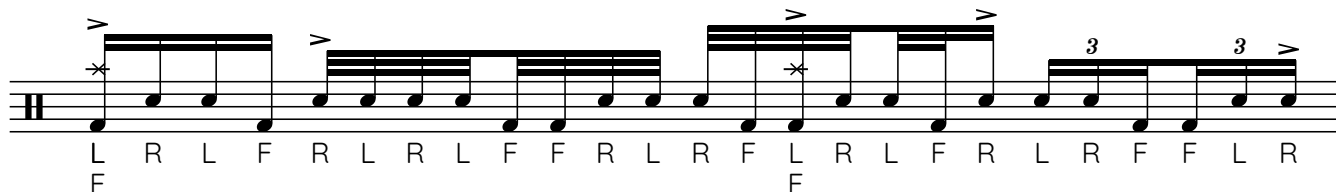
Musical notation for Exercise 7A, Exercise 3 from Lesson 29, Tooled. The exercise consists of four measures of music on a single staff. Each measure contains a triplet of eighth notes. The first measure has a triplet of eighth notes starting on G4, with a dynamic accent (>) over the first note. The second measure has a triplet of eighth notes starting on A4, with a dynamic accent (>) over the first note. The third measure has a triplet of eighth notes starting on B4, with a dynamic accent (>) over the first note. The fourth measure has a triplet of eighth notes starting on C5, with a dynamic accent (>) over the first note. The fingerings for each measure are: R L L R, L R L R, L R L R, and L R L R. The first and third measures have a cross (x) over the first note, and the second and fourth measures have a cross (x) over the last note. The fingerings for the first and third measures are: R F, L L, R F, and L R L R. The fingerings for the second and fourth measures are: L R L R, F F, L R L R, and F R L R L.

Exercise 8 - Exercise 3 from Lesson 30



Musical notation for Exercise 8, Exercise 3 from Lesson 30. The exercise consists of four measures of music on a single staff. Each measure contains a triplet of eighth notes. The first measure has a triplet of eighth notes starting on G4, with a dynamic accent (>) over the first note. The second measure has a triplet of eighth notes starting on A4, with a dynamic accent (>) over the first note. The third measure has a triplet of eighth notes starting on B4, with a dynamic accent (>) over the first note. The fourth measure has a triplet of eighth notes starting on C5, with a dynamic accent (>) over the first note. The fingerings for each measure are: R L F F, R L L F, R L R L, F F R L, R F L R, L F R L, R L F F, and R L R L.

Exercise 8A - Exercise 3 from Lesson 30, Tooled



Musical notation for Exercise 8A, Exercise 3 from Lesson 30, Tooled. The exercise consists of four measures of music on a single staff. Each measure contains a triplet of eighth notes. The first measure has a triplet of eighth notes starting on G4, with a dynamic accent (>) over the first note. The second measure has a triplet of eighth notes starting on A4, with a dynamic accent (>) over the first note. The third measure has a triplet of eighth notes starting on B4, with a dynamic accent (>) over the first note. The fourth measure has a triplet of eighth notes starting on C5, with a dynamic accent (>) over the first note. The fingerings for each measure are: L R L F, R L R L, F F R L, R F L R, L F R L, R L R F, F L R, and F L R.