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Introduction

by Jim Chapin

Quite a complicated recipe, this making of a drummer: the ability to maintain an even tempo; a firm sense of meter; good coordination between hands and feet; quick reflexes; the self-discipline that enables one to practice hard and with concentration.

These are fundamental building blocks, and any young drummer should consider himself blessed if he starts his career with a sizable chunk of even one of them. Even the greatest players make it clear that, in spite of their success, the preponderance of their talent usually lies in but one or two of the above areas.

This is what makes Joe Morello so amazing. He has *no* visible weaknesses. His time is impeccable; his taste is unerringly correct with reflexes like lightning. And his coordination, on many different levels, is unique.

On top of what must have been an outstanding original talent, the fact that Joe is one of the world's champion practitioners is also largely responsible. Many drummers have conditioned themselves, sometimes grudgingly, to be with their drums for some appreciable portion of their waking hours. Joe, who has been playing drums for over thirty years, is still in the first flush of a great love affair with the instrument.

Joe first studied with Joe Sefcik in his hometown of Springfield, Massachusetts. Sefcik was a remarkable teacher who gave him a fine background, and then suggested Joe study with George Lawrence Stone, a delightful man, who was just overjoyed with Joe. Of course, the lessons proved to be just as rewarding for the teacher as the pupil.

When I spent a day with Mr. Stone in 1951, he talked about "the outstanding kid from Springfield" a good part of the time. Of course, I didn't connect the "drum monster" I met at the Valley Arena that very next year with Stone's prize pupil.

As far back as the mid-'50s, Joe was far along in the process of developing his own special and devastating technique, a skill which has given rise to some marvelous drum mythology: "Man, I never heard anything like it! That cat was rolling with his left hand!" This technique might be characterized as a sort of perpetual motion of evenly divided three- or four-note phrases.

Many drummers make a rough attempt at this effect by first dragging the stick, in a kind of repeated buzz, and then opening it, trying vainly to produce evenly divided accented taps. Superficially, it might be said that Joe does the same thing, but in contrast, his sound is perfectly "round," with no breaks in continuity.

Probably, it is Joe's most amazing invention, but perhaps some credit belongs to the late Billy Gladstone and his theory of "catching the bounce." Joe took only a few lessons from Gladstone, but all he has ever needed was the spark of an idea from which to build an imposing edifice.

Speed? Joe can perform with one hand what others need two hands or more to achieve. How did he arrive at this pinnacle? Talent, energy—and an analytical mind.

New York's Hickory House was a jazz and steak house for about forty years. From late 1952 until 1955, when he left Marian McPartland to join Dave Brubeck, Joe held open drum clinics there. Sitting at the oval bar that enclosed the bandstand entitled a young drummer to more than the trio; during the intermissions, one could follow Joe to a rear table to watch him perform miracles on a folded napkin.

In his first few months in New York, Joe's intense interest in drums and his natural modesty often conspired to get him in trouble. In perfect innocence and admiration, Joe would ask some respectable, though perhaps not overwhelming, technician to demonstrate a facet of his learning. Falling into the trap, and without any idea of Joe's capabilities, the "master" would display his technique. In all sincerity, Joe would enthusiastically ask, "Is this right?" and then proceed to reproduce whatever had been demonstrated—twice as fast and much cleaner!

Until the pecking order had been established, and Joe's original position as "new boy in town" had turned into unchallenged "king of the hill," his sincere thirst for knowledge made some unwary drummers quite nervous.

The Dave Brubeck Quartet had acquired a respectable following of jazz fans well before Joe joined the group. Their concerts were sellouts all over the country. However, Joe brought a new solo voice into the fray, along with the facility and flexibility to anticipate and complement Brubeck's search for new rhythmic directions in jazz. Many composers in the pop field learned their lessons well at the feet of these master experimenters.

During the Brubeck years, Joe produced a body of recorded solos that has no parallel in all jazz. In addition to all the technical excellence on display, the final impression is one of delightful discovery. The solos are so full of episode, of delicious surprises, and of theme and variation that they stand on their own as drum compositions.

Joe has maintained a lower profile recently, concentrating on teaching and cutting down on personal appearances. But hearing Joe today is a real revelation. He is a veritable powerhouse. Part of this relatively recent step forward is his increased use and understanding of the Moeller system, which he was forced to achieve from a distance and almost by intuition.

Sanford Moeller, through years of observation, had discovered that there was a common trait that "swift" drummers seemed to share: the look of the hands and arms in relationship to the sticks. The action of the "thrown" accents made it appear as though the sticks had a secret power of their own. The exercises that Moeller invented and compiled utilized the extraordinary acceleration of whipping accents, and an axiom of physics: "An object in motion (in this case the tip of the stick), when allowed to move freely, tends to stay in motion." Moeller claimed no origination of the system, and he believed that really gifted students would eventually develop it naturally through trial and error.

Joe never studied with Moeller. In later years, Moeller developed a habit of discouraging students from enrolling for lessons. His rejection of Joe seems tragic in retrospect. Moeller would have been very proud to see what Joe has accomplished with his system, even from a distance. He has achieved standards of speed and dexterity that the "old man" could never have possibly anticipated.

The student of this present work will find a real, but *realistic*, challenge here. For shining out from each exercise is the light from the lively intelligence of Joe Morello—an all-time drumming genius.

Preface

by Joe Morello

on technique

Master Studies is not intended to be a “how-to” book. By that I mean that it’s not an instruction book that will teach you various hand and stick positions, nor does this book have anything to do with any “style” of playing, nor is it intended to give the drummer some “hot licks.” This is a workbook of material to use in developing the hands for accenting, and for controlling the different pressures used in single strokes, double strokes, and closed rolls. You can go through this book using whatever techniques you’ve been taught, and you can apply the ideas in this book to any style of music you want. Furthermore, this book does not have to be practiced in any particular order. You can skip around and work on whichever exercises are most appropriate to your needs at any given time.

Technique is only a means to an end. The goal is to play musically, but some drummers lose sight of this and approach the drums strictly from a technical standpoint. Often, they become so fascinated with speed that they miss the whole point of music. So just studying this book for the technique alone doesn’t make any sense. You have to apply the technique to the music you are playing. If you need to use accents, for example, this book will help you develop the ability to put an accent wherever you hear one. But when you are playing, you should not be thinking, “Well, now I’m going to play page such-and-such from *Master Studies*.” The ultimate goal is

to be able to play what you hear in your mind and to be able to play it instantly.

Although I am known as a jazz drummer, I never studied jazz drumming with anyone. My teachers were Joseph D. Sefcik, George Lawrence Stone, and Billy Gladstone, who were not jazz drummers by any means, but who knew how to get a good sound out of a drum. In my travels around the world, I’ve run into many different approaches and techniques. I think it would be presumptuous of me to declare my way of playing as being the “end-all” of techniques. However, there is one thing that I want to make very clear: I’ve come to the conclusion that everything is done with natural body movement. The wrist turns and everything have to be natural; they have to fit the way the body is made. You must use everything in a natural way. After you have been playing awhile, you will develop an individualized style, and each style has its place.

Some of the things in this book are unusual, and they might give you different ideas about things you can do. For example, some of the accents are in odd places, and in that respect, it might open your mind to different patterns. But ultimately, it’s up to your imagination to develop your own creativity. So this book is just to help you develop your facility, keep yourself in shape, and help you become aware of what your hands are doing and how they’re working. How you use the technique is up to you.

using the metronome

I feel that the exercises in this book should be practiced with a metronome. But it is important to understand what a metronome will do and what it will not do.

A metronome will help you to be rhythmically accurate; it will not teach you to swing. The metronome can be used to gauge your development; it should not be used as a challenge. Let’s look at each of these points.

The metronome is useful in teaching you to space your notes correctly and keep time. The metronome will not slow down when you play the fast parts; it won’t speed up on the slow parts; it won’t change the pulse when you change from 8ths to triplets to 16ths. It can be very valuable in helping you to learn rhythmic relationships (such as those in the “Table of Time” section in this book). It will also help prepare you for playing with a click track, if you should encounter one in a recording studio.

The metronome will *not* teach you to swing or groove. That has to do with feeling, and the metronome has no feeling; it’s a machine. However, don’t be afraid of the metronome either. There has been a myth going around for years that, if you practice with a metronome, you’ll play mechanically. That’s not true. So use the metronome as a guide, but don’t let it become more important than it really is.

One way of using it as a guide is by gauging your progress with it. As your proficiency increases, you can play with the metronome set at higher tempos. Psychologically, being able to see your progress is helpful. But don’t get involved in a

speed contest with the metronome. When you forget about being musical and start worrying about speed, you are defeating the purpose of music. Being able to play 16th notes at a metronome setting of 270 doesn’t mean a thing if you can’t play them musically.

I suggest starting off slowly each time you practice. Make sure you are totally relaxed. After your muscles are warmed up, you can gradually increase the tempo, one metronome marking at a time. If, at any point, you start to feel tension in your hands, wrists, or arms, STOP. Move the metronome back a couple of notches and work from a tempo at which you are totally relaxed. This is what will eventually build speed.

We all have days when we don’t seem to be able to play as well. Maybe yesterday you were able to play a certain exercise with the metronome set at 160, but today you feel tension if you try to go past 148. Fine. Stay at 148. Playing stiffly at 160 won’t do you a bit of good. Eventually, you’ll work your way back up to 160. Your top speed may go up and down from day to day, but if you average your speed and compare it week to week, you should see some improvement.

Experiment with using the metronome on different beats. You may want to start with the metronome clicking off each beat of the bar. But after you can do that, try it with the metronome clicking off only the first beat of each bar, or set the metronome to click on the “2” and “4” of each bar, or have it play on each “and” in a bar. There are a variety of ways to use the metronome. Use your imagination.

8th-note and triplet combinations

These exercises combine ideas from the previous two sections. Remember to pay attention to the *sound* you are making, and strive to eliminate any tension from your arms, wrists and fingers.

1

R L L R L R L L L L R R R L R L R R R

2

R L R R R R L R L R L L L R L R L L

3

R R R L R L L L R L R R L L L L R L L

4

R L L R L L R L L L L L L L R L R L L

5

R L L L L L L R L L R R R L R L L L R

6

R R L R L R L R R L L R L R L R L L

7

R R L R L R R L L R L R L L R L L L

8

R R L R L R R L R L R L R L L L L R L

9

R R L R R L R L R L R L L L L L R L L L

triplets with flams

1

Ⓡ L R Ⓛ R L Ⓡ L Ⓡ L Ⓡ L Ⓡ L R Ⓛ R L Ⓡ L Ⓡ L Ⓡ L

2

Ⓡ R R R Ⓛ L L L Ⓡ R R R Ⓛ L L L Ⓡ R R R Ⓛ L L L

3

Ⓡ R L Ⓡ R L Ⓡ R L Ⓡ L R Ⓡ L R Ⓛ L R Ⓛ L R Ⓛ L R Ⓛ L R Ⓛ L R Ⓛ L

4

R L Ⓡ L R Ⓛ Ⓡ L R Ⓛ Ⓡ L R L R L Ⓡ L R L Ⓡ L R L Ⓡ L R L Ⓡ L

5

Ⓡ L Ⓡ L R L Ⓡ L Ⓡ L R L Ⓡ R R R Ⓛ L L L Ⓡ R R R

6

Ⓛ R L Ⓡ L R L Ⓡ L R L Ⓡ L R L Ⓡ L L L Ⓡ R R R Ⓛ L L L

7

Ⓡ R R L L L L Ⓡ R R L L L L Ⓡ R R L L L L Ⓡ R L

8

Ⓡ R L Ⓡ R L L L Ⓡ R R L L R L Ⓡ L R L Ⓡ R R L L L

9

Ⓡ R L Ⓡ R L L L Ⓡ R R R L L L Ⓡ R L R

Biography



Joe Morello was born on July 17, 1929, in Springfield, Mass. Having impaired vision since birth, he devoted himself to indoor activities. At the age of six, his family's encouragement led him to studying the violin. Three years later, he was featured with the Boston Symphony Orchestra as soloist in the Mendelssohn Violin Concerto. At the age of twelve, he made a second solo appearance with this orchestra. But upon meeting and hearing his idol, the great Heifitz, Joe felt he could never achieve "that sound." So at the age of fifteen, Joe changed the course of his musical endeavors and began to study drums.

Joe's first drum teacher, Joe Sefcik, was a pit drummer for all of the shows in the Springfield area. He was an excellent teacher and gave Joe much encouragement. Joe began sitting in with any group that would allow it. When he was not sitting in, he and his friends, including Teddy Cohen, Chuck Andrus, Hal Sera, Phil Woods, and Sal Salvador, would get together and jam in any place they could find. Joe would play any job he was

called for. As a result, his musical experiences ranged from rudimental military playing to weddings and social occasions. Eventually, Mr. Sefcik decided it was time for Joe to move on. He recommended a teacher in Boston, the great George Lawrence Stone.

Mr. Stone did many things for Joe. He gave Joe most of the tools for developing technique. He taught Joe to read. But probably most important of all, he made Joe realize his future was in jazz, not legitimate percussion as Joe had hoped. Through his studies with Mr. Stone, Joe became known as the best drummer in Springfield, and rudimental champion of New England.

Joe's playing activity increased, and he soon found himself on the road with several groups. First, there was Hank Garland and the Grand Old Opry, and then Whitey Bernard. After much consideration, Joe left Whitey Bernard to go to New York City.

A difficult year followed, but with Joe's determination and the