

INTRODUCTION

All drummers develop their own patterns, beats and methods of execution as they grow as musicians. However, when playing in the studios they come up against a variety of vastly different musical situations. During my many years in the studio I dealt with many different producers, some of whom played a little bit of drums, and some of whom wanted tricky and unique drum parts. I would take 15 minutes and write the parts out, then play them in the studio, and then take the parts home and file them away. I accumulated quite a few of what I call “systems”—things that weren’t based on normal, everyday drum playing. This book illustrates many of these systems, and is designed to develop coordination, musicality, reading ability, and confidence. It also provides drummers with new and exciting material to help them develop individual creativity.

These systems are not designed to be played strictly as exercises, but used as tools to develop new musical ideas. In the studio, you must be prepared to play an incredible variety of musical genres—jazz, rock, Latin, fusion, country, etc. The material contained within these systems can be applied to any and all musical styles

Another aspect of studio playing is sight reading. You should be able to sight-read anything without any problem. Of course, even if you are a great reader, if you come across some tricky patterns and you don’t have the coordination to go with the reading, it will throw you. Therefore, the systems in this book will promote advanced reading and coordination not only of single-line drum parts, but multi-line drum parts as well.

The main benefit of mastering these systems, however, is the development of individual creativity. All musicians need inspiration and material to continue their own musical growth. Hopefully, the information contained in these systems will provide you with new possibilities and ideas for continued musical development. The systems will prepare you for things you might encounter in the studio—reading, coordination, flexibility. They will also prepare you to be part of current musical trends, and to create the music of the future.

Current trends in music allow these systems to be used more and more. Once a number of drummers master the systems and can sight-read multi-line drum music, it is possible that composers and arrangers will write music with this approach in mind. It is my hope that, by illustrating these systems, I can help drummers understand their instrument better and help them become members of the “new breed” of drummers who will take part in the shaping of modern music.

CONCEPTS: Part 1

DEVELOPMENT OF ALL LIMBS

One of the biggest problems that many drummers have is the fact that they do not have complete control over all four limbs. Many drummers just practice snare drum exercises and do not incorporate the feet. By the same token, drummers who do incorporate the feet often have trouble leading with the left hand (if they are right-handed). Many drummers come to me and say, “My right hand is fine, but my left hand is terrible.” It’s the same thing with the feet—strong bass but weak hi-hat. My methods for using these systems cover all aspects of using all four limbs in a practical sense.

RIGHT- AND LEFT-HAND LEAD

All of the systems contained in this book will involve leading with the left hand as well as with the right. This will develop better control over the instrument and eliminate the idea of a weak hand. Most drummers find that, by practicing these exercises with either hand leading, the weaker side becomes the creative side: Since this side is not trained, it is easier for it to groove and play funkier. The concept of left-hand/right-hand lead is especially effective when used with two floor toms and three hi-hats—my concept of “territorial rights.” Try to develop a balance in the center of your body, rather than focusing on your right or left.

MY APPROACH TO DRUM SETUP: “TERRITORIAL RIGHTS”

In my drum setup, I use three hi-hats—two in the traditional position and one on the side above the floor tom. I also use a second floor tom to the left of the traditional hi-hat. I find that this offers tremendous flexibility, and I recommend using a similar setup when practicing these systems.



By using three hi-hats, you are opening up a whole new world of possibilities. You can lead with the right hand on the closed right hi-hat, and play patterns, beats, and accents on the drums, cymbals, or other hi-hat to create a variety of feels and tonal colors. You can also lead with the left and have right-hand flexibility. I call this approach “open arms”: right-hand lead on the right hi-hat; left-hand lead on the left hi-hat. Crossing over the snare drum to play the hi-hat seems unnatural to me.

This brings us to the second floor tom, and the idea of territorial rights. I use the second floor tom (on the left side) for many sound possibilities. I find it easy to

simulate two bass drums by tuning the tom to the same pitch as the bass drum. It is also very useful when leading with the left hand.

“Territorial rights” refers to playing the instruments on the left side with the left hand, and playing the instruments on the right side with the right hand.



As you can see from the photo, the small tom, hi-hat, cymbals, snare, and large tom (on the left) are most naturally played by the left hand, while the snare, small tom, large tom, hi-hat and cymbals on the right are played by the right hand. It is simple and logical. If you put a four-year-old child behind a set of drums, the child would not cross over to play the hi-hat.

I found that one of the biggest problems I had in the studio (as far as technical execution) was ending a fill on the right side and then getting back to the hi-hat. By using three hi-hats, two floor toms, and left- and right-hand leads, this is no longer a problem. Be sure that you use the same setup when you play that you use when you practice.

BASS DRUM TECHNIQUE

Many drummers wonder whether they should play the bass drum with the heel down or up. I feel that for today’s music you need to be able to play both ways.

I personally play with the heel down, and my power comes from the knee down, not from the hip. During my years in the studio, we very rarely played very loudly, and engineers were able to adjust my sound to whatever volume was needed.

However, today’s studio playing, as a rule, is much louder. With the invention of modern recording instruments, such as limiters, and the success of heavy rock bands, you are often called upon to play very loudly. Studio engineers today call the bass drum a kick drum, and many times that is what you do—kick it! I find that playing with the heel up gives you a short, staccato sound, and playing with the heel down gives you a more rounded sound. You will need to be able to play at all dynamic levels, so you should practice both methods. I, however, recommend more concentrated effort on the heel-down approach for control.

POSTURE

I’m a firm believer in sitting properly when you practice, play in the studio, or perform live. Good posture will help you keep your stamina and endurance, and prevent possible back injury.

In the studio, I would sometimes work 17- to 20-hour days. In 1969, I suffered a

slipped disc injury and was out of work for six months. Although I felt that my posture was okay, being more aware of specifics in this area might have helped to prevent this injury.

Another benefit of sitting correctly relates to hearing the instrument. Sitting with correct posture allows you to hear the entire set, as opposed to when you are leaning over the hi-hat or snare drum. It also enables you to play with a very natural balance of sound between each part.

I suggest using a mirror when you practice. You can check your posture, and even your facial expressions. Some students bite their lips or stick their tongues out. That just dissipates your energy.

TIME

The most important thing for a drummer is understanding time. This occurs with experience and dedicated practice. There are three basic time feels: on top, in the middle, and behind. You have to find out which time feel works in a particular situation.

On Top—This type of feel generates the most energy and excitement, but there is always a danger of rushing. In playing on top of the beat, you play with a feel slightly in front of the center of the beat.

In The Middle—This type of time feel is exactly that: in the middle of the beat.

Behind—This feel places the groove slightly behind the center of the beat. Playing with Count Basie requires playing behind.

In playing good time with a rhythm section, the bass player and drummer must work well together. It is great if you can find a bass player who you are comfortable with—one who feels time in the same place that you do. Then the two of you can figure out the type of feel required for a given session.

In practicing the systems, you should practice with a click track, because in the studio you must be able to work with it. People say that a metronome doesn't swing. It doesn't, but what you put with it will swing. Practicing the systems with a click will help develop a good sense of time, and will help develop the feel of working with a click. Practice the systems using all three types of time feels.

GROOVE AND SWING

The way to make these systems cook is to know them inside out. When reading a chart for the first time, just about any drummer, even one of the greats, will sound mechanical. But by the third or fourth time through, it should groove. The same idea applies to these systems. The first time you play it, it's not going to swing. These are coordinating exercises, and they are hard. They will be (for the most part) unfamiliar to you, and nothing unfamiliar is going to cook right away. After you understand each system, sing each line, and hear and understand all the lines and parts. Then you can work on specifics about the groove.

After you can play each system reasonably well, tape yourself. Listen for spacing, sound, accents, dynamics, and musical approach. Criticize yourself to the x degree.

Grooving in the studio or with a rhythm section is not a one-person thing. You can practice grooving at home and play great. However, you might get with a rhythm section in which the bass player plays something that contradicts what you are playing, and the groove will be gone. There are many aspects to playing a groove. Bass, guitar, drums and keyboards all must groove together. Therefore, it is important to practice so that what you play feels good to you, but it is also important to get experience with other musicians and work on grooves together.

THE IMPORTANCE OF SINGING

This concept represents one of the most important and beneficial ways of using the

systems. As you go through the systems, you will find that you have to sing various parts of the exercises. You will end up using the voice almost like a fifth limb, and this will help you in many ways. Some of them are:

1. *Ability to hear and feel the quarter note.* One of the first things you have to sing is the quarter note, along with the metronome, as you sight-read. The quarter note is the daddy of the bar; singing it really helps you hear exactly where the quarter is, and how everything you play relates to it. This will result in better time feel and better execution.

2. *Sight-reading ability.* As you advance through the systems, you will find yourself playing with all four limbs and singing a different part each time you play through an exercise. As you sight-read, you will sing the quarter note, then the snare drum part, then the line you are sight-reading, and in some cases, the upbeat and the hi-hat or cymbal part. Practicing in this manner helps you to sight-read without having to sing the melody line all the time, and enables you to recognize figures and execute them instinctively.

3. *Understanding of individual parts.* When playing complicated figures with all four limbs, you must be aware of each individual part that makes up the figure. In the studio, you may sometimes be asked to play the bass drum louder or the snare drum softer. You may find that, by changing just one part of the figure that you are playing, such as simplifying the snare drum or playing a part on the hi-hat instead of the snare, you can create a special effect or please a producer. By practicing these systems while singing a specific part, you will become acutely aware of each part, and thus be able to have more control over dynamics and more flexibility when you are playing.

4. *Alleviate mechanical reading.* Many drummers sight-read well, but they are not really hearing and feeling what they are playing because they are playing mechanically. By mastering the systems and being able to sing each part, sight reading will become less mechanical and more musical. You will be so familiar with figures that coordination and execution will not be a problem; you will be free to create a feel within the music you are sight-reading.

5. *Awareness of pitch and timbre.* When singing each individual part, you should sing in a tone very close to the part that you are focusing on. The snare drum vocal part should sound somewhat like a snare, bass drum like a bass drum, etc. Many drummers are not aware of tones and pitches. Most can hear a snare drum part, but when asked to play the same figure between tom-toms or on the bass drum, they are lost. When practicing the systems, you will find melodic lines shifting around among different instruments. Singing these different parts enables you to understand fully each tone color.

6. *Awareness of spacing.* Singing helps you to be aware of the placement of each beat and the spaces between each note. A common problem is rushing fills when excited. Singing will help you develop an accurate awareness of spacing and precise execution. Some of my students, after mastering the singing of each part, sing the rests while playing the exercise.

7. *Energy.* Singing can create a certain excitement and energy when you are practicing, playing in an isolation booth in the studio, or playing in a live performance situation. When you sing with energy, you play with energy.

8. *Breathing.* Another benefit that results from singing exercises is awareness of correct breathing. Try to sing a drum fill while breathing in. It is incredibly awkward. The fill flows naturally when you release the air. I feel that, if you breathe normally, your playing will flow normally.

A concept that helps many students is the idea of breathing in the same manner that a horn player breathes. Sometimes I have students write breath marks in each exercise to promote natural breathing.

The concept of singing will become more understandable as you go through the systems. Hopefully, you will find that this is a very enjoyable and beneficial part of your practice routine.

