

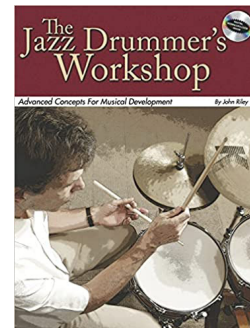
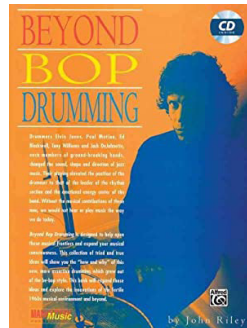
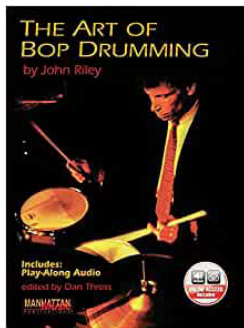
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INTRODUCTION

I fell in love with music and the drums a long time ago and have been an observer, student and fan of great drummers for over 40 years. In that time I've come to realize that all the great players have seamlessly assimilated four main components of music-making, and they play with a spirit that unifies and inspires their bandmates. This book will dig into each of these critical components. I'll show you exercises and strategies that have been beneficial to me and I'm certain will help you achieve your musical goals.

The drum set is a relatively young instrument—it's only about 100 years old—and up until the 1960s, everyone that played the drum set was a jazz drummer. So the jazz drumming language is the foundation for most of what's played today and, as such, the basis for this book. If you already own my books *The Art of Bop Drumming*, *Beyond Bop Drumming* and *The Jazz Drummer's Workshop*, this book will expand on that material and shed light on areas the books don't address. If you don't own my books, they are chock full of useful information which will be a great supplement to the material presented here.



The drums are a very powerful instrument, but we're primarily an accompanying instrument—our job is to help make the band sound as good as possible. Since a band really IS only as good as its drummer, what does it take to become a great player, a master musician of the drum set?

It should go without saying that one must have a love of music and of playing the drums and a curiosity about how the music and drumming have evolved. As I've said, I've come to realize that all great players share four fundamental qualities: They all have excellent technique, a strong groove, fluid creativity and superior musicianship. The development of each of these characteristics is essential because they work together when playing at the highest level. Whether you dream of playing with Miles or Meshuggah, you've got to have good time and an understanding of songs in order to be a contender, so the development of your groove and musicianship must not be overlooked in the pursuit of the more tantalizing skills.

Practicing should focus primarily on groove and musicianship, but this instrument is a little too complicated to be successful at without a certain level of technical control. Technique and creativity are the building blocks which lead to a solid groove and contribute to good musicianship. Improved technique improves your groove and makes it possible to execute your musical decisions. Superior technique doesn't necessarily lead to great musicality, but most of the innovators, on all instruments, are able to hear things their peers can't and are able to execute their innovations because their technique is superior.

CHAPTER 1: Technique

Hand Technique

So what do I mean by technique? In the broadest sense, having good technique means having control of each of your limbs so that you can organize them to best support the music you are playing, but let's start with some the fundamentals of hand technique.

There are two different philosophies on how to move the sticks. The first I'll call the "firm grip" and it's basic premise is to control the movement of the stick at all times. In the firm grip the fingers are wrapped around the stick throughout the entire range of motion. Muscles are engaged to lower the stick towards the drum and to lift the stick back to the starting point. The result is great precision and a dry, staccato sound.

The second approach I call the "loose grip." It seeks to capitalize on the fact that, when held loosely, the stick wants to rebound. My fingers engage the stick with just enough contact to avoid losing it.

I throw the stick towards the drum and let it fly into the surface. After it strikes the surface, the ensuing momentum propels it back to the starting point. The result is a more legato sound and, with ample practice, equal control and better endurance than with the firm grip.

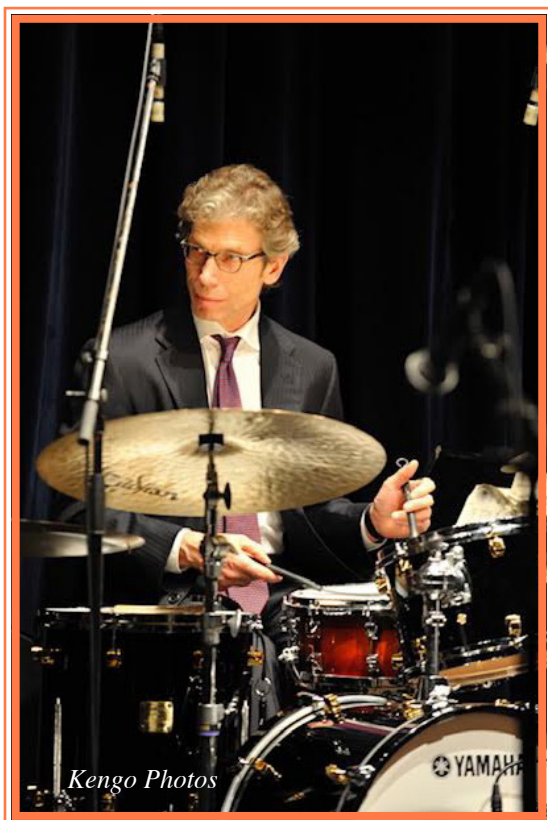
You may find it helpful to cultivate the feeling of the rebounding the stick, if you experiment with throwing the stick while loosely holding it between your index and middle fingers. Once you can feel that free-flowing motion, return the stick to the normal position and cultivate that same sensation.

For softer, faster playing I rotate my hand from the palm-down German grip to the thumb-up French grip and initiate each stroke with my middle finger. All my fingers contribute, but the middle finger is the prime driver of the stick.

If you play matched grip, use your right hand as a model for your left. I play traditional grip and find it helpful to cultivate the sensation of the rebounding stick by first holding the left stick with my thumb and simply rotating my wrist.

Once that motion feels relaxed, I reposition the stick, cradling it—not clamping down on it—in the webbing of my left hand and gently curve my index finger over the stick. With the traditional grip, the index finger is the main point of contact and the initiator of both wrist strokes and finger strokes. The other fingers should simply find a natural relaxed position.

The balance of your stick has a big impact on just how much rebound you get. Check out the relationship between the speed of each downstroke and each rebounding upstroke. To me it looks



Vanguard Jazz Orchestra, Japan, 2012

CHAPTER 1 (continued)

and feels as if the stick is actually rebounding up even faster than it's going down. Check out that same relationship when I flip my stick over and play with the heavier butt end. In this position the stick definitely feels slower. That means in order to play fast I'll need to use my muscles more to compensate for the stick's slower upward momentum. I imagine that you, like me, prefer to let the stick do as much of the work as possible, so I suggest you select a stick that feels as lively as possible. In general, sticks that feel top-heavy are more sluggish.

We've discussed a little bit about wrist and finger strokes and hand positions. Where does volume come from? Volume comes from height. When a coin is dropped from two inches, we get less volume than when it's dropped from twelve inches, and it's the same with a stick. If I need more volume I will add more height by simply raising my arm, or I will add the weight of my forearm to the movement.

Hopefully by now you have a sense of just how gently to hold the sticks. As you start to work on these ideas you will most likely feel that you will be giving up too much control if you hold your sticks as loosely as I hold mine. If this is the case, I suggest you put a little stick wax on your sticks. I find that when I first start playing each day, or if I'm in an extremely air-conditioned room, my sticks feel slippery. After a few minutes of playing, a little perspiration builds up and the sticks feel much more secure. I find the application of a little stick wax makes the sticks feel great right away.

Most of my playing, maybe 80%, is with the wrists and in a more-or-less German position on the snare drum. I rotate my right hand into a French, or what some people refer to as the $\frac{3}{4}$ American grip, to play the ride cymbal so that I can incorporate my fingers. To play the ride cymbal, I use the combination of a wrist throw on beats 2 and 4, and then I collect the stick with my fingers to play the skip note and beats 1 and 3. The motion starts on beat 2.

Even if you are relaxed, any kind of repetitive movement, like a long series of wrist strokes or a long series of finger strokes, will lead to fatigue. Because I am distributing the workload between a wrist throw and the finger action when playing the ride cymbal, I can get a really good sound and play quite fast and relaxed for long periods of time.

The Moeller Stroke

Another movement which distributes the workload is the Moeller stroke. In the Moeller stroke the arm or forearm employs a whipping motion which causes the wrist to accelerate and snap towards the drum. This whipping stroke generates enough energy to create multiple secondary bounces. If one's wrist and fingers are supple enough to accept these "free" notes, the Moeller stroke can be a great addition to your playing.

One of the difficulties in mastering the Moeller stroke is that, in order to get it, you've got to really give up a lot of your control of the stick. One effective way to overcome this problem is to

CHAPTER 1 (continued)

do exercises which give your brain something else to worry about while you make the Moeller stroke. The idea is that if your brain is preoccupied with another activity, the hand playing the Moeller stroke will have to relax and find its own natural equilibrium.

Since the Moeller stroke is best mastered as a three-note sequence, let's imagine we are playing eighth notes in 3/4 and accenting every third eighth note, like this: (sing 1+2+3+)

Now, with your opposite hand, play the three quarter notes in each bar while maintaining the Moeller sequence. At first there will be a lot of friction between your limbs, but eventually the hand playing Moeller will find its own sense of balance and order. Don't force the synchronization of your hands; let them work it out together.

Once this is flowing, try varying the pattern in your opposite hand. Now make the Moeller sequence in triplets and vary your opposite hand.

The Moeller stroke is great, but it doesn't work in every musical situation simply because the stroke is powered by an accented first note. Years ago Joe Morello showed me how he could diminish that accent by minimizing and randomizing the whipping motion in his left hand. This mini-Moeller stroke almost becomes a shimmying movement, where the left index finger simply rides on top of the stick.

We've been talking about hand technique, which is a large subject. If you'd like to delve further into this I recommend checking out: Joe Morello's *A Natural Approach to Technique* and Jojo Mayer's *Secret Weapons for the Modern Drummer*.

Foot Technique

Now I'd like to discuss a little bit about foot technique. I'm using basically the same approach with the bass drum as I use with my hands. On the bass drum pedal I am playing heel down and I launch the beater towards the bass drum head, let it fly into the head and bounce off. With a bass drum tuned like this, with some resonance, this approach generates the best sound. I don't press the beater into the head, because that chokes the sound of the drum and reduces my speed and flexibility. Most of my playing is flat-footed.

The way I generate power on the bass drum pedal is the same as the way I do it with the sticks, I use height, or in this case I make my pedal strokes longer. At a loud volume the beater is almost starting from the top of my shoe. So, just like with the hands, I use smaller strokes to play softly and larger strokes to play louder. Regardless of the volume, I strive to get a good sound and to stay relaxed.

For years I had difficulty listening to the old-timers like Gene Krupa, Buddy Rich and even Max Roach because they played the bass drum so loudly when they played four on the floor. I asked Jim Chapin about this, and his answer was really enlightening. Jim told me that in those days the

CHAPTER 1 (continued)

bandleaders didn't trust the projection of their bass players, so band leaders sought out drummers with a strong foot to compensate. Drummers had to play the bass drum strongly or they wouldn't get hired.

Playing the hi-hat is a little different, because what we are generally going for is a staccato sound, so we have to use either pressure or weight to get a clean "chick." There are three different approaches to achieving a good chick. The technique many jazz drummers use we call the heel-toe technique, so if you are playing 2 and 4 on the hi-hat, your heel will tap beats 1 and 3 while your toe will play beats 2 and 4. When you synchronize that with your bass drum, your left heel should land exactly with the bass drum on beats 1 and 3.

Another way to play the hi-hat is with a rocking motion. My heel is lifted off the pedal but I maintain some weight on the cymbals. I rock my heel up and down and gently release the weight off of the cymbals just before beats 2 and 4 so that the cymbals open. The weight is then brought back in on beats 2 and 4 to create a good chick. When synchronized with the bass drum, it looks like this:



Carnegie Hall Jazz Band, Italy, 1995

This is an excellent technique for playing up tempos, because the rocking movement of the entire leg helps us stay relaxed and the added weight helps us get a solid chick.

For softer playing I don't need as much weight on the pedal so I play the hi-hat flat-footed. The movement looks like this:

I like to set up my hi-hat with the top cymbal fairly loose in the clutch and with the cymbals about two inches apart. This loose top cymbal generates a warm, open sound when playing time on the hi-hat, when splashing the hi-hat, and when using the hi-hat as a crash sound.

CHAPTER 1 (continued)

PLAY-ALONGS

Coordination



70BPM



80BPM



90BPM



100BPM

So we've discussed a little bit about hand technique, a little bit about foot technique; the next technical component is coordination. The objective is to gain control of your limbs so that you can play either hand or either foot at any time in the service of the music—that's the ultimate goal. So I'd like to show you a series of exercises with that in mind; first with the cymbal playing time and the feet playing time while the left hand plays a moving part, then we'll take it from there.

Since we're working towards playing music, these exercises should be practiced as four-measure phrases, and you should strive to be able to hear a four-bar structure. I've asked the great bass player Jay Anderson to play some bass lines at a variety of tempos for you to practice with, and I'll play along with them too. For now we'll focus on one simple harmonic structure which we call the 1-6-2-5 turnaround, or C A D G, because this harmonic cycle is part of many songs. We're going to use this cycle in many ways to develop coordination and later to work on groove.

4x ♩ = 100

1

So that's a collection of basic, classic jazz comping phrases. You want to get comfortable with them and not let your ride cymbal distort as you play them. The next thing to do is to play the exact same sequence with the bass drum.

4x ♩ = 100

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