

# THE BEAT MATRIX UNLOCKED

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## ABOUT THE AUDIO/VIDEO

Each chapter of the book has a matching video file in which Mark explains the concepts in that chapter and demonstrates some of the examples. These videos are named to match the title of each chapter. For the digital book, click on the video icon to view the chapter video.

Each example has a matching audio file. They are numbered to match the book. For the digital book, click on the example number to hear the file.

## BONUS MATERIALS: Play-Alongs/Loops/Sample Kits

### Play-Along Tracks (w/video)

- Each with and without drums.
- One-bar click count in for tracks with no drums.

1. Code
2. Resolved
3. Swaggestry
4. Unlocked

### Bonus Tracks (audio only)

5. Light Speed
6. Beat Tables
7. Afro Math
8. Circle Squared
9. BPM
10. Juxtapose
11. Vibes
12. Technodrum

### Loops

- 30 Loops w/BPMs  
5 Different Categories:
- Trap
  - Hip Hop
  - Gospel
  - Drum 'n' Bass
  - '70s/Disco/Rock

### Sample Kits

5 different genre full sample kits

## DRUM KEY

|              |              |              |       |              |        |               |      |              |                     |       |
|--------------|--------------|--------------|-------|--------------|--------|---------------|------|--------------|---------------------|-------|
| Bass<br>Drum | Floor<br>Tom | 2nd<br>Snare | Snare | Small<br>Tom | Hi-Hat | 2nd<br>Hi-Hat | Ride | Stick on Rim | Hi-Hat<br>with Foot | Crash |
| ●            | ●            | ●            | ●     | ●            | ✕      | ✕             | ✕    | ●            | ✕                   | ✕     |

# PREFACE

Welcome to our world!

Thank you for your inspiration to keep growing as a musician. It is the reason behind this presentation, and I'm honored to share my experiences and go on this journey with you.

Here is what happened to me:

I used to wonder why when I played beats live it didn't feel or sound like the record, there was a lack freedom to be creative, I was frustrated to take a solo, feeling very limited and that what I'd play really didn't fit. Imagine you had to perform some music from a record that was made with programmed beats (or sounded like it). You really liked the music and were excited to play it. You gave your very best effort in practice and the performance only to discover how disconnected everything felt, and that no matter how hard you tried, what you played felt like it wasn't authentically fitting the music. There is a struggle, a feeling of knowing there is more and you really want to pursue it. This is how I felt for a while and is why I wanted to share some of my lessons on this continual journey with you.

The musical start for me happened by playing drums in church. From there it went to learning about jazz, leading me to hip-hop, R&B, rock, and eventually to mixing them all together. Through the years I've gained a lot of experience and discovered there's a similarity to all these types of music that links them. I had been a student of every band offered in school from elementary through high school, including gospel choir, symphonic band, concert band, jazz band, pep band and marching band. Then I moved to New York City to continue my jazz studies, which embodied and built on the things I learned in school. What I wasn't expecting was to be introduced to a person whose musical concept would change my musicianship forever: James Yancey, a.k.a. J Dilla.

In that first year in New York, I had the opportunity to play in a band and recreate some of Dilla's programmed beats live from the game-changing hip-hop album *Like Water for Chocolate* by the artist Common. It was my first major tour. Upon hearing that album my first thought was, "Wow, these drums sound so live even though they are programmed, I want to learn more." On further study, I discovered that the only drummer I had ever heard play hip-hop was on that album. It was Questlove.

Growing up, when I heard beats I'd often shrug and think, "Eh, it's just a beat, I can do that." But after going back and forth listening to Questlove and Dilla, I learned that there is a lot more happening than just playing a beat. I then discovered that there were musical treasures down this road and I wanted all of them.

There are three basic concepts of this puzzle that I would like to highlight and share with you. They are **beats**, **improvisation**, and **exploration**. It may sound simple, but this study has significantly enhanced my musicianship and caused me to recognize more depth in music than I ever thought possible. This has helped me start the quest to unlock what I call *The Beat Matrix*. Musical artists like Kendrick Lamar, Flying Lotus, Karriem Riggins, Snarky Puppy, Robert Glasper, Thundercat, Christian Scott, and many others are either fusing the idea of taking beat concepts and turning it into organic music, or taking organic music and applying it to programmed beats. This is opening endless possibilities on what music can do, how far it can go, and the experience the listener can have.

We will explore how beats can be used more as a musical concept that can mix with and enhance any genre, as well as the other way around. This ultimately will allow you to push the music further, compete with technology, blend different music languages authentically, and result in being a better musician of today for tomorrow.

# INTRODUCTION

## The Quest

*The Beat Matrix Unlocked* is designed to properly musically educate, and broaden your perspective in the art of “beats” (programmed or sampled music) and musicality, as it pertains to the drum set. The big wave that’s happening now with how beats are used in music is ever changing and expanding, calling for higher education and demands. Due to this surge, I strongly felt it was important to share my knowledge and experience in this area, to meet this need. In this project I will focus on some of the concepts that I’ve learned from a few different producers (mainly J Dilla), along with my other musical experiences playing drums in various genres over the years.

The goal is to show a more organic approach to understanding the possibility of beats and their application on the drums. These concepts can be used in different genres, songs, solos, or just playing grooves. When learned and applied, they can take musicality to another dimension and significantly enhance the player, whether solo or with a band. Be sure to catch the “keys” as they help you unlock this matrix!

## Outline

As we proceed through the book, we’ll follow this basic outline:

1. **Beat Concepts** - The beat, patterns, sonics, feel and performance
2. **Improvisation** - The voice, chops, and soloing
3. **Amalgamation**- The swag, the blend, and freedom

Each chapter of the book will expand on these three basic sections.

## Setup

Here is the kit that I’m using for this session. Every piece here is to expound upon some of the concepts that I use when I play music.

- 20” kick
- 14” snare (2nd snare optional)
- 12” Tom (10” tom optional)
- 16” Floor Tom
- Hi Hat
- Ride
- Crash
- Cymbal Stack
- Electronic Drum Pad (optional)

You don’t have to have this set up. If you don’t have an electronic pad, or stack, or anything like that, you still can practice these concepts and learn the principles that I’m showing you.



# INTRODUCTION



## The Flow

These studies will unfold in three basic operations.

1. **Concept:** This will be geared towards explaining the concept and showing how it works. Spend as much time as needed to understand the concept as it is what will add to your musical growth.
2. **Exercises:** These are meant to be repeated over and over to ingrain the concept.
3. **Creative Practice Time (C.P. T.):** Everything connects to practice in some way, but creative practice in particular is time that you intentionally take to incorporate the concepts learned. Feel totally free and have fun throughout every study and exercise.



“What you do in practice is what you will do in the performance.”  
Try to become the person you would like to be on stage in the practice room.

## Good Practice Tips

- **Record yourself.** It's great to have something to record yourself but if you don't, know that your brain is the best recording system you have. Having said that, recording yourself helps you hear what you're really doing, because when you are practicing and thinking at the same time, there can be some deception in what you're playing and what's actually being played. So, recording yourself helps you hear the actual notes being played.
- **Repetition is key.** I've been asked how much a person should practice.

Setting time aside and dedicating it to working on things is great, but don't allow it to stop there. In your mind you can practice at any time, as well as tapping your hands and feet. Take full advantage of all the time you have. Music is 24/7. And the more you are in the state of thinking about music, the more you're able to stay in the flow of practicing. When you do set time aside, that's where you focus on whatever concepts that you want to apply. It could be three hours, eight hours—any amount of time. It's a good way to cut out all of the clutter in life and focus on music.



“Practice never stops.”

- **Growth takes time.** The finished product doesn't happen overnight, but growth does. Always know that as long as you're sticking with it, you are growing.
- **Mistakes can be productive.** Something that I've learned from Dilla and other producers is that every note matters, even mistakes, because where the notes fail, intention can make up the difference. So always give it 100%! It may not feel good, but, from mistakes, you're able to learn, not only about the correct way of whatever you're trying to be good at, but also showing honesty in the moment.
- **Set goals.** Set a goal to be able to do something you couldn't do before, or know something you didn't before—and again, for it to stick, repetition is the key.

So let's dive in!

# BEAT CONCEPTS

## The Beats

Often, beats are thought about in terms of hip-hop, but there is more to understand. I've also discovered that thinking of beats more from a musical concept opens the possibilities when applying them to the drum set. Thought, motion, sound, and patterns are the basic way of opening up the musical horizon. Anything combining these elements can be considered a beat even if it is on another instrument.

Although the concept of drum programming has been around for a long time, here are some of the producers that I first heard program drums as if there was a live drummer playing (i.e., not sounding so much like a loop) that changed my musical perspective. Also, I want to showcase an example of a live drummer playing like a programmed, produced track. This not only opened up the concepts of programming drums but also how a drummer can approach playing the acoustic drums.

Here are some notable beats with transcriptions. We will then explore some of the concepts learned from them and more in the chapters to follow.



“Programmers emulate real drummers concepts and ideas” so we’re already ahead!

♩ = 98 BPM

### Diana In The Autumn

Drummer: Steve Gadd

Artist: Gap Mangione

1. This groove was sampled and used in the J Dilla track “Fall in Love.”

Musical notation for the groove of "Diana In The Autumn" in 4/4 time. The notation consists of two staves. The top staff shows a series of eighth notes with 'x' marks above them, representing a drum pattern. The bottom staff shows a series of eighth notes with 'x' marks below them, representing a bass line. The tempo is 98 BPM.

♩ = 93 BPM

### Fall In Love

Producer: J Dilla

Artist: J Dilla

2. Note the creativity in the use of the loop.

Musical notation for the groove of "Fall In Love" in 4/4 time. The notation consists of two staves. The top staff shows a series of eighth notes with 'x' marks above them, representing a drum pattern. The bottom staff shows a series of eighth notes with 'x' marks below them, representing a bass line. The tempo is 93 BPM.

# BEAT CONCEPTS



## Wonderin

♩ = 107 BPM

Drummer: Roy Haynes

Artist: Roy Haynes

3. This groove was sampled and used in the Q Tip track "Higher"

## Higher

♩ = 94 BPM

Producer: J Dilla

Artist: Q. Tip

Drum Program: J Dilla

4. This track uses a sample of the Roy Haynes drum track from "Wonderin'." Note the sonics and variation.

## One in a Million

♩ = 61 BPM

Producer: Timbaland

Artist: Aaliyah

Drum Program: Timbaland

5. Note the complexity of this beat. This embodies the concept of showing skills but having a strong beat.