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This book is dedicated to Jules.

Introduction

Greetings Drummers!

At a drum clinic years ago, I had the opportunity to ask Billy Cobham if he had any hints, tips or insights into counting and playing in odd time signatures. Having been the drummer for the original Mahavishnu Orchestra, which played music that was mostly in odd time signatures, I figured he would have something to say about the subject, and he said (I am paraphrasing here), "Basically, all the odd time signatures we were playing in are just a beat or two, more than, or less than a bar of 4/4 or 3/4!" Simple and easy! Masterful advice from one of the great masters of drumming!

Most (or a lot) of the music we hear today is in 4/4 or 3/4, and we feel these time signatures naturally and organically for two reasons, the first being that we are bipeds with 2 arms and 2 legs (do we call ourselves "bi-armed"?), so naturally we will be able to more easily play, execute and feel duples or fours. The second reason, and probably the main reason we feel these time signatures so naturally, is that it's what we hear all the time!

In Greek folk music, in addition to 2/4, 3/4 and 4/4 the time signatures often used are 5/8, 7/8, 9/8, 5/4 and 7/4. To our Western sensibilities these "grooves" are unusual and not necessarily easy or comfortable for us to feel, but to the Greek folk musician (and folk dancers) it is completely natural because it is what they hear and play all the time.

Although the majority of the music we might hear tends to be in 4/4, 3/4, or 12/8, there are many composers who use odd time signatures in their music. In jazz, what immediately comes to mind is Dave Brubeck's "Take Five" (in 5/4, and which includes Joe Morello's classic drum solo) and "Blu Rondo á la Turk" (in 9/8). In fusion, there is the Mahavishnu Orchestra, which rarely played in 4/4, and used time signatures such as 7/8 ("Trilogy," first section from their live album) 9/8 ("Vital Transformation"), 19/16 ("Celestial Terrestrial Commuters") and many others. Frank Zappa utilized a wide range of time signatures ("Purple Lagoon" 7/8, "Keep It Greasy" 19/16) and styles to such an extent that he defied categorization. The classic progressive rock bands Rush; Yes; King Krimson; Emerson, Lake and Palmer; Gentle Giant; The Nice; Refugee and Genesis and contemporary prog band Dream Theater all use odd time signatures to great effect in many of their compositions, often moving through many different time signatures within one song. These bands were heavily influenced by classical composers such as Stravinsky, Bartok, Mussorgsky, Sainte-Seans, Ginastera and Copland. Frequently lauded as the piece that ushered in 20th-century classical music, Stravinsky's "The Rite of Spring" is an orchestral masterpiece that uses a wide array of time signatures and textures that were considered groundbreaking. In the more commercial world of music you have bands like Pink Floyd, whose song "Money," in a 7/4 shuffle, was hugely successful. The Grateful Dead's "Estimated Prophet," another 7/4 shuffle and one their big hits, was part of the album *Terrapin Station*, whose title track uses odd time signatures. The Beatle's "All You Need Is Love" has it's verses in 7 and choruses in 8, setting up a rhythmical tension and release that is integral to the song and to the support of the lyrics. Odd time signatures are cool!

Why is it then, that many drummers find it challenging to play in odd time feels? I believe it's because they just don't do it enough! Well, here ya go! This book will hone your odd time playing ability, and increase your beat vocabulary.

When practicing the material in this book it's important to be able to count aloud while playing. By externalizing (out loud) the counting, you are internalizing the counts and phrasing. By saying it out loud you are putting it into your brain. If you can make your counting automatic and internal, you will rarely if ever lose your downbeat. So many young drummers drop/add beats because they aren't counting!

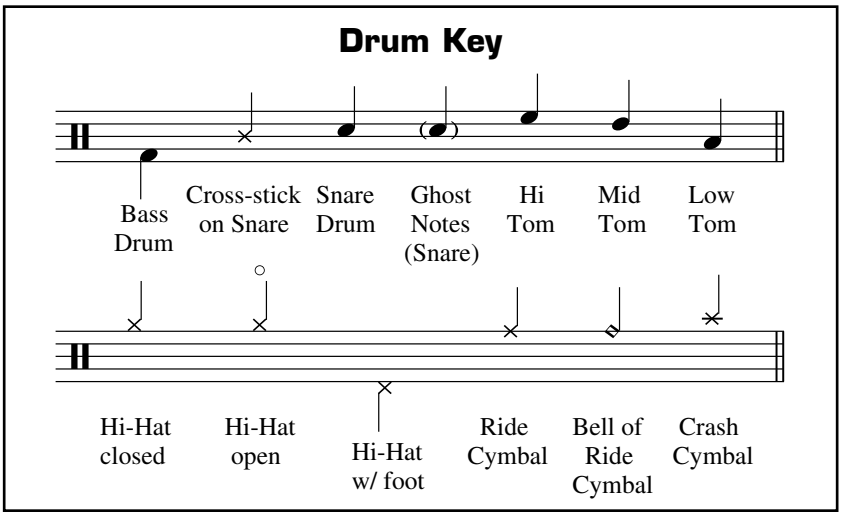
It is important as a drummer to master and have the ability to improvise in any time signature—not necessarily because you are going to play a piece in 17/16 or 21/8 but because we are drummers! Rhythm is our business! Our lives!! Part of becoming a drummer is becoming a rhythm master and this includes knowing and being proficient in odd time signatures. Knowing this aspect of drumming and rhythm will make playing in 4/4 that much easier and make you a better drummer and rhythmatist.

The Examples

Odd time signatures are everywhere in rock, if you look hard enough. Admittedly, if you turn on the radio today, chances are what you will hear will be in 4/4, however there are many instances where you will find the use of odd timings in the rock literature. There is a lot of rhythmically interesting and challenging music out there! Bands like Dream Theater, Meshuggah Primus, Soundgarden and Tool come to mind when thinking of unusual rhythms in the more contemporary setting. The prog bands of the classic prog era (late '60s and '70s) also come to mind: bands like Yes, Genesis, The Mahavishnu Orchestra and King Crimson, who used unusual time signatures everywhere in their music. It is these bands, in the examples you will find in this book, that represent the cutting edge in rhythmic creativity. I hope you will find them helpful in your exploration of the world of odd and unusual time signatures.

Some of the bands you will find in the examples include:

Led Zeppelin
Dream Theater
Soundgarden
System of a Down
Primus
Tool
Yes
King Crimson
Dave Matthews
Dave Brubeck
The Mahavishnu Orchestra
Heart
Blondie
The Beatles
Emerson, Lake and Palmer
Genesis
Sting
Peter Gabriel
Allman Brothers
Jeff Beck
Radiohead
Rush
and others...



3/4

For 3/4 count the quarter notes:

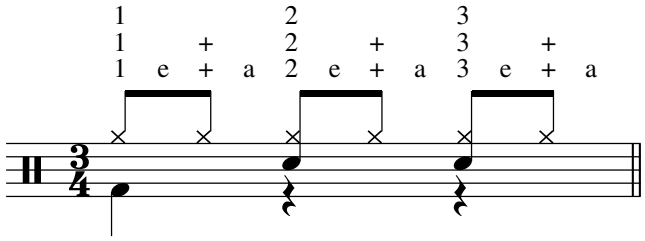
1–2–3

To add the "and" counts, or 8th notes, count:

1 + 2 + 3 +

To add the 16th notes, count:

1 e + a 2 e + a 3 e + a



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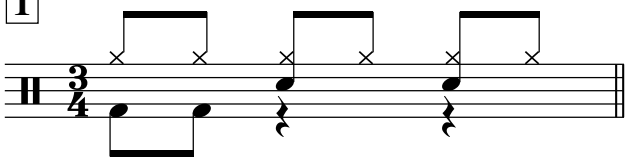

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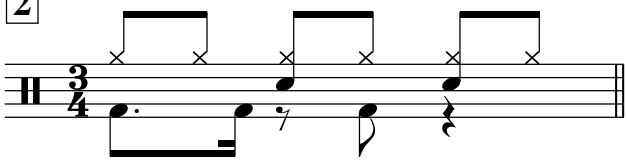

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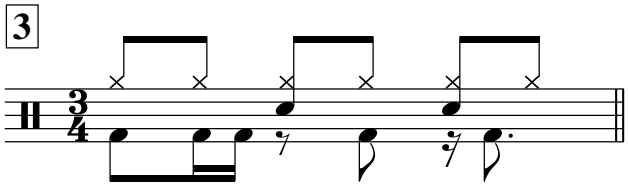

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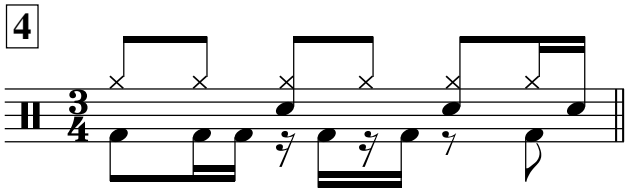

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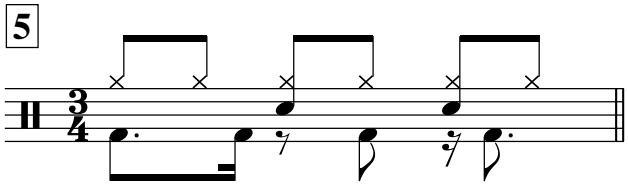

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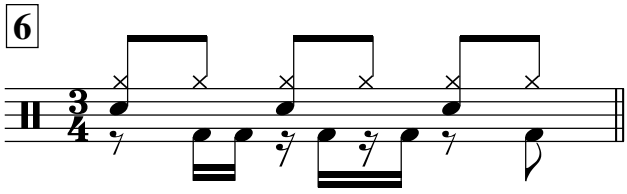

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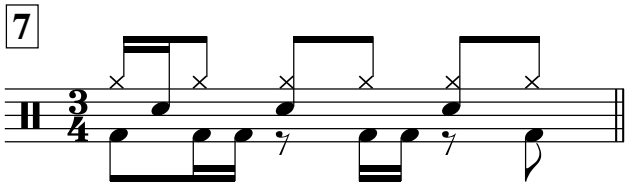

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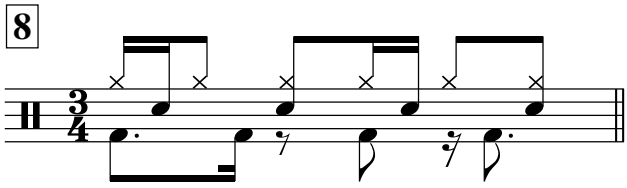

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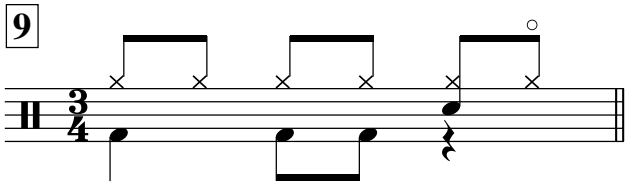

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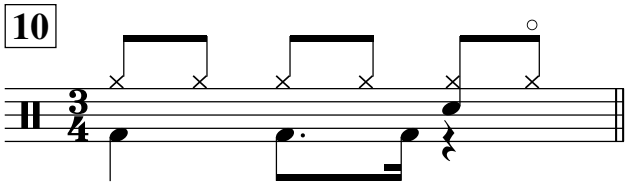

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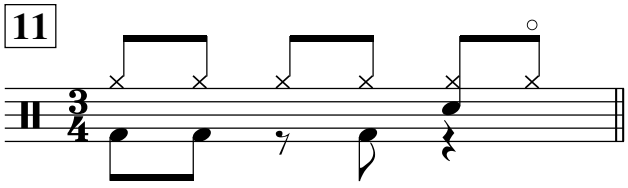

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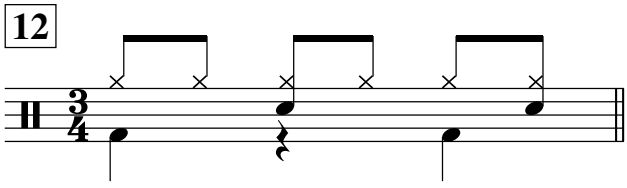

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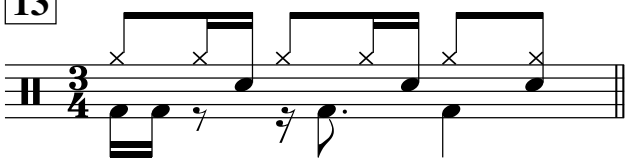

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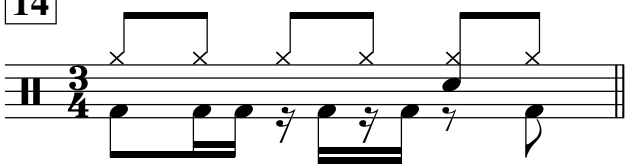

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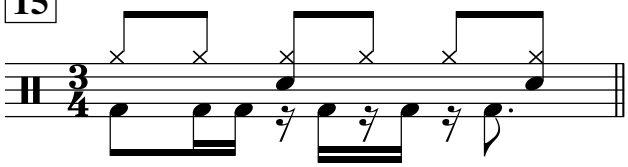

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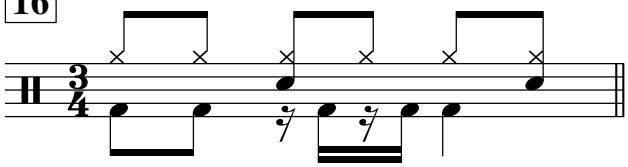

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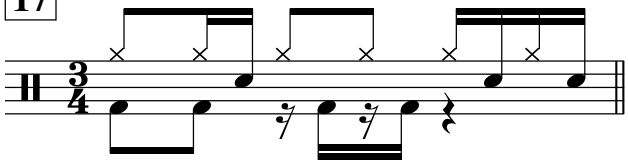

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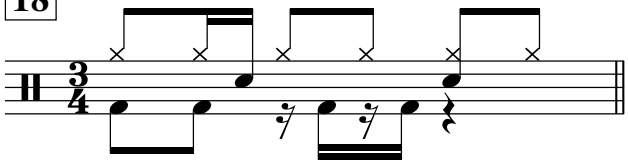

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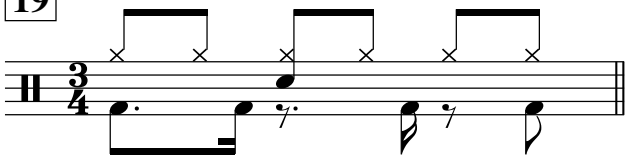

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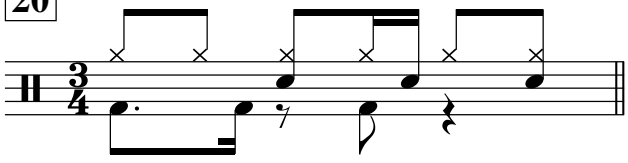

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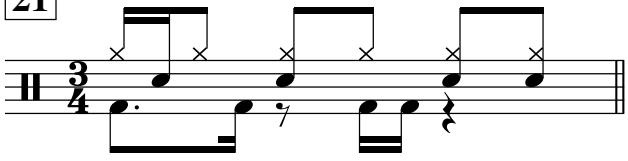

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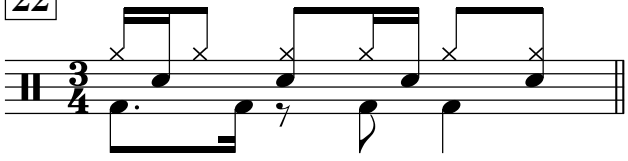

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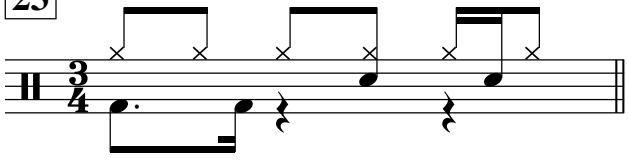

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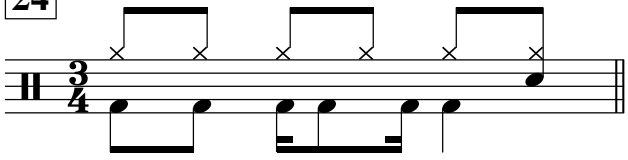

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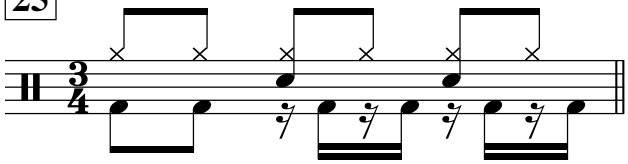
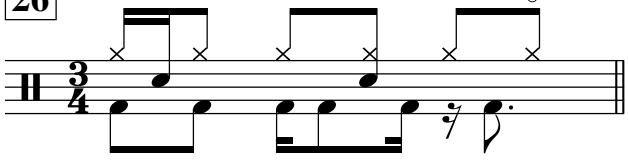
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