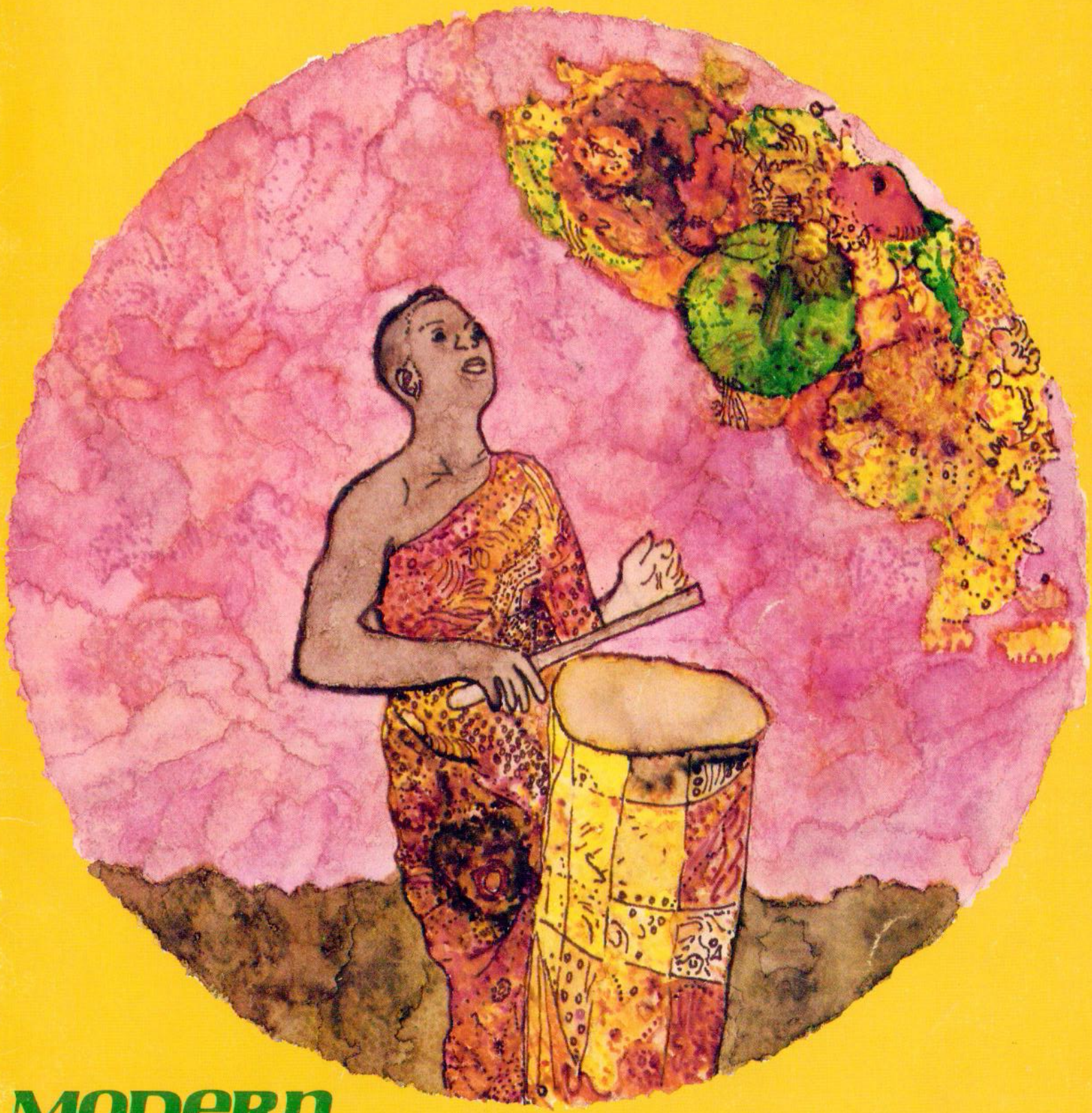
Drum Wisdom

by Bob Moses



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by

Bob Moses

edited by
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dedication

Edgar Bateman

Roy Haynes

I'd like to dedicate this book to two great drummers who had a very strong influence on me both musically and personally. One is the great Edgar Bateman. When I was growing up he was my main inspiration; in my mind he was the greatest drummer I ever heard. His dedication, honesty and striving for excellence have always been a great inspiration to me. Edgar possesses one of the most graceful motions I've seen in a drummer. When I see him play with brushes, it reminds me of a swan on a lake. I can't thank him enough for all that he's given me. I'd also like to dedicate this book to the great Roy Haynes who deserves to be praised at every opportunity, because he has had an incredible effect on so many drummers. He initiated so much of the new style of playing, influencing players like Tony Williams and Jack DeJohnette, and all of the people who are known for breaking up the time, and for grooving hard in an extremely creative manner. A lot of those innovations really stem from Roy Haynes. In addition to that, he is also a great funk and dance-groove player, and anticipated a lot of the current trends in drumming, now seen in people like Steve Gadd, Steve Jordan and other funk and R&B masters. For all the joy he's given me, I also dedicate this book to him.

I would like to thank several people who helped make this book a reality: First is Rick Mattingly, who helped me put this book together by editing tapes of conversations and working with me endless times. He put much time, love, expertise and dedication into this book. Next is Danny Gottlieb, who is, to his credit, the eternal student — always studying, practicing and growing, although he is already an excellent drummer and an accomplished musician. Danny was the one who suggested that I write a book and who put me in contact with *Modern Drummer*. He also spent many, many hours transcribing music and writing examples. Without these two people, the book definitely would not have happened. I'd also like to mention Jahnet "Dr. J" Levatin, who helped with the final editing, and whose touches made the text immeasurably better.

Bob Moses

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introduction

The knowledge put forth in this book is basically an oral tradition. To be honest, it was difficult to translate to the page, although I think we did an excellent job, and I think the ideas are very clear. Still, a lot of this material is easier to communicate on a person-to-person basis. One thing to realize is that we're dealing with musical ideas and concepts. We can explain these concepts to a certain degree in writing, but oftentimes aural examples prove helpful. For this reason, my address is available for those who would like to contact me in person to ask any questions or to study privately. I'm also available for clinics. You can reach me in care of Modern Drummer Publications.

I believe you will find the concepts in this book to be practical, valuable and immediately applicable to the everyday job of playing music. Unlike most books I've read, it presents an overall concept rather than detailing technical minutia or lots of side issues, such as bass drum technique or left-hand finger stroke. It deals with the larger category of playing music, and does so in such a way that it simplifies it and translates the concepts into some very simple, obvious methodologies.

In a sense, this book takes the mystery out of playing. When you hear a great drummer play, you may wonder, "How could I ever do that?" Basically, this book will give you a very simple explanation of what actually happens in the act of making music. (In fact, it does so in such a way that the book is valuable not just to drummers, but to anybody who is interested in making music.) It also deals with basic concepts of communication. All art is an attempt to communicate and there are certain rules about getting your ideas across that really pertain to all artistic expression.

The concepts set forth in this book are open enough that they won't necessarily lead you to sound like me; they will help you to sound like yourself. That's one reason I did not include a lot of exercises in the book. It's not even important that you play the few examples there are. When I, myself, try to read the Non-Independent exercises in this book, it actually slows me down. I generated the examples by playing extemporaneously. Whereas I can play that stuff easily off the top of my head, trying to read it back is difficult. The examples are included to show you the *type* of thing you can do; they are not intended to be exercises per se. In a way, this book is like a coloring book: It outlines a broad basic concept which each individual can fill in his or her own style, whether that be rock, funk, Latin, jazz, swing, reggae or whatever.

I recommend that you start by reading the whole book from beginning to end, so you get an idea of the overall concept. Then you can go back and work on it chapter by chapter, concept by concept. You can jump ahead to chapters that particularly interest you or you can jump back and forth, but only after you've read the whole thing from beginning to end.

attitude

The first step in my concept is always having a musical idea behind what I play, and getting this idea across to my listeners. I always play from something; I never play from nothing. Sometimes when I hear people playing, it's difficult to know what idea they are playing off of, because the musicians are not making enough use of the specific elements of the song they are playing. Melodic musicians should use the original melody as the idea behind their melodic improvisations. Even the drummer should be able to relate a drum solo to the original tune in such a way that a listener will be able to recognize that tune in the solo.

This involves a certain amount of predetermination. Before you play, you have to decide what idea you are going to play off of. Until you make this decision, you will not be free to put your full energy into your playing. Instead, you will be concentrating on figuring out what you are going to play. Once you've decided, you can really jump on it, and play it with all the force, sensuality and sensitivity that you can muster.

The next important point is to take one idea and expand it, instead of playing a lot of ideas. The greatest musicians are those who can take one idea and make the most of it. Too often I hear drummers who flit from one idea to another. They might start with an 8th-note feel, and then suddenly go into a triplet feel. Next, they might throw in a quick 16th-note thing, and then go back to the triplet feel. Meanwhile, they are switching from one cymbal to another cymbal. My feeling is that any one of those single ideas could be expanded and used for five to ten minutes.

Look at the reason for change in music: When I play, I make musical changes because I've gotten all the juice out of a particular idea; I've milked it. I've reached a point where I feel that anything more I could say on that idea would be redundant and unnecessary. So at that point I change the idea, and I change it forcefully. I avoid wishy-washy transitions where the listener is wondering whether I am still playing the same idea or whether I have switched to something else.

Another reason that we want to have an idea to play off of is because our goal is to groove. As far as I'm concerned, that's the only goal. Creativity is not a goal; creativity *is*. Everybody is creative, but not everybody grooves.

Let's look at the word "groove." Inherent in the word "groove" is "repetition." That's not all groove is, but there has to be some element of repetition or else the music is not going to groove. There are some grooves that I call "static" grooves, which are 100% repetition, or close to it — the same thing over and over. Certain funk and disco grooves are like that, and they can feel great. What's nice about jazz playing is that there's room for change within the groove; it's not 100% repetition. There might be just one little element of repetition, but that in itself gives the music the cohesion it needs. Your element of repetition may be minimal, as it often is in jazz, or maximal, as in disco, funk, Latin or African music. The point is to maintain that single idea rather than to constantly change your internal focus.

Before developing these points further, I want to say one more thing: There should be a musical idea behind everything you practice, just as there should be a musical idea behind everything you play. I'm against any kind of mechanical, non-musical, "drumistic" kind of practicing, such as doing paradiddles for an hour while watching TV. It's a bad habit to separate the drums from music. Every time I pick up the sticks to play, I have music running through my head. I am playing music, not just drums. I think it's also a bad habit to practice just to exercise your "chops" per se. There will always be something *musical* that will exercise your "chops." If you know only drums, you don't necessarily know music, but if you know music, then you know drums. Music includes melody, harmony and rhythm. Having just the drumistic things without having the rest of music is certainly incomplete.

internal hearing

Once you have accepted the concept that you should always play off of something, the next important point is this: There is a distinction between what you play and what you play off of. In other words, there is often a difference between what you are hearing in your head and what you — or the band — are actually playing. This brings us to the concept of internal hearing. Let's call what you are actually playing the external. That's what everyone can hear. However, what you are playing off of is sometimes an internal thing. Only you hear it in your head. So there is a separation between what you think about and what you play.

What are the types of things I hear internally in my mind? What I think about — the internal hearing — is always the simplest possible idea. Let's compare it to building a house. The first step is to have a strong, basic framework. The second step is to add all the detail and decorative work. So the house has two elements: the structural, which is very simple, basic and strong, and the detailed, ornamental work. In terms of music, the decorative work is generally the province of the soloist or lead instrument. The drummer and the bass player provide the strong, basic structure. This is not to say that the drummer can never play decoratively, but the sense of structure must not be lost. It's certainly not desirable for a lead instrument to lose the structure, but it's not disastrous either, because that player can find the structure again by listening to the rhythm section. However, if the drummer or bass player loses that focus, it *is* disastrous, because they *are* the structure. That is why it's so important to hear a strong, focal idea in your mind, and why, in many cases, you cannot afford to listen to what is actually being played as much as you listen to something internal. If there is any danger that what someone plays, or what you yourself play, will pull you off the basic structure, then you cannot afford the luxury of listening to it. You have to actually *ignore* the external because your first responsibility is to be one with the structure.

Internal hearing is like a muscle that I use to hold onto something that may slip away from me. The commonsense rule about internal hearing is: When the external is very simple and conforms to the basic idea, then you don't have to flex that internal hearing muscle very strongly, because the music itself is giving you the structure; the internal and external are the same, or very similar. As the music moves away from the basic structure and gets more abstract, polyrhythmic, over the bar or less melodic, it will tend to pull you away from the basic idea. That is the time when you have to flex the internal hearing muscle more strongly, because that is when you are in the greatest danger of being distracted from the basic idea. This often means that you will actually not be listening to the "external" music.

What, then, are some of the specific things that one can play off of? Although it is theoretically possible to play off of an infinite variety of ideas, in my playing there are three musical sources I employ more than others: playing off of a melody, playing off of a vamp or playing off of a resolution point. Many years ago I realized that utilizing these sources gave my playing grace, strength, and a consistent feeling of swing and groove.

When playing off of a melody, I make that my primary thought. I don't concentrate on what I'm playing. Some people have trouble singing a melody while they're playing drums, because the melody is interfering with their drum patterns. That's backwards. I make the drums follow the melody — become subservient to the melody. After all, if I wasn't playing *that tune,* I could just be playing free. Also, when I choose to play a specific song, then that is the material on which I base my improvisation.

While the band is playing the melody, my internal and external hearing are the same. However, when it gets to the second chorus and one of the lead instruments starts playing an improvised solo, I am still internally hearing the original melody and almost ignoring what the soloist is playing. Many times a drummer will try to duplicate the ideas, abstractions or extensions of the soloist, but that is not your job. Your job is to be aligned with the structure and provide a cushion for the soloist to work off. This is not to say that you can never listen to what the soloist is doing, but you can only do so after your internal hearing is so strong that you could not possibly be in doubt about or lose the basic structure — the melody from which that solo comes.

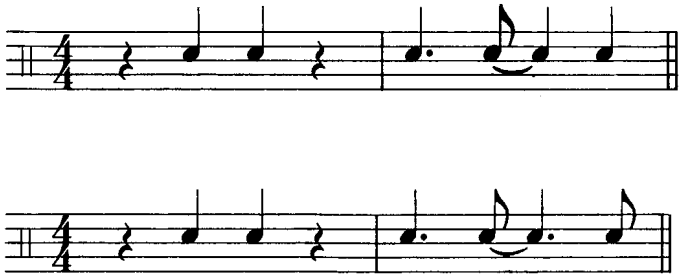
Trying to play *with* the soloist is like two people trying to get into the same end of a canoe — it's going to tip over. Therefore, you must continue to play off of the basic melody even after the soloists have abandoned it and have started improvising. That way, the soloists can balance their ideas against the basic structure.

Some tunes are based on vamps. Generally speaking, when a tune has static harmony, it tends to have a rhythmic/harmonic vamp. In many of these types of tunes, such as John Coltrane's "Equinox," the vamp is in the bass line.

In this situation, align yourself with the vamp and continue to play off of that, no matter what the soloists are playing. This gives them a consistent structure to work off.

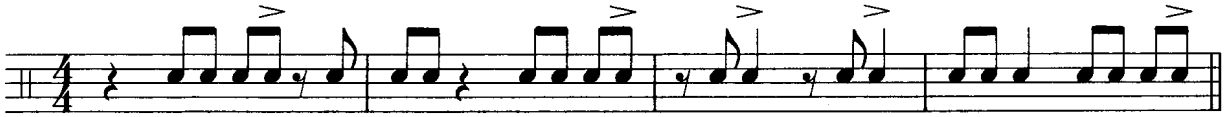
Latin music utilizes the concept of the clave, which is similar to a vamp. It's a rhythmic motif that repeats over and over. The basic Latin clave is:

All the variations that Latin musicians play come off the clave or a similar vamp. This particular pattern is an integral part of most Latin music, but there are variations on this clave:



Vamps occur in all types of music. Funk music is very much based on vamps. In jazz, vamps gained a prominent place around the early '60s with the advent of modal music — music which is basically written over one chord. At that time, it became prevalent to play off of bass figures. A vamp can also be thought of as a motif, a recurring rhythm or a clave. They all mean the same thing.

It's also very valuable to use vamps when you play by yourself — to hear a bass line in your head, either one that you know from a song or one that you make up. This is a four-bar bass line that has become very much a part of me:



I don't even remember now if it's something I heard or something I made up, but I use it a lot when playing in 4/4 time. I can use it in many different styles and in situations where I need to find a focal point.

The third category is playing off of a resolution point, which will be discussed later in this book. For now, suffice it to say that this is similar to playing off of a vamp.

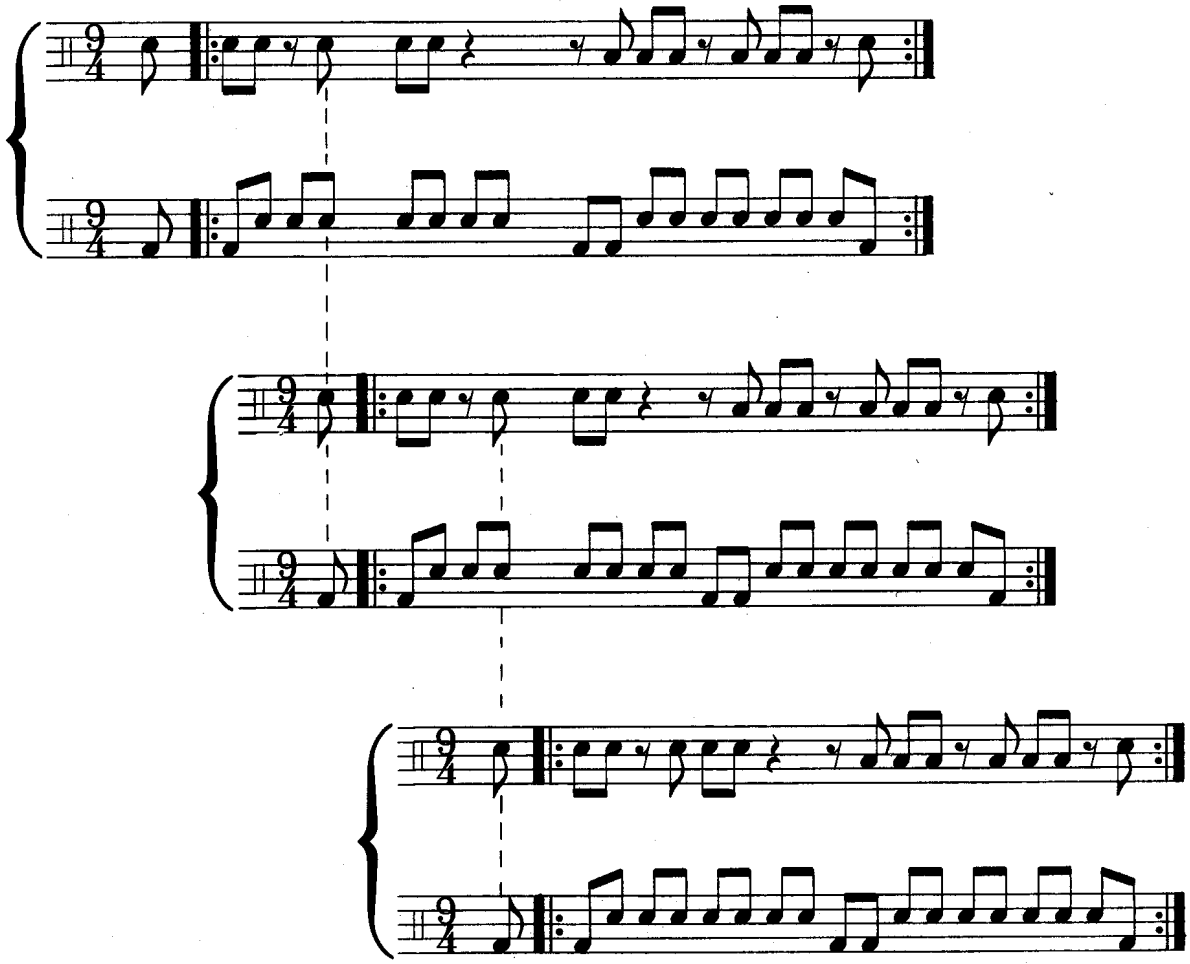
These are probably the three most common things to play off of, but there *are* other things, such as an image, a poetic thought or a color. An example would be to play off of the color gray. That's a very abstract idea, but if you did, in fact, play only things that reminded you of that color, you could make a cohesive statement. If you really stick with one idea, whatever your idea is, it will get across. But usually the idea will be based on a melody, a vamp or a resolution point. There is also another category I use called "the flow," which I will discuss later. "The flow" is something you can't take full advantage of until you've spent a lot of time with resolution points.

groove canon

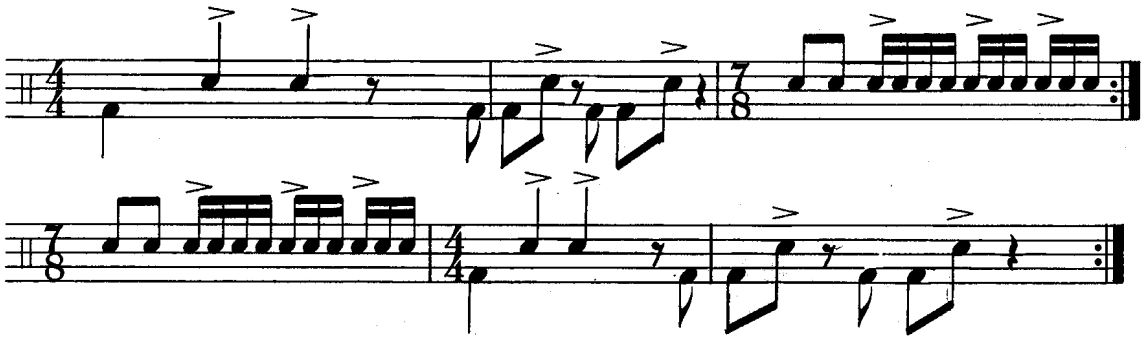
The concept of a canon, or "round," is very old. Much of Bach's music used fugue or canon, which is one melody or rhythm started in different places. Many people have sung "Row, Row, Row Your Boat" in elementary school as a round. Although it is an old concept, I have not heard it used before in the way I use it — applied to groove-oriented music.

The musical reason I came up with this was to solve an ambivalence I feel. I love vamps and repetitive figures because they're very danceable. They tend to put the listener in a trance, and they really feel good. But no matter how hip a vamp or repetitive figure is, after a certain point it is possible to get tired of it. Even though the best musicians make it feel good for a long time, once you've psyched out the groove (or clave) of the vamp, it tends to lose a little of the mystery. So I came up with a strategy which, in my opinion, increases the danceability and grooveability of the vamp and, at the same time, adds the element of mystery: I start the vamp in several different places.

I use this concept on two of my albums. There are two examples on the record *When Elephants Dream Of Music* (Gramavision GR8203). The first is on a piece called "The River." There are two figures in nine that go against each other, and these two figures each start in three different places.

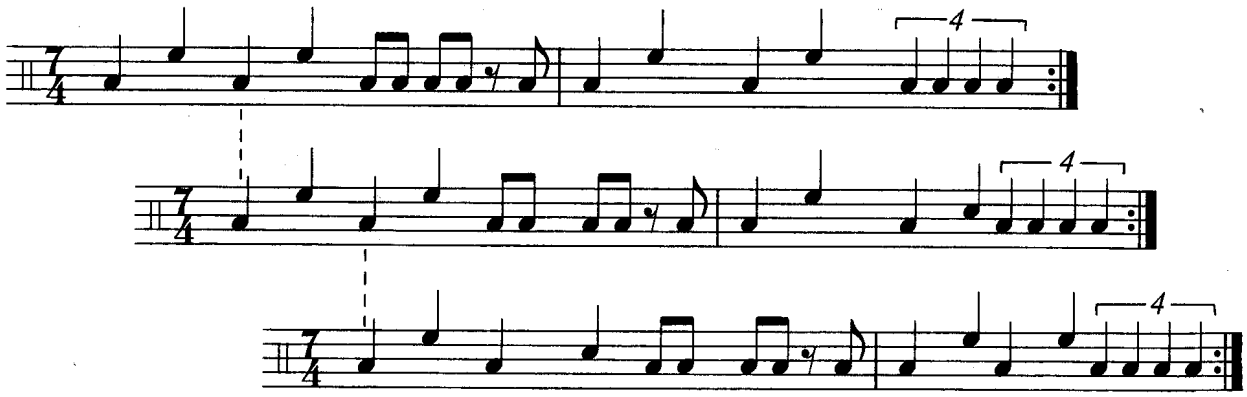


The other example on that record, "For Miles," is not strictly a canon. In this composition, the rhythm is made up of two bars of 4/4, and one bar of 7/8. There are two rhythm sections. Rhythm section A plays the rhythm as written: two bars of 4/4, followed by one bar of 7/8. Rhythm section B starts at the same time, but begins with the 7/8 bar followed by the two bars of 4/4. I visualize this as one rhythm going forward and backward simultaneously.



Because these rhythms are mine, I can usually play my own part and still listen to the other musicians without being pulled off my own part. But on "For Miles," even I had to ignore the others. It was really a test of everyone's internal hearing.

Another example is from my album, *Visit With The Great Spirit* (Gramavision GR8307), on a piece called "Suite Bahia." There is a rhythm in seven which is used in three different places, and in three different styles — first with voice, handclaps and talking drums; then on drumset, bass and guitars; and finally on log drums.



This piece has incredible groove, and yet the mystery is there for the listener because it's impossible to discern where 1 is; there are several valid 1's. But there is unity, because the musicians are all playing the same figure.

The reason I'm introducing this concept here is because it provides a good test of your ability to hear things internally. For instance, although I recommend that you use internal hearing on even the simplest of music, such as "Stella By Starlight," it is possible to get through a tune like that without internally hearing the melody throughout. But with the groove canon concept, you really have to use internal hearing, because when you start to listen to the same rhythm coming in at different places, the tendency is to end up in unison with the other musicians. At first, you really have to ignore what other people are doing and hold your own part internally. The more you do this and the better you learn your part, the easier it will be for you to listen to the total effect later on.

I encourage others to try this concept with their own music. It's a great thing to practice with other musicians who want to work on their own internal hearing, no matter what instrument they play. It's instructive to tape yourselves, so that you can concentrate on your own part while you are playing, and then experience listening to the tape to hear how the different parts are working together. I think you will be surprised at how good it sounds, and what a good method it is for developing your internal hearing.

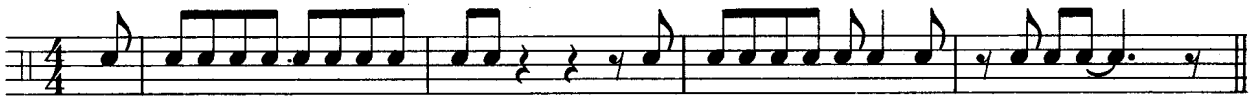
the 8/8 concept

The idea of playing off of a resolution point brings us to what I call the 8/8 concept. There are eight resolution points in a bar: the four downbeats and the four upbeats. Perhaps some people have heard that jazz is based on triple meter or triplets, while rock and Latin music are based on duple meter or 8th notes. I think this distinction is a mistake and actually misleads people. The music that I call "American groove music" is, for the most part, based on the 8/8. There is a place for triplets, but as I'll explain later, they're generally used on slower tempos.

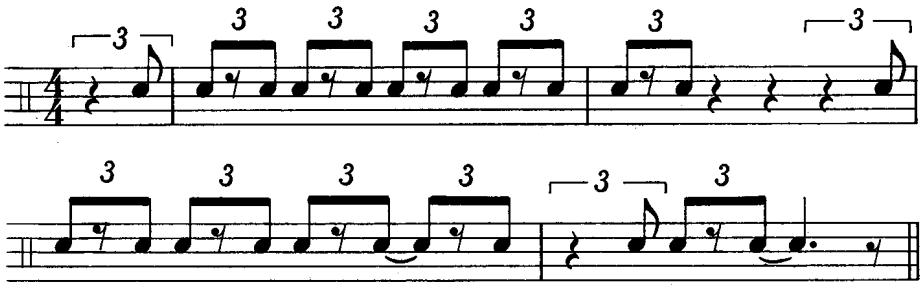
First, understand that there are different types of 8th notes. There are what we call "straight" 8th notes, which are played exactly as written, and there are "rounded" 8th notes, which are also called "swung" 8th notes or "jazz" 8th notes. When you see a Charlie Parker tune written out, it's written as 8th notes. However, it is not played strictly. A jazz musician will automatically round out the 8th notes.

Ornithology

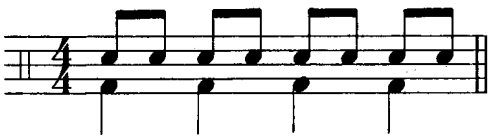
written:



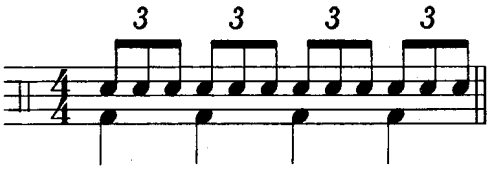
played:



There is a reason why it is written as 8th notes; it's not that jazz composers are too lazy to write a triplet with a rest in the middle. Thinking of it as triplets clutters the bar; the more you subdivide a beat, the more tendency there is to make the music slower. It's a subtle difference, but you can hear it. Sing rounded 8th notes over a pulse.



Now sing triplets over the same pulse.



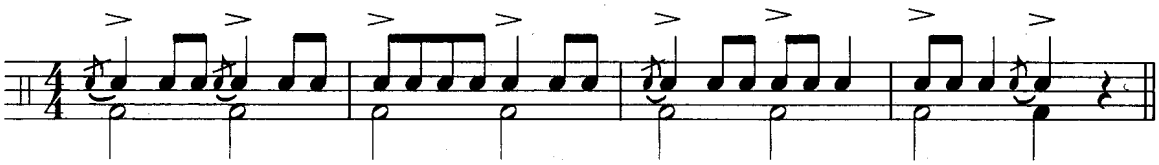
The tempo tends to come down a little when people play a lot of triplets, and the same thing can happen if you try to keep triplets going in your mind. This brings us back to the difference between the internal and the external. Even if you are not playing triplets, if you are *thinking* triplets, you are filling each beat with too many notes. By thinking 8th notes, be they round or straight, you are leaving the music more open. You can still *play* some triplets if you want to; however, I advise you not to *think* triplets.

Some drummers get into the habit of filling up every possible space, because they practice by themselves and they forget to think about the fact that there will be other musicians playing with them. If you are filling up every beat with triplets, you are not leaving room for anyone else. If you play off of open 8th notes, however, the other musicians will have space in which to do something. So we want to keep our internal rhythm uncluttered and basic.

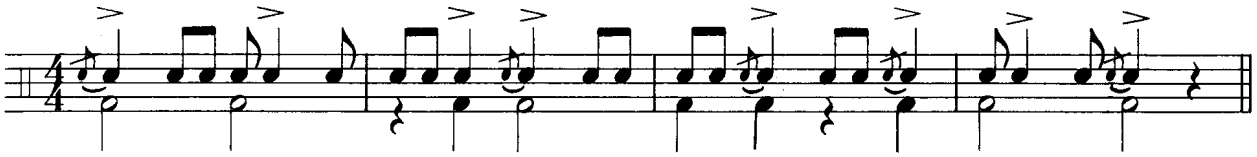
There are also historic reasons for thinking in 8/8 rather than in triplets. The American music called jazz, and almost all other American music, comes from one basic source: the syncopated march. Let's look at how that developed.

Black people were brought to America as slaves, and because of the policies of the day, they were not allowed to retain any of their African culture. They could not sing African songs, play African drums or even keep their African names. Although a lot of the culture and tradition was lost within a few generations, still, a certain type of feeling was retained. Not having African instruments available, but still wishing to express themselves musically, the black people turned to whatever instruments *were* available.

The instruments which were popular at that time were essentially European military instruments — trumpets, trombones, clarinets, marching drums — and they were used for music such as that of John Phillip Sousa. Although Sousa marches have a lighter spirit than European military music, nevertheless, they are based on the same strict rhythms, and the accents tend to fall on the downbeats.



When the black people picked up the same instruments and played the same music, they tended to inject some of the feeling that had characterized their African music. They were more interested in dancing than in marching, and so they started moving the accents around; the rhythms became more syncopated and the 8th notes became rounder.



This became the syncopated march. It is actually the root of what I call "American groove music," which includes ragtime, Dixieland, swing, boogie woogie, R&B, rock 'n' roll, jazz and so on. The point of this is that the syncopated march was based on an 8th-note feel, not a triplet feel. A lot of people feel that bebop is based on triplets, but that is not true. Before bebop, the emphasis was on the bass drum and the snare drum. The bop drummers simply moved their right hands to the cymbals, giving the music a less earthy, more airy sound. Nevertheless, it was still rooted in the same 8/8 march.

As far as contemporary usage, the syncopated march is also the root of funk. Listen to a master like Steve Gadd on the Paul Simon tune, "50 Ways To Leave Your Lover," and you'll hear a classic syncopated march.

So for these reasons, I suggest that you use an 8th-note flow as your foundation, rather than triplets. There is a place for triplets, especially with slower tempos, but usually groove music is based on 8th notes.

the eight points

Once you accept the 8/8 flow as a useful concept, the next logical conclusion is that there are eight points in the bar that you can resolve to: the four upbeats and the four downbeats. For some reason, the way music has been taught in this country, people learn to think that the 1 is the most important beat in the bar. In fact, it's not the most important, and in some ways, as a resolution point, it might even be the least important. I feel that you should be able to resolve equally well to any one of the eight points. By "resolve" I mean that you can start a phrase somewhere before any given point and have it land naturally and easily on that point.

The way to master the eight points is not an intellectual process, but is best achieved by becoming familiar with how they feel. They each have a distinctly different feeling. There is as much difference between 4 and the & of 4 as there is between the color blue and the color green. This leads back to attitude. One of my concepts of music — which I apply to all instruments and all music — is that every note should be played for a reason. When I play an & of 4, I play it because it has a certain feeling, and it is my conscious choice to play that feeling.

One of the basic rules of any kind of communication is to choose your subject matter. Know what it is that you want to get across. For example, if I were giving a speech, I wouldn't have a sentence about politics, and then a sentence about baseball, and then a sentence about ice cream. I would choose one topic. Perhaps I would say different things about the topic from night to night. One night I could be very abstract; another night I could be funny; another night I could be sad or serious. But my audience would always know what my chosen topic was, because I would stay with the topic I chose.

The same is true with the resolution points. It is important to realize that, because they each have a unique feeling, jumping randomly from one to another is like changing topics in a speech. This is not to say that you can never use more than one point at a time, or that you can't use combinations of points, but again, you must know exactly how each point feels, and you must consciously choose to use that feeling.

Let me now bring up something which makes this easier: Although there are eight points in the bar, there are really only four different feelings. Although there *is* a difference between the 1 and the 3, these points *feel* very similar. Likewise, the 2 and the 4 have a similar feeling, as do the & of 1 and the & of 3, and the & of 2 and the & of 4. I am going to give you a methodology for working on each of the eight points, but because of the similarity of feeling, I am going to first discuss them in groups of two.

1 and 3

To me, the 1 and the 3 are anchors. They tend to stop forward motion, almost like putting a stake in the ground. They tend to give a feeling of reaching the end, and for that reason, I tend to use these the least of all resolution points. Ironically enough, they are the ones that almost everybody seems to be able to do.

2 and 4

These are very valuable resolution points. They are where the "swing" resides. These are the beats that you snap your fingers on or clap your hands to. These are the beats that make it swing, and resolving on these beats is very effective.

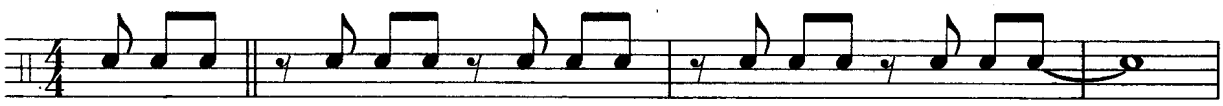
The & Of 1 and The & Of 3

To me, these feel like an elbow in the ribs; they have kind of a jerky feeling that wakes you up. They also remind me of a contraction; they have a "pulling in" kind of motion. They are very effective because they tend to propel the music.

The & Of 2 and The & Of 4

These are the opposite of the previous feeling; they are like an expansion rather than a contraction. They are a stretching — a leaning forward. There is a famous Miles Davis

composition called "Four" that is based on the & of 2 and the & of 4.



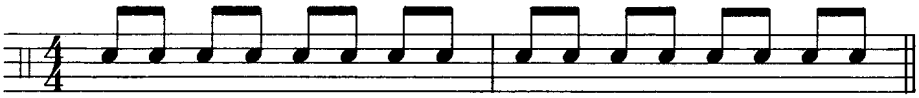
etc.

If I had to pick one point that is the most important, I would pick the & of 4. But again I stress: Don't skip any of them. They are all important.

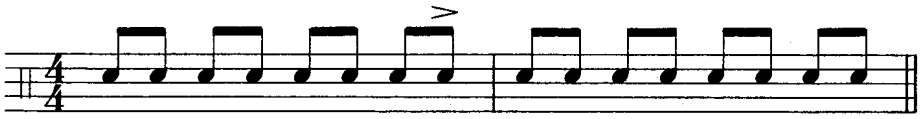
METHODOLOGY FOR MASTERING THE EIGHT POINTS

In the following pages, we're going to deal with each resolution point individually. To do that effectively, we will work with two-bar phrases. Let's look at the reason for that. The idea behind a resolution point is that it gives you an element of repetition that is necessary for groove. We do not necessarily need something that repeats in every bar, however, because we are not just hitting these points, but rather, we are resolving to them. One bar doesn't really give you enough room to resolve. In order to have enough room to make a resolution, most of the time we're going to want at least a two-bar phrase. It could, in fact, be longer than a two-bar phrase, but in this book we will focus on two-bar phrases because they are so basic and common to music.

I feel that it is very valuable to visualize music whenever you can. You should not just hear it, but also see it. When working from a resolution point, start by visualizing a two-bar phrase with a "grid" of 8th notes, which you will use as your framework.



The next step is to zero in on one of the points. For the moment we will pick the & of 4 in the first bar, and we will mark that point with an accent. (Note: In actual practice, the resolution point does not necessarily have to be the loudest note in the bar, but more about that later.)



So, you are now visualizing a two-bar phrase of 8th notes, and one of the notes has been chosen as your resolution point.

The ability to internalize the 8/8 framework with a resolution point in it is the key to freedom on the drums. Working off of a point will give you the element of repetition that is necessary for groove, but it will also allow you all the freedom you could ever want. In other words, that one point — in this case, the & of 4 — is always going to be there, and that's enough to give your playing the cohesion it needs. Around that point though, you can be playing different things all the time. The things that lead to or follow that point can be constantly changing.

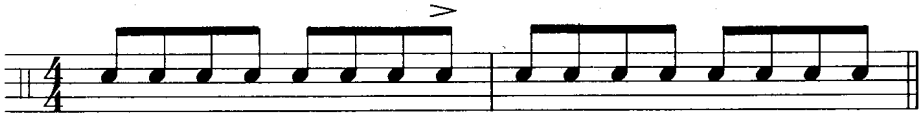
There is another advantage to using a point: It can help you keep good time. Some people have trouble with rushing or dragging, and one of the reasons is that it is very difficult to memorize pure pulse. After a few minutes, it can become a shade faster or slower. Granted, few people have metronomically perfect time; nevertheless, you want it to be as close as possible. A resolution point helps with this by serving as an "aural landmark." After hitting the point consistently for even one minute, it starts to become inevitable. You become so used to hearing the point in its exact spot in the phrase that, if you should get even a little off it, you will immediately be aware of it.

We are now going to apply these concepts to each of the eight points. Since we are dealing with two-bar phrases, we have a choice of putting each point in the first bar or the second bar. Therefore, we are talking about 16 possibilities, and we will deal with each of the 16 in the following pages.

the & of 4 in the first bar

Developing The Internal Hearing

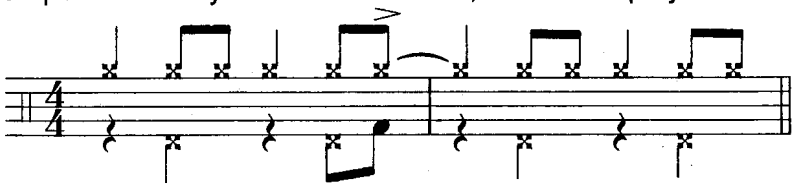
First, visualize a two-bar phrase, with the 8/8 framework, and focus on the & of 4 in the first bar.



Before trying to play anything, spend some time singing the above two bars. This phrase will become your internal hearing when you are actually playing off of the & of 4 in the first bar. Until you can internalize this phrase, it will help to sing it out loud. It may be played or sung as rounded or straight 8ths.

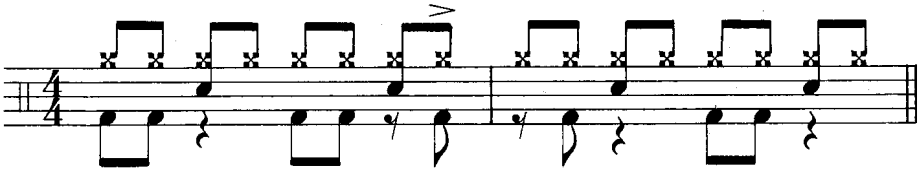
Exercises

Before you can use a resolution point to its full advantage, you must be able to feel it without having to count. To develop that ability, I suggest that you start out playing something very simple, such as a basic timekeeping pattern, while marking the resolution points. A common way to mark the point is with a combination of cymbal and bass drum. A suggested exercise, based on the typical jazz timekeeping pattern, is given below. Play this exercise many, many times, until it feels completely natural and you do not have to count in order to hit the resolution point. When you do this exercise, be sure to play rounded 8th notes.



At first, you may tend to sound like a big band drummer when marking these resolution points. However, until you really get the feel of them, it is helpful to be very obvious about them — maybe even a little over-obvious. Once you have mastered the feel of a point, you can start to use it internally rather than externally, and be much more subtle about the way you mark it.

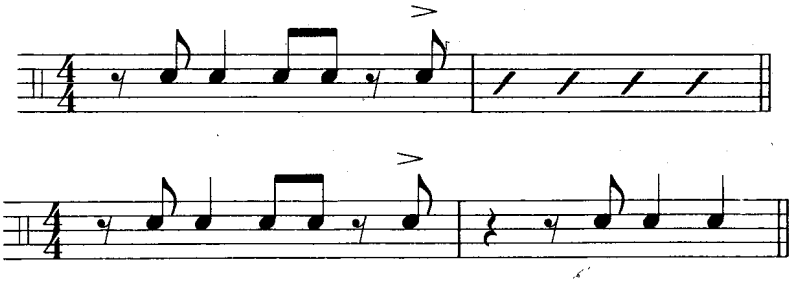
The next exercise is based on a straight 8th-note feel, and could be used for rock playing. Again, practice this pattern many, many times, until you can feel the & of 4 without having to count it.

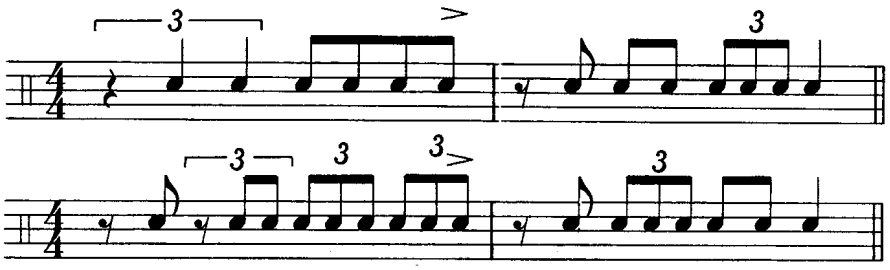


Make up your own timekeeping patterns based on the & of 4 in the first measure, using both straight and rounded 8ths.

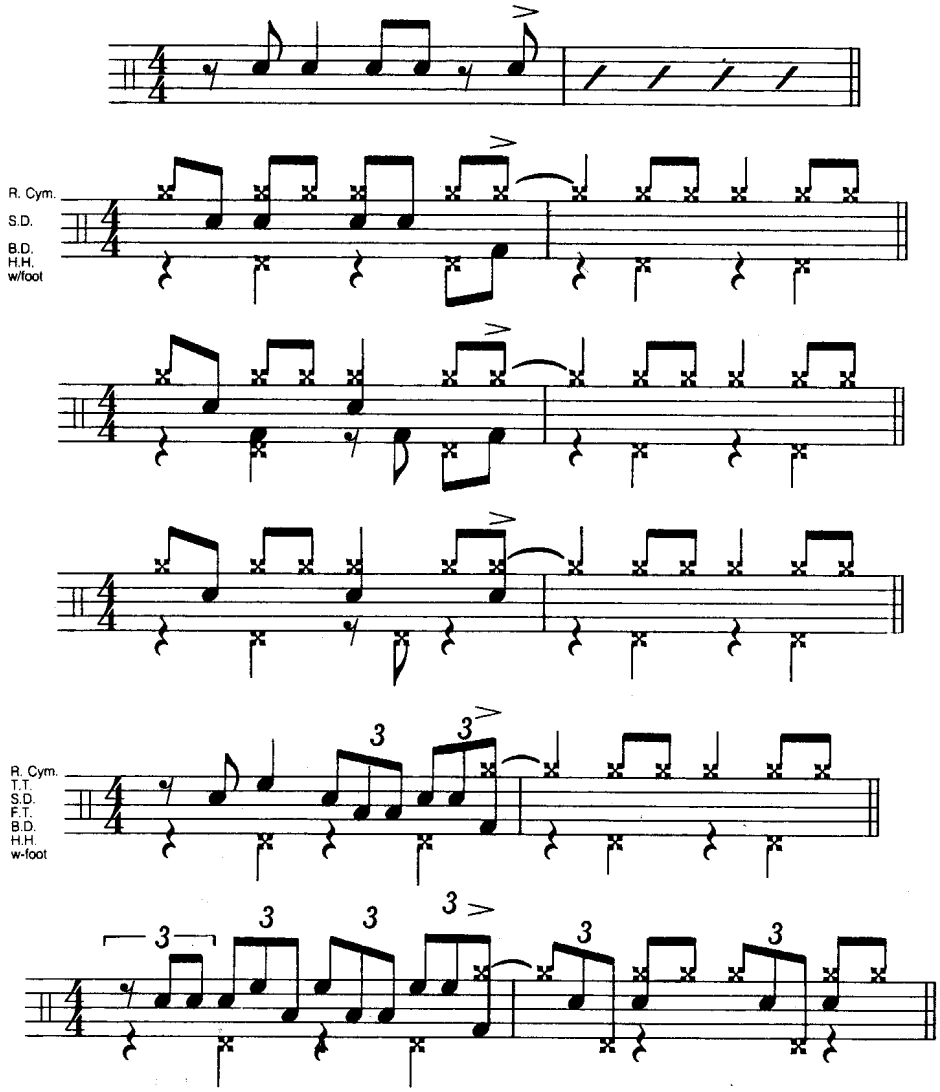
Applications

Music consists of phrases, not just individual notes. The purpose of the resolution points is to give us something to resolve to, not just a single point to hit. Rather than starting with a "drumset pattern" and then trying to make a phrase out of it, it is better to start with a musical phrase, and then apply it to the drumset. Below you will find four two-bar phrases, each of which resolves on the & of 4 in the first bar.





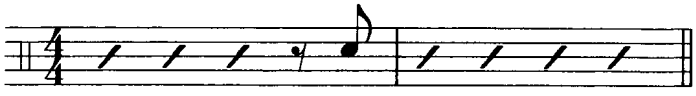
Let's take the first example and examine different ways that one could apply this phrase to the drumset.



As you can see from these drumset examples, the resolution point can be incorporated into very simple timekeeping patterns, as well as more complex solo or fill patterns.

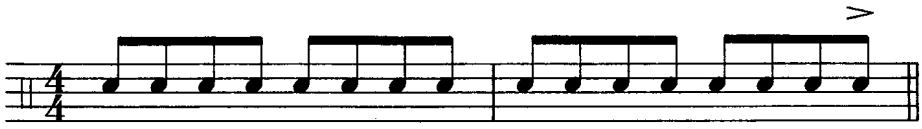
For the remaining 15 points, I will only be giving some rhythmic examples of phrases which resolve to the given point. I will not illustrate how to apply those phrases to the drumset, because it is more important that you develop your own ability to do this, rather than memorizing the way I — or anyone else — might do it.

Rather than practicing specific exercises, you need to develop your own creativity and your ability to use the resolution points in whatever type of music you are personally involved with. After you feel that you can hold the 8/8 framework in your mind, along with a specific resolution point, start creating your own two-bar phrases which resolve to that point. At first you might want to practice the individual phrases repeatedly, but ultimately you should be able to play a different phrase every two measures with the only common element being the resolution point itself. You can use the following example as a framework for your playing, filling in around the resolution point in any way you choose.



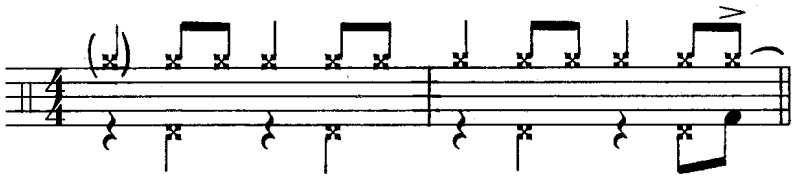
the & of 4 in the second bar

Visualization

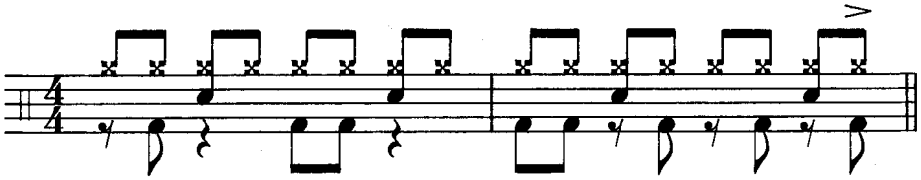


Timekeeping Patterns

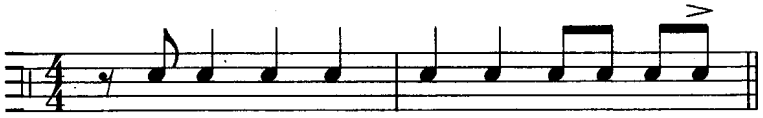
Rounded 8ths

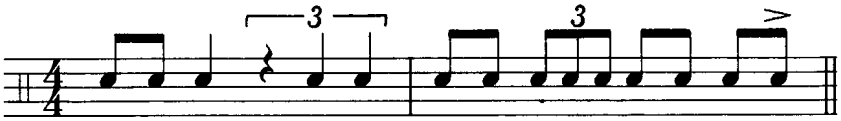


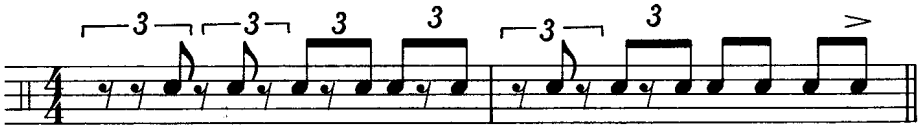
Straight 8ths

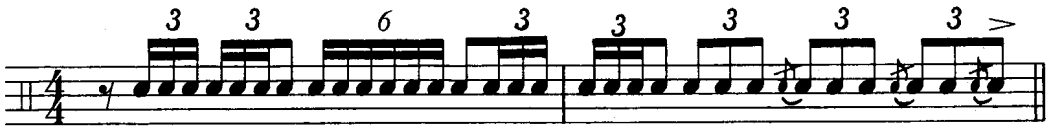


Phrases resolving to the & of 4 in the second bar:

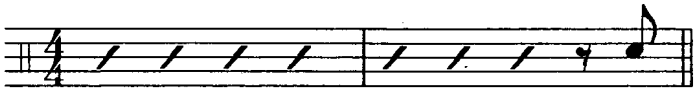






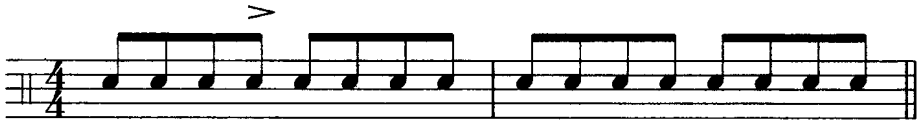


Framework for playing:



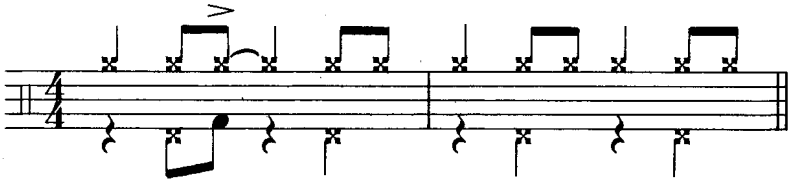
the & of 2 in the first bar

Visualization

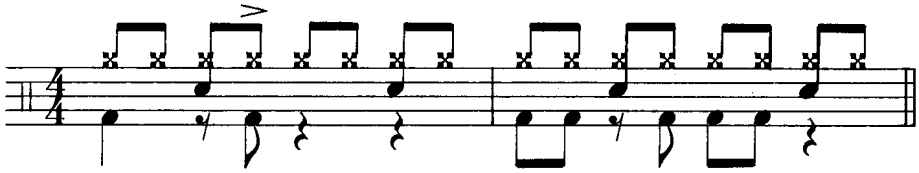


Timekeeping Patterns

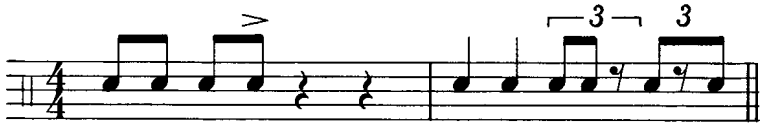
Rounded 8ths

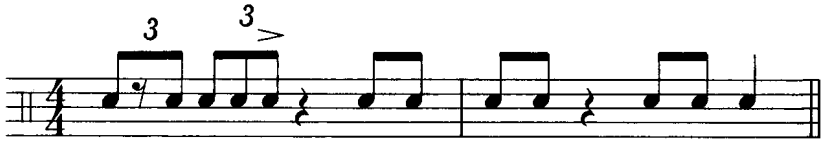


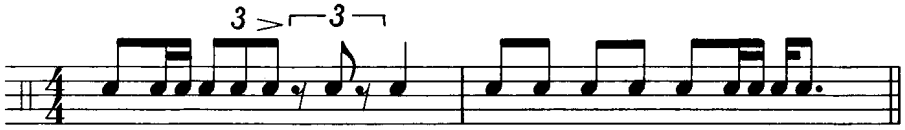
Straight 8ths



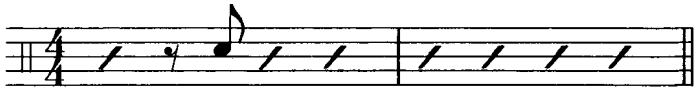
Phrases resolving to the & of 2 in the first bar:





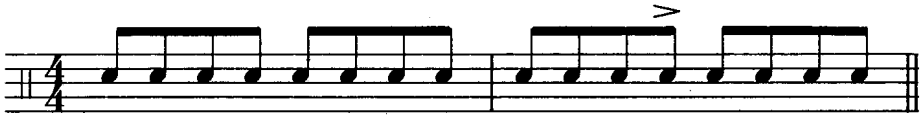


Framework for playing:



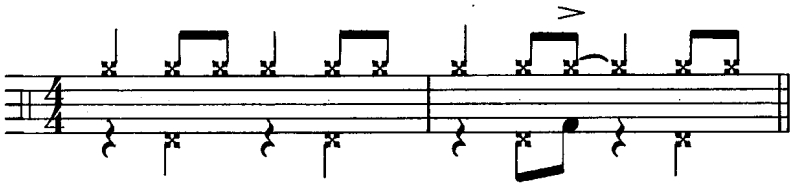
the & of 2 in the second bar

Visualization

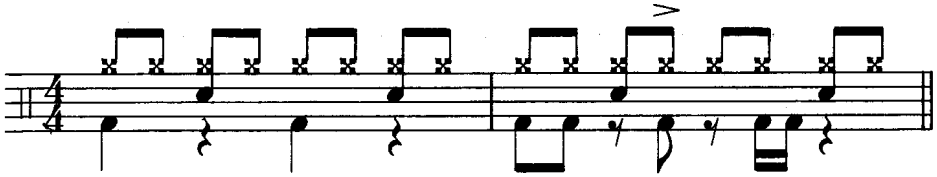


Timekeeping Patterns

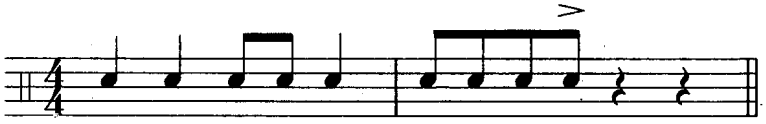
Rounded 8ths

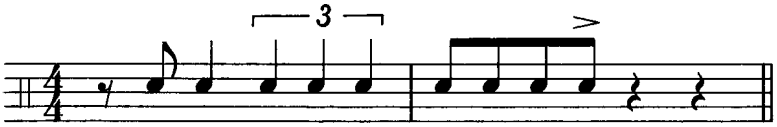


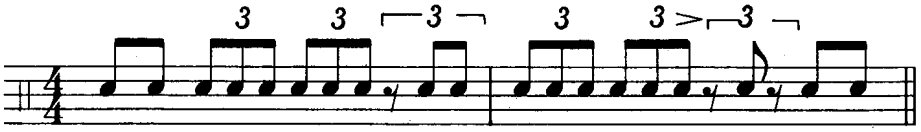
Straight 8ths



Phrases resolving to the & of 2 in the second bar:







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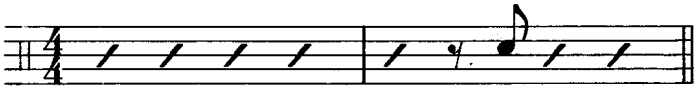
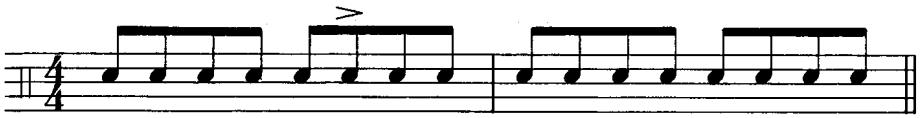


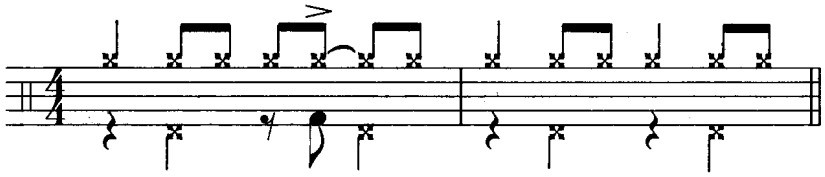
the & of 3 in the first bar

Visualization

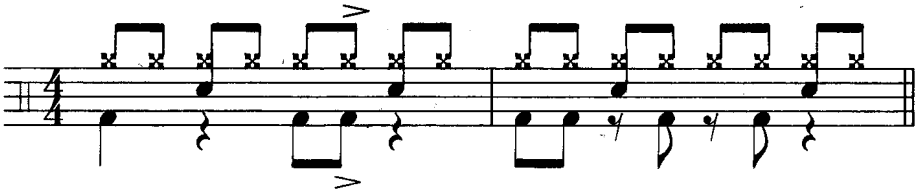


Timekeeping Patterns

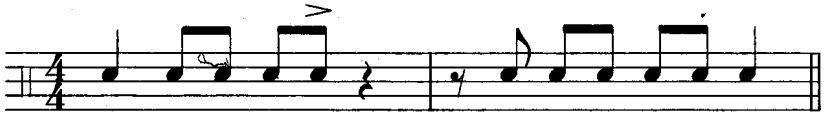
Rounded 8ths

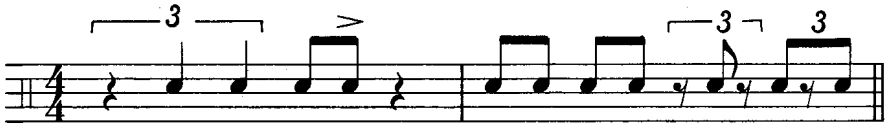


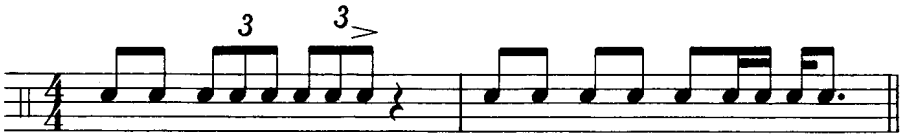
Straight 8ths



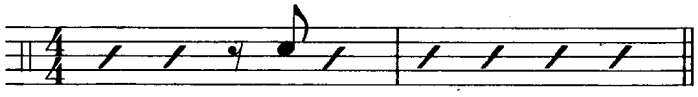
Phrases resolving to the & of 3 in the first bar:





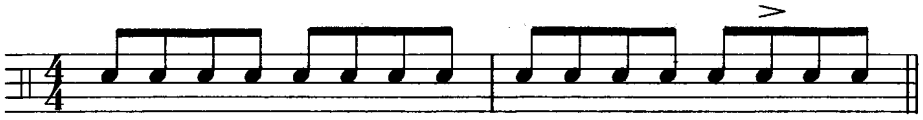


Framework for playing:



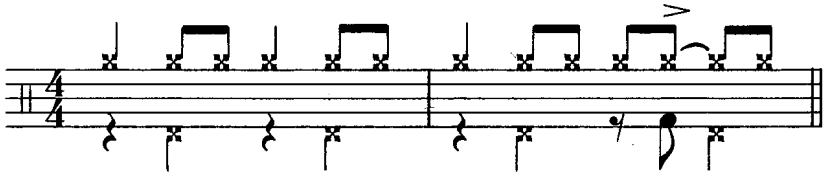
the & of 3 in the second bar

Visualization

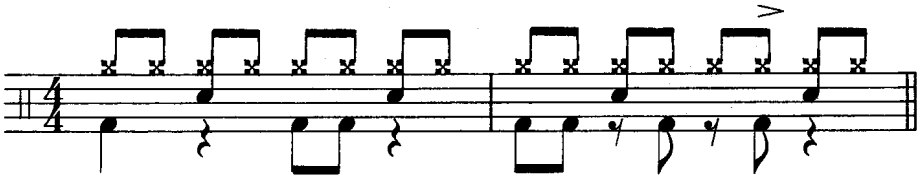


Timekeeping Patterns

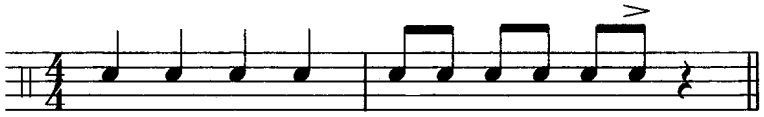
Rounded 8ths

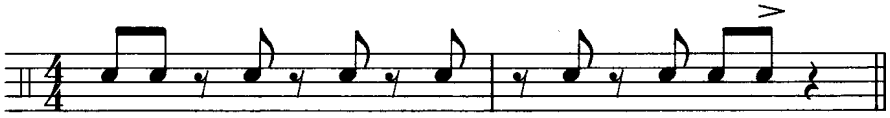


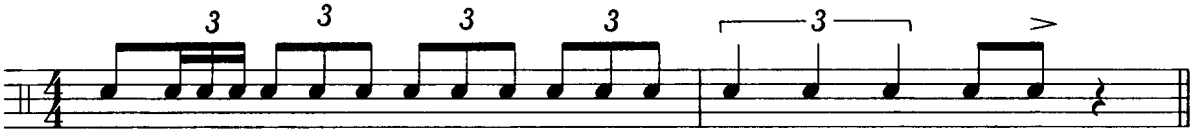
Straight 8ths



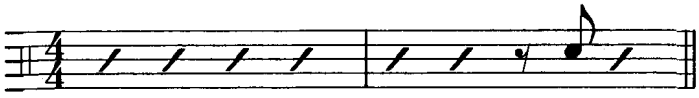
Phrases resolving to the & of 3 in the second bar:





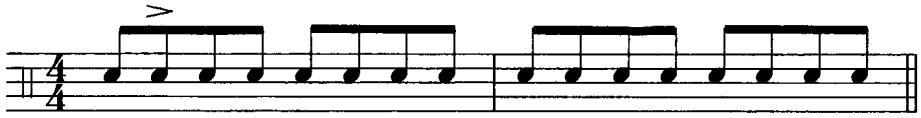


Framework for playing:



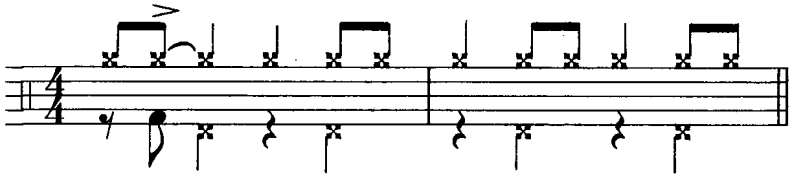
the & of 1 in the first bar

Visualization

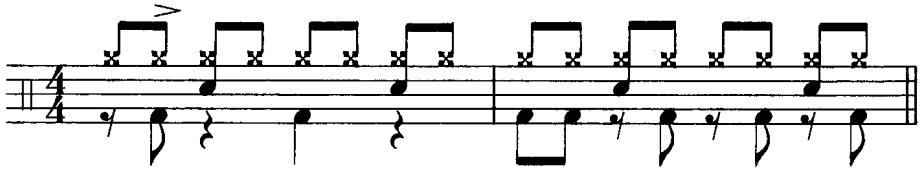


Timekeeping Patterns

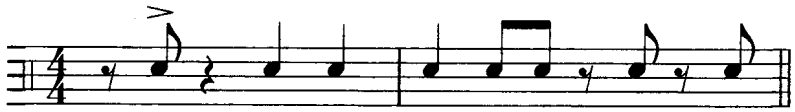
Rounded 8ths

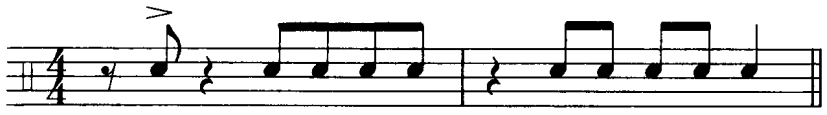


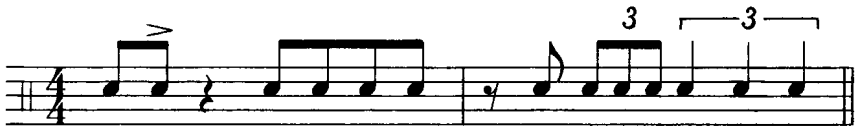
Straight 8ths



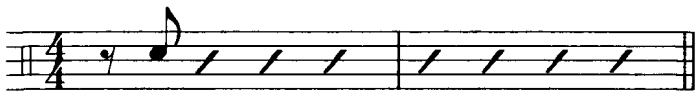
Phrases resolving to the & of 1 in the first bar:





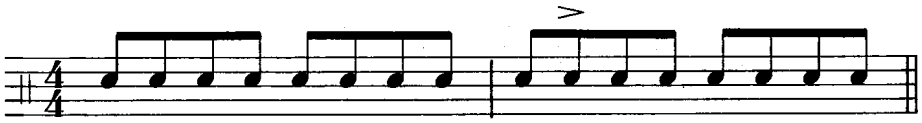


Framework for playing:



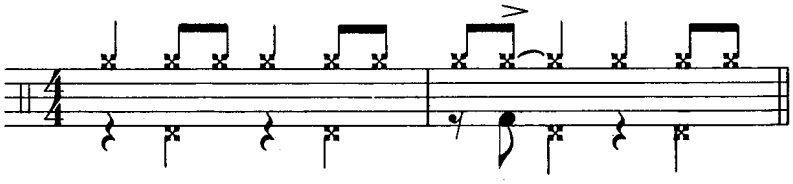
the & of 1 in the second bar

Visualization

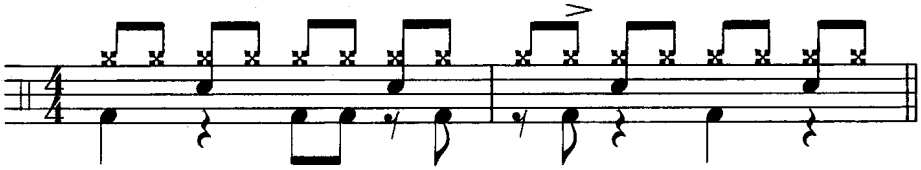


Timekeeping Patterns

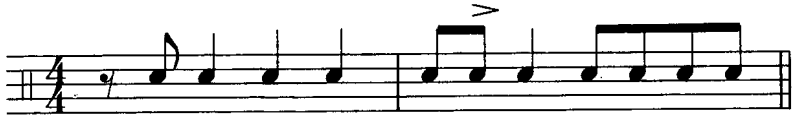
Rounded 8ths

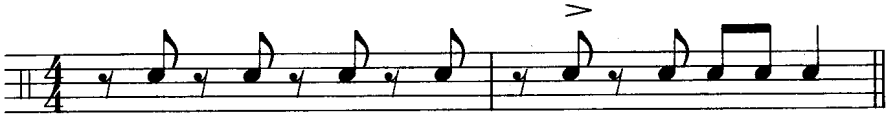


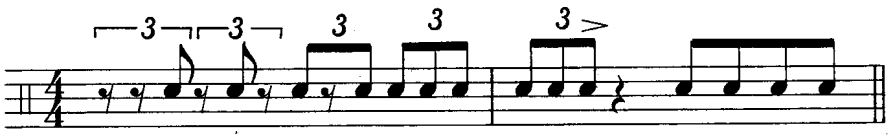
Straight 8ths



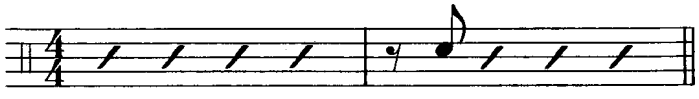
Phrases resolving to the & of 1 in the second bar:





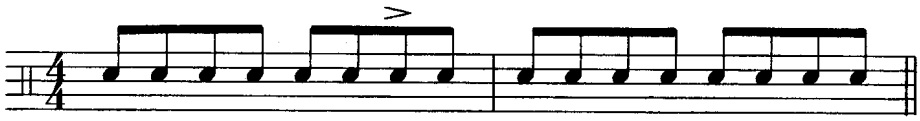


Framework for playing:



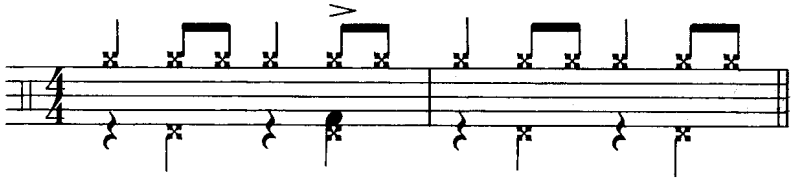
4 in the first bar

Visualization

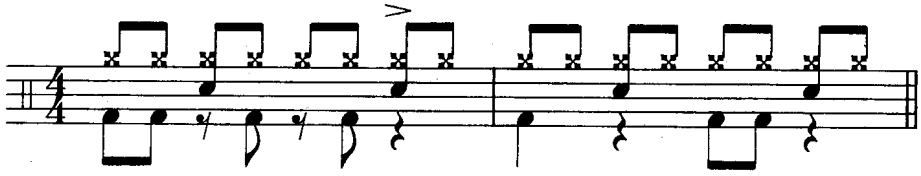


Timekeeping Patterns

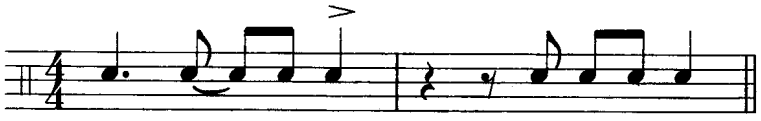
Rounded 8ths

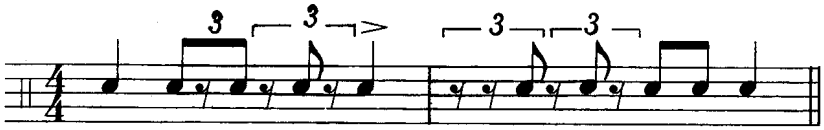


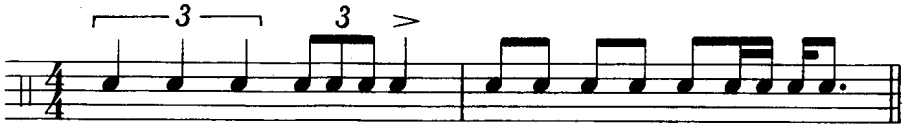
Straight 8ths



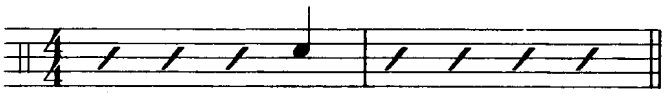
Phrases resolving to 4 in the first bar:





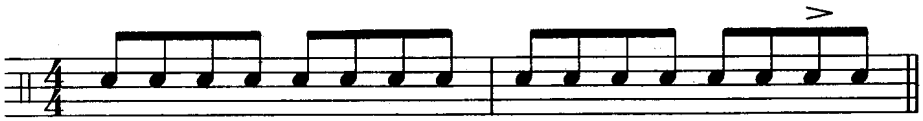


Framework for playing:



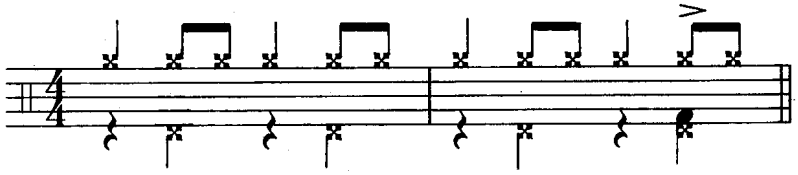
4 in the second bar

Visualization

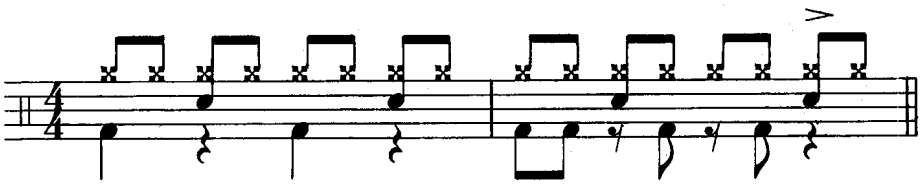


Timekeeping Patterns

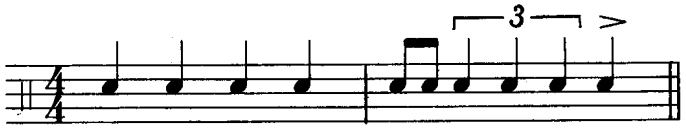
Rounded 8ths

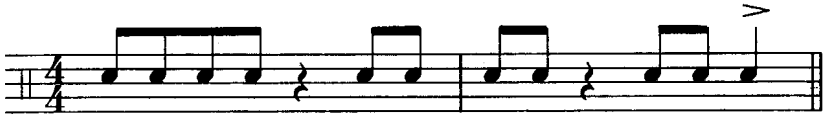


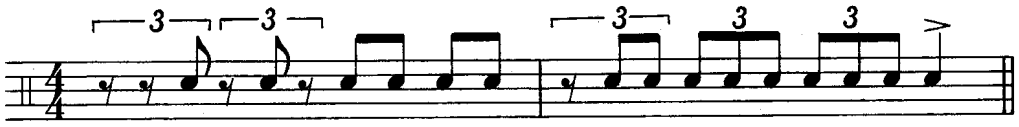
Straight 8ths



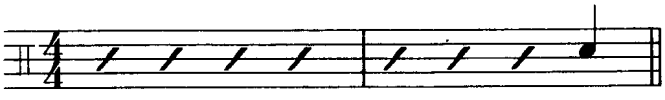
Phrases resolving to 4 in the second bar:





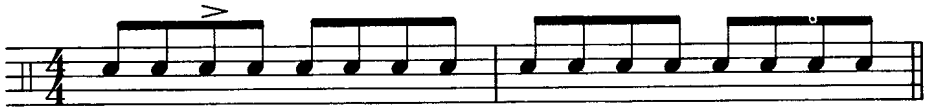


Framework for playing:



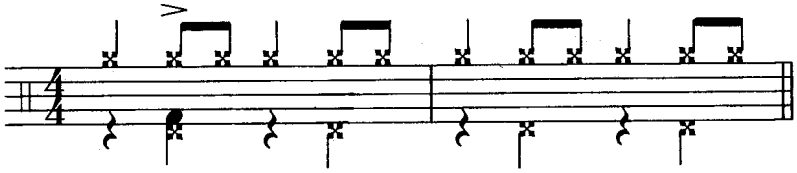
2 in the first bar

Visualization

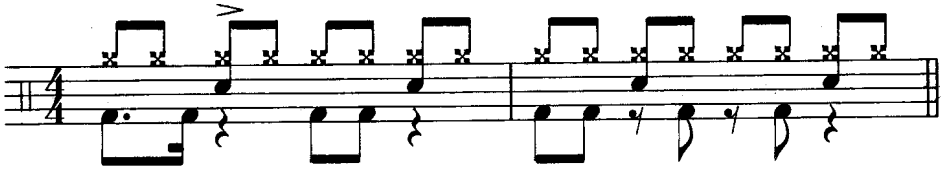


Timekeeping Patterns

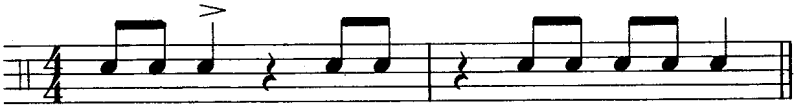
Rounded 8ths

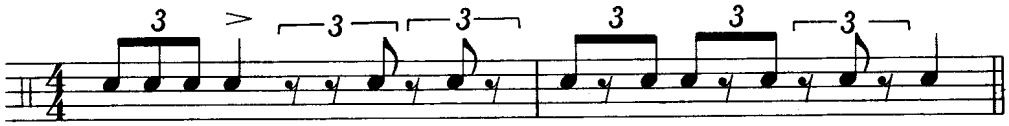


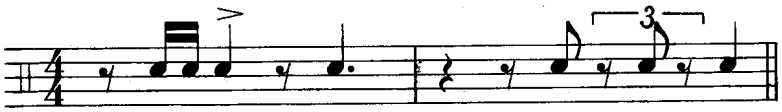
Straight 8ths



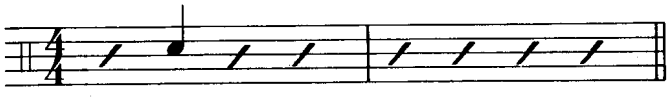
Phrases resolving to 2 in the first bar:





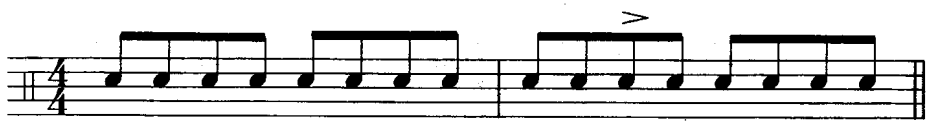


Framework for playing:



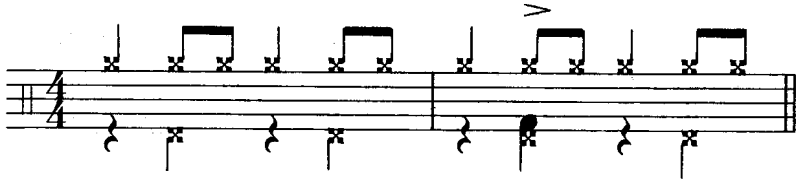
2 in the second bar

Visualization

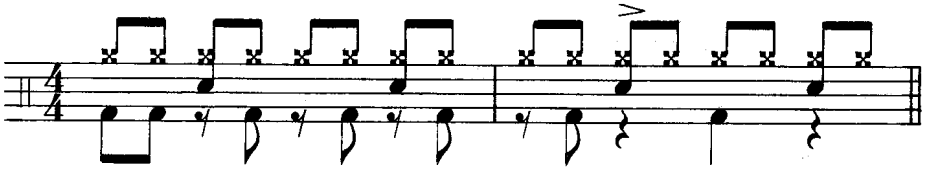


Timekeeping Patterns

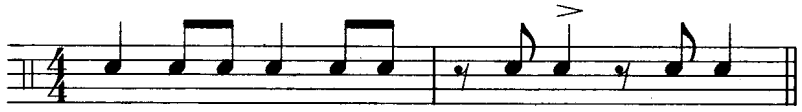
Rounded 8ths

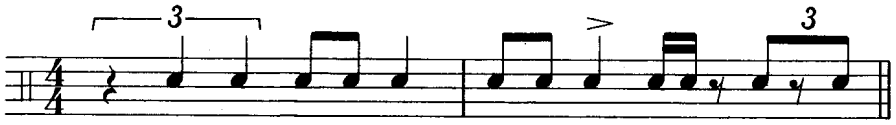


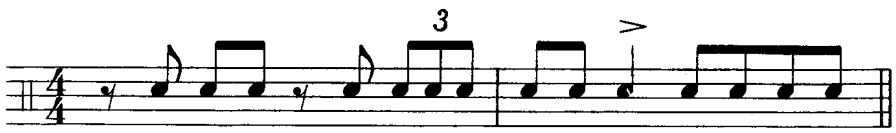
Straight 8ths



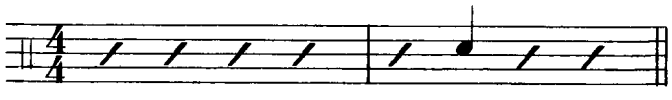
Phrases resolving to 2 in the second bar:





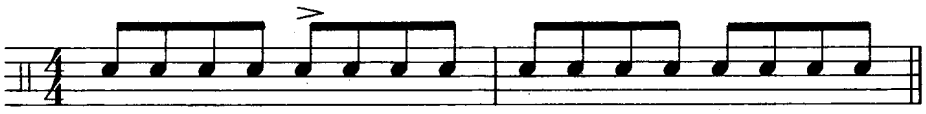


Framework for playing:



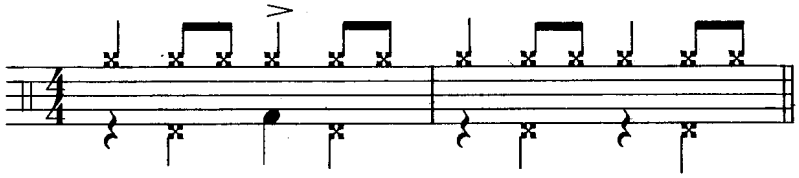
3 in the first bar

Visualization

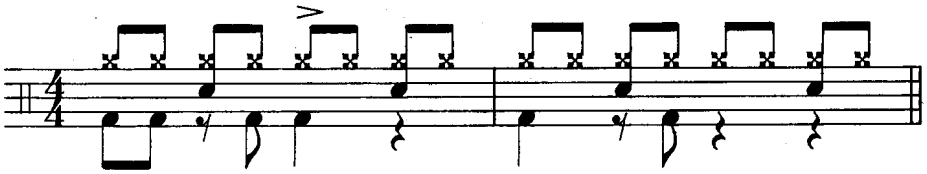


Timekeeping Patterns

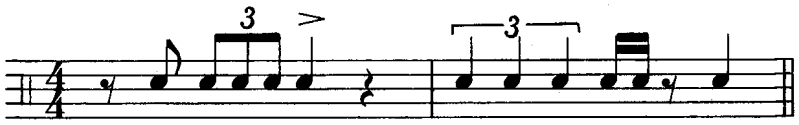
Rounded 8ths

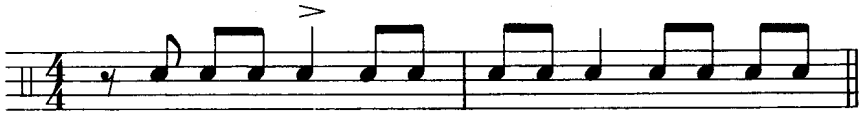


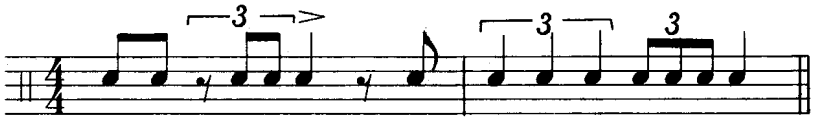
Straight 8ths



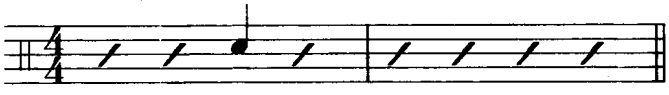
Phrases resolving to 3 in the first bar:





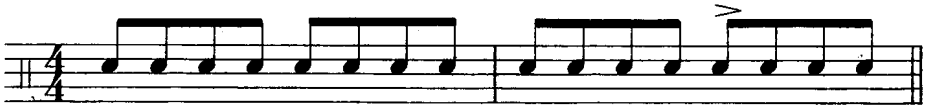


Framework for playing:



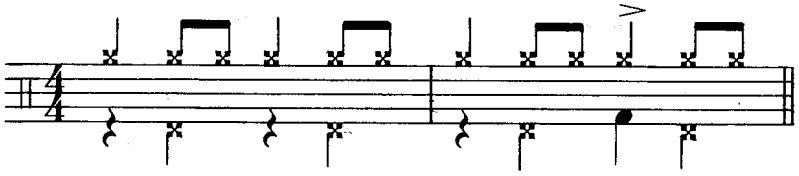
3 in the second bar

Visualization

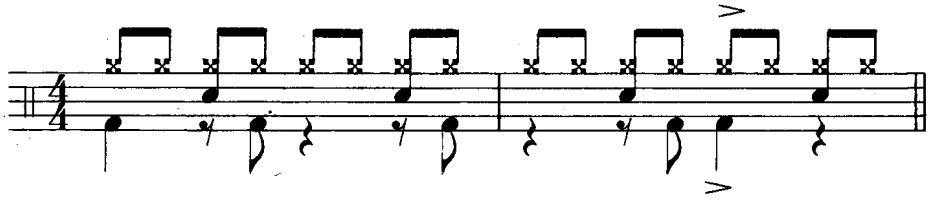


Timekeeping Patterns

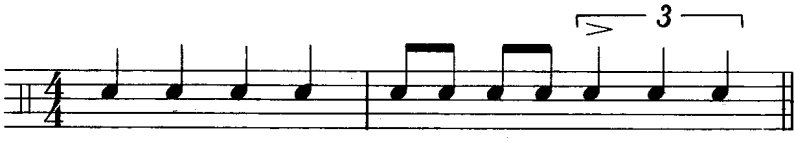
Rounded 8ths

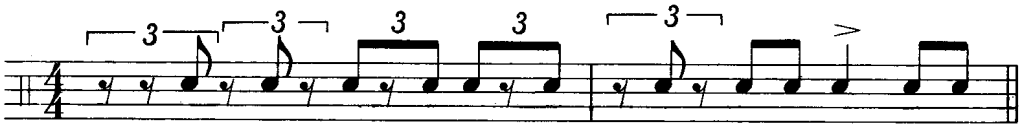


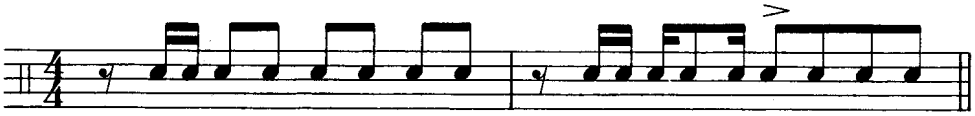
Straight 8ths



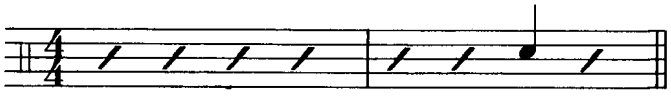
Phrases resolving to 3 in the second bar:





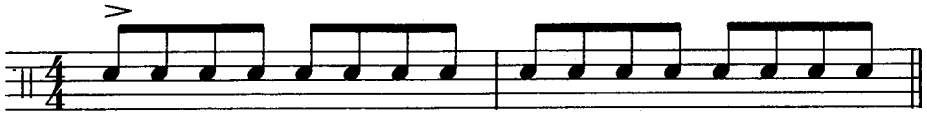


Framework for playing:



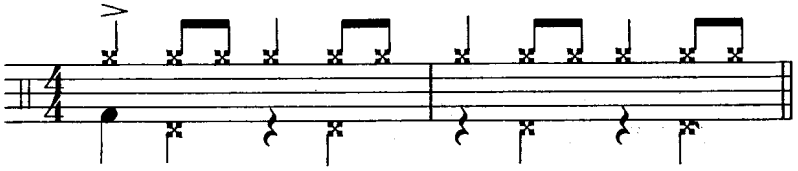
1 in the first bar

Visualization

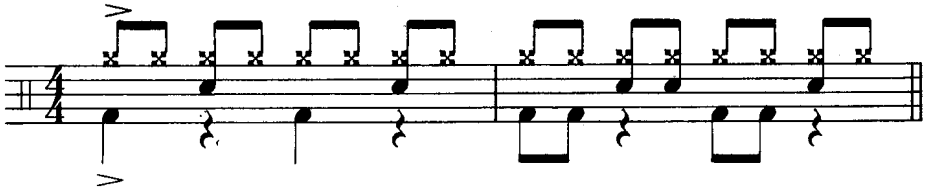


Timekeeping Patterns

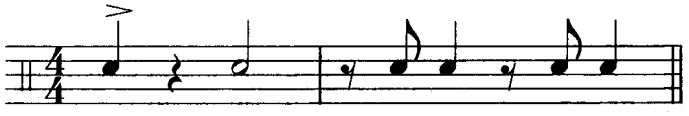
Rounded 8ths

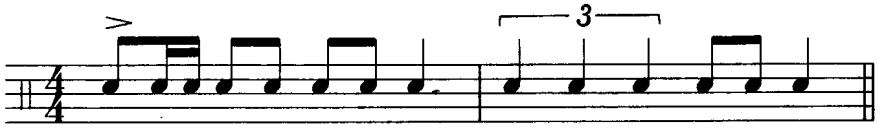


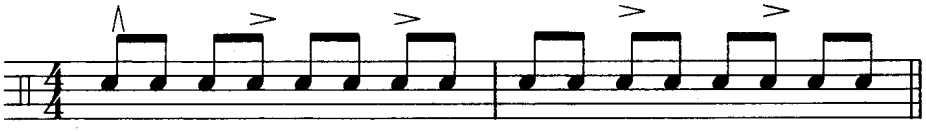
Straight 8ths



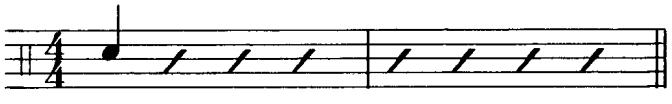
Phrases resolving to 1 in the first bar:





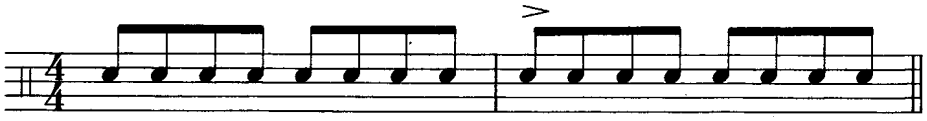


Framework for playing:



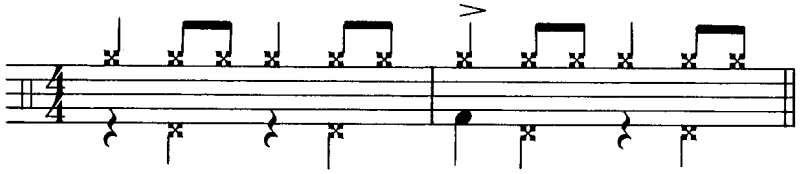
1 in the second bar

Visualization

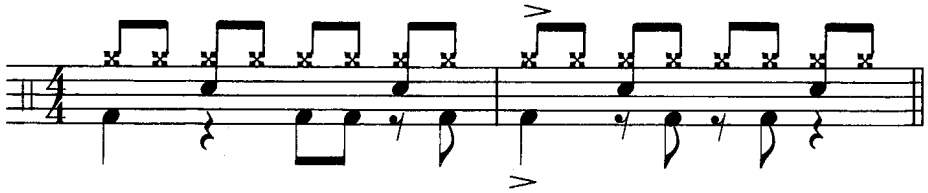


Timekeeping Patterns

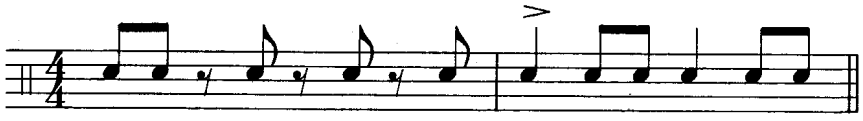
Rounded 8ths

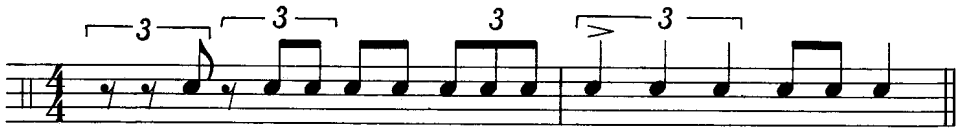


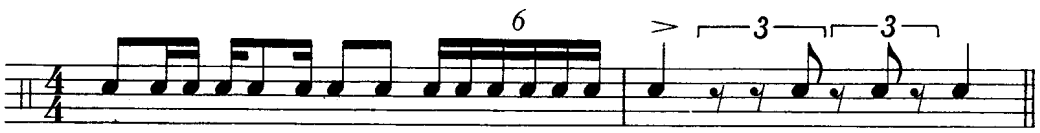
Straight 8ths



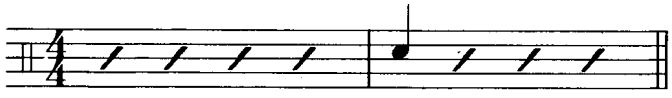
Phrases resolving to 1 in the first bar:





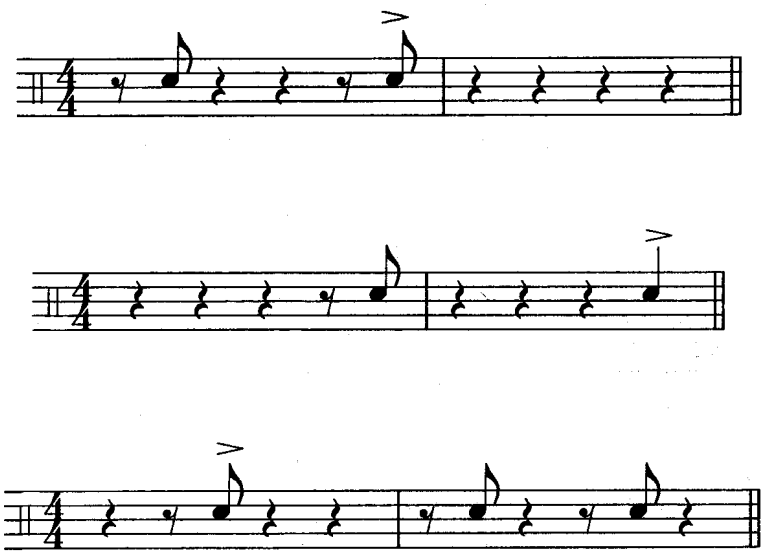


Framework for playing:



combining points

It's possible to combine two or more resolution points in a two-bar phrase. In these situations, there will always be one point which is more important than the others. Some examples are given below, with the primary point marked with an accent.



It is very important that you deal with individual points for a long time before you start combining them. Remember, the basic concept is that you are playing from the simplest idea you can find. The more resolution points you combine in a two-bar phrase, the more complex your basic idea becomes.

The group Compost featured Jack DeJohnette, Bob Moses, Jack Gregg, George Davis, Jumma Santos, and Harold Vick.

movable two

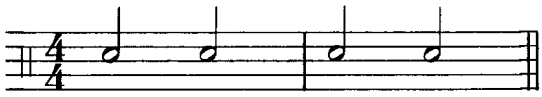
Sometimes we are told to play a tune "in two." Playing in two means playing in a half-note motion instead of in a quarter-note motion. Some of the most common usages of playing in two are samba-like tunes and medium-bounce swing tunes, like "There Will Never Be Another You," where the bass line moves in half notes instead of quarter notes. It is also useful for playing fast-tempo swing tunes because it is important to internalize a rhythm and have it dance through your body. Trying to dance to straight quarter notes at a fast tempo will make your body move too fast and in a jerky manner. But you *can* put your body into a half-note flow. It helps tempos stay up and swing more. So playing in two is a valuable musical device, and we're called upon to do it a lot.

When most people play in two, they assume that the half notes fall on the 1 and the 3, but in reality, we can move in a half-note motion starting from any of four different places. This is what I call the movable two. Just as you can resolve to any of the eight resolution points, if you're moving in half-note motion, there are four places you can start from: the 1 and the 3; the 2 and the 4; the & of 1 and the & of 3; or the & of 2 and the & of 4. This is another way of having variation within a unified idea. The unified idea is to move in half-note motion, but we can change the point from which our half-note motion moves.

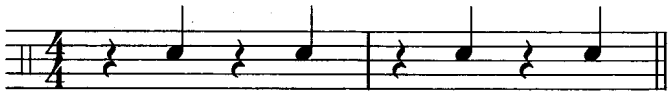
Methodology

Play each of these over and over to get the feel.

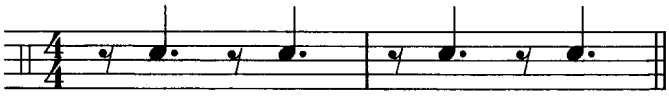
1 and 3



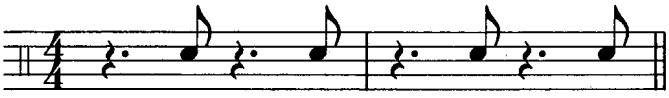
2 and 4



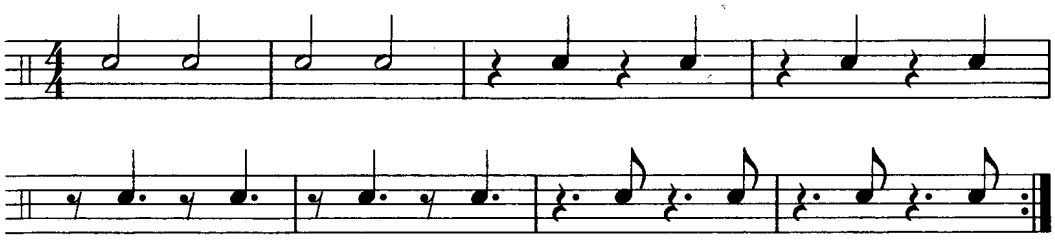
& of 1 and & of 3



& of 2 and & of 4

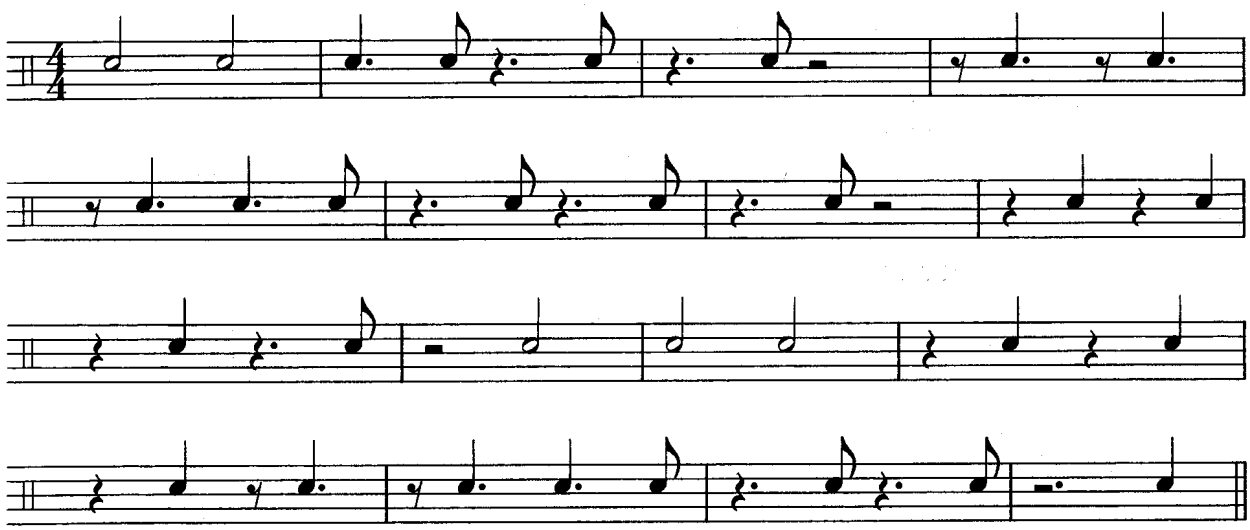


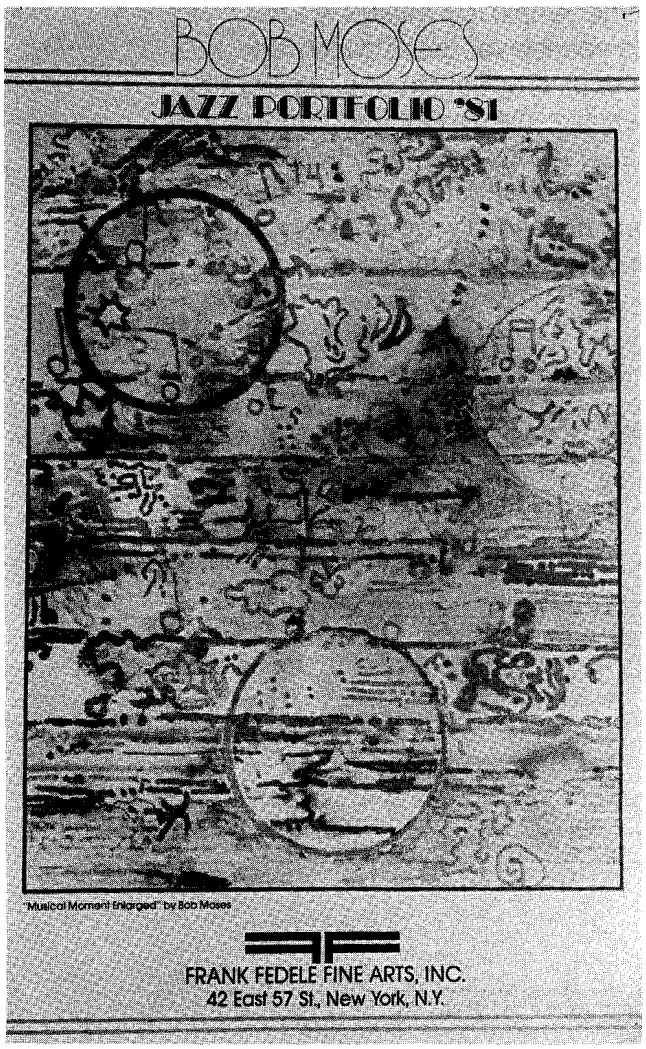
The simplest application of the movable two is to go consecutively, playing two bars of each, in the order shown above. Even though it's simple, you'll see how hip it sounds.

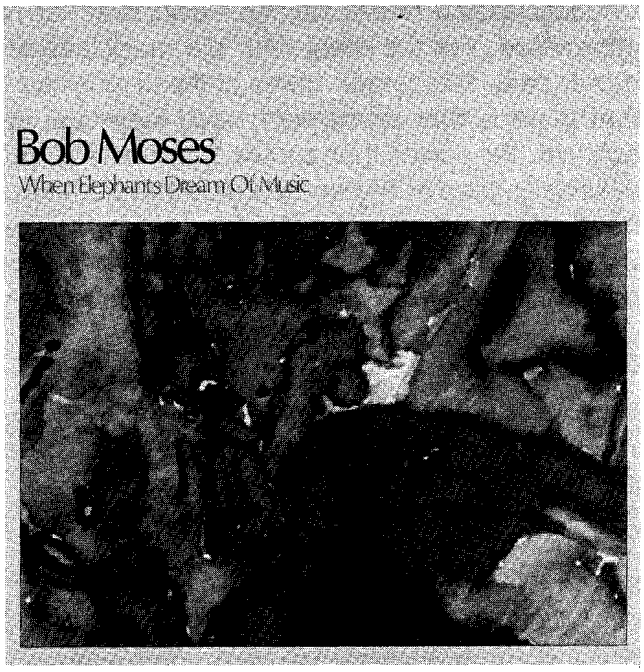


We can play with the various "in two" feelings, moving from one to another in ways that are not symmetrical, as long as we observe the half-note motion.

Movable two can be used with any straight 4/4 tune, not only when the piece of music calls for playing in two. It's another way of using the resolution points — a unifying feeling that helps give continuity and groove, yet also provides change and surprise. The unifying factor is the half-note motion, but the half-note motion can start from any one of four places, and the variation of these four places is what makes the movable two interesting as well as functional.







At left is a poster that was made from one of Bob's paintings, used to advertise a showing of art works by musicians. Shown above is the jacket from one of Bob's albums, for which he also did the artwork.

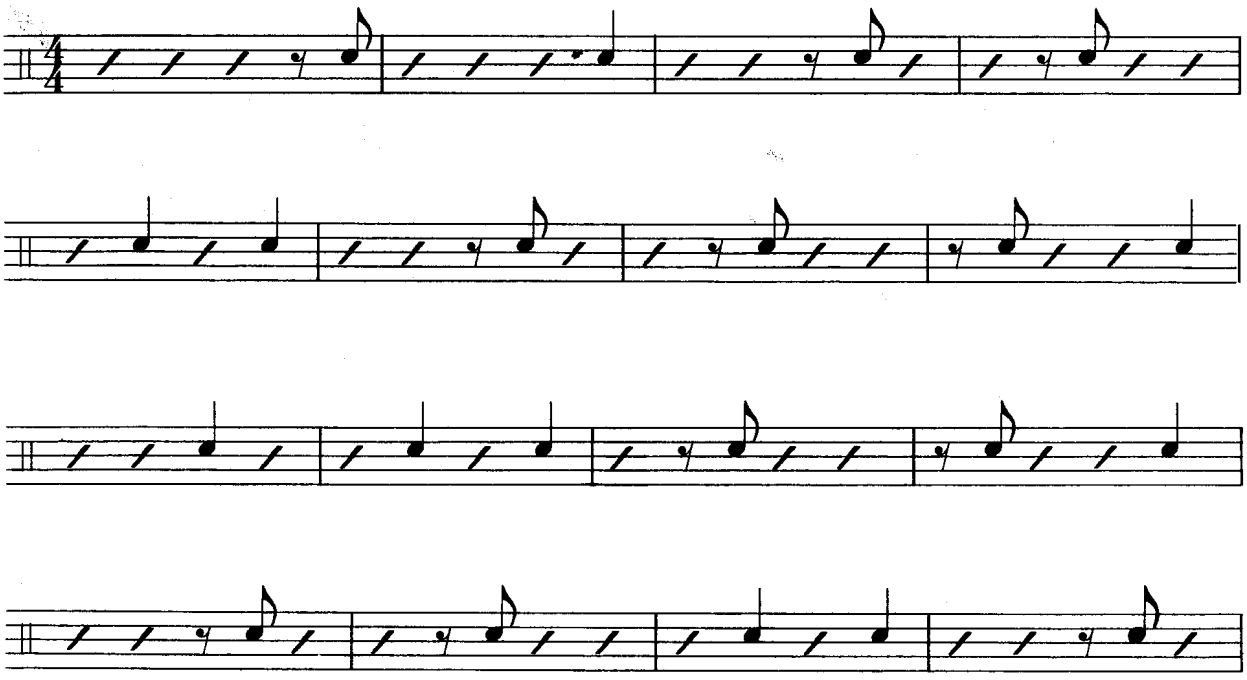
playing off of the 8/8 flow

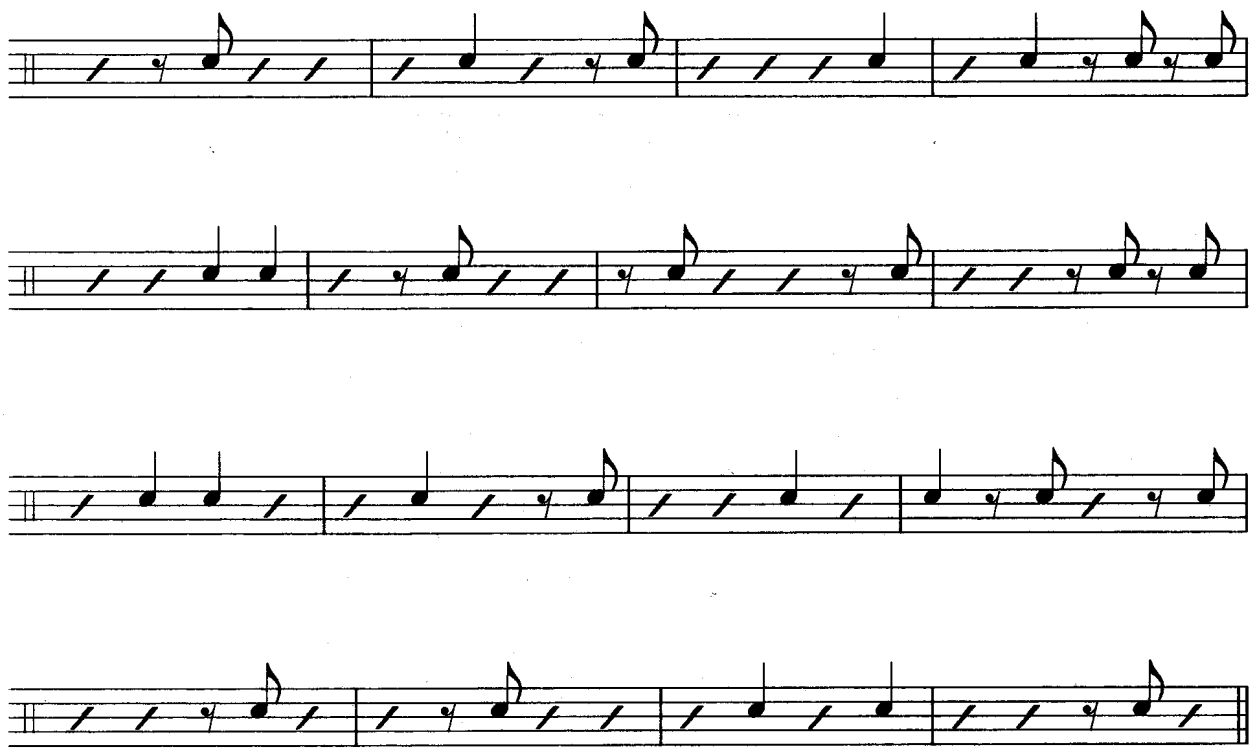
Thus far, I've discussed playing off of three things: a melody, a vamp or a resolution point. There is another thing you can play off of: the 8/8 flow itself. While this is less specific and freer than the other three, it will, however, hold you in a groove, which is your goal. Before going any further, I want to stress the importance of spending a *lot* of time dealing with the individual resolution points before you attempt to just play off of the flow. In my own case, I dealt with the individual points for approximately ten years before I allowed myself to play from the flow. I still play off of resolution points a large percentage of the time.

The basic principle behind playing off of the flow is to imagine a steady series of 8th notes, like an imaginary click track. Once you can hold that 8th-note flow in your internal hearing, then you are free to vary the resolution points from measure to measure. Although you will be varying them spontaneously, the variations should not be haphazard. The resolution points you choose must make sense in relation to each other and set each other up. In order to instinctively make spontaneous choices that make musical sense, you must first have a thorough knowledge and understanding of the way the eight individual points feel. This is why I stress that you first spend a lot of time with each point individually. Remember, freedom in itself is worthless; it's better to give up freedom in order to sound good.

This brings up another aspect of my philosophy, which is that improvisation is unimportant to me. I'm not saying I'm against it, but I don't consider it a qualification for good music. The only thing that is important to me is whether or not the music sounds/feels good. I think that most people sound better when they are less free. There are certain musicians who know music so well that they can be spontaneous and still have cohesion, but a lot of people need more preconception to make it work.

Most classical music, African music, Brazilian music and other ethnic folk musics are not improvised. For the most part, the musicians are playing preconceived parts which are designed to fit together. Some of these musics are very powerful, precisely for the reason that there is that *agreement;* each individual agrees to sacrifice his or her freedom to achieve the power that comes from unity of purpose. That kind of agreement is often missing in jazz or improvised music. Jazz allows freedom, but unfortunately, one of the freedoms it allows is the freedom to play things which don't necessarily work together. Playing off of the flow, which allows much freedom, is done best by those musicians who have thoroughly mastered vamps, motifs and claves.





Bob has been a member of Gary Burton's group on three different occasions. In this shot from the late '70s are (clockwise from top) Bob, Gary Burton, Tiger Okoshi, and Steve Swallow.

the non-independent method

The term "non-independent method" is my own invention. The method itself is derived from my observations of how most top drummers play. To understand my reservations about independence, let's examine the word itself. Independence means playing one rhythm against another. The key word in this phrase is "against." To me, against means war — faction fighting faction. When you have two ideas working against each other, you divide your strength and diminish your power. My belief is that, in order to swing, it is necessary to internalize one rhythm. It's difficult enough to internalize, focus or concentrate on one rhythm; when dealing with two or more simultaneously, you are much less likely to groove. Independent playing forces you to focus more on mathematics and less on musical feeling.

Independence generally means playing a standard jazz ride beat, like "ding ding-a-ding, ding-a-ding," and playing various rhythms against it on the bass drum and snare drum (although independence could be any two rhythms played against each other). In my opinion, playing rhythms on the snare drum and bass drum against a fixed ride beat actually limits what you can play to the licks you have worked out and practiced. I imagine that even the most diligent practitioners of independence have, at most, 30 to 40 licks that they can play against "ding ding-a-ding," which is an adequate arsenal, but is still finite and limited. Out of those 40 licks, perhaps only 20 would routinely fit into the music. With non-independence you have infinite possibilities of left-hand/bass drum combinations, and as you will see, the methodology is easy enough that you can achieve this variety with little or no practice.

Another qualm I have with independence is that, because of its difficulty, its practitioners tend to overuse it. After you've practiced something difficult, it's human nature to want to use it because you spent all that time working on it. However, it may not fit in the music you're presented with. I often hear musicians playing licks that they've practiced because they're impressive, not because they fit the music. Of course, if you have mastered some independence, and it suits the piece, there's nothing wrong with using it. However, my feeling is that, as a methodology, it tends to take you away from your prime function, which is to swing.

Let's talk about the cymbal beat. What I propose to show is that it's not necessary to always play "ding ding-a-ding" as the ride pattern. It's a valid thing to play, but it's only one of the many possible things that you can play. In fact, very few drummers stick to that all the time.

Let's look at the function of the cymbal in music. The purpose of the cymbal is to provide a drone or harmonic cushion for the lead instruments. (This is one reason why it is not good to switch cymbals in the middle of somebody's solo. It pulls the rug out from under the soloist, who is playing off of the continuous harmonic drone you are creating with that cymbal.) The cymbal is the one part of the drumset that is legato. The rest of the drums are staccato. Although they do ring to a certain extent, they have a definite attack, whereas the cymbal tends to create a wash. That's why it is suited to the role of the drone or harmonic cushion.

Once you understand the function of the cymbal, you will realize that it's not necessary to go "ding ding-a-ding" all the time. It's only necessary to be hitting the cymbal with enough frequency to create a continuum — that harmonic cushion to which I'm referring. I have had students say to me that, when they play with bebop-oriented musicians, they believe those musicians want them to play that so-called straight, jazz ride beat. My belief is that most musicians don't care what the drummer plays as long as it swings. One time I saw Jack DeJohnette play with some Dixieland musicians. DeJohnette is a great non-independent drummer, in the sense that he uses many variations on the cymbal. The other musicians were knocked out by his playing because he was swinging. It wasn't important to them that he play that exact beat.

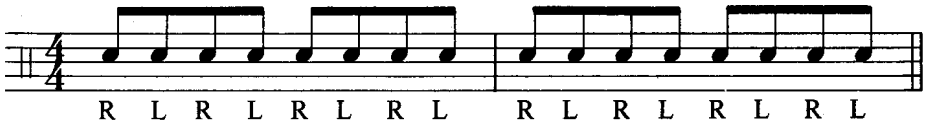
The key point concerning the non-independent method is this: Instead of playing two rhythms — one on the ride cymbal and the other on the snare drum — think and play only one rhythm. When I play, even though I have one hand on the cymbal, I'm still playing only

one rhythm — not two against each other. For example, I could play a paradiddle (which is one rhythm) with my right hand on the cymbal and my left hand on the snare. It would be easy to play, it would sound good, and it would create enough of a continuum on the cymbal to fulfill the function of the harmonic cushion.

So that there's no misunderstanding, let me reiterate that sometimes the standard ride beat — "ding ding-a-ding" — is the perfect thing to play. Also, there are certain independent rhythms that will fit very well with the music at hand. If you have acquired the ability to play those rhythms and your taste tells you that they fit, by all means use them. Also, let me stress that independence is a discipline, and discipline is beneficial. Conquering a problem is a good test of your mental prowess. However, my feeling is that, if you're involved with the art of making music, and that is your priority (and I think it should be your priority), independence should be relegated to esoteric study. I think practicing independence would be more beneficial after you've already reached the level of being a functional, swinging drummer who gives other musicians a smooth ride when they play. This is our first goal, and I think that the easiest and most direct way to reach that goal is by the non-independent method.

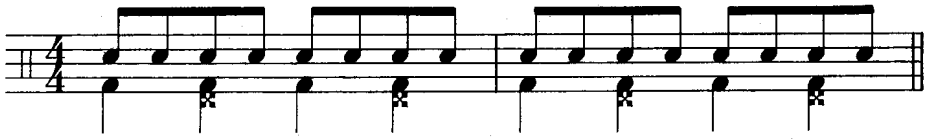
METHODOLOGY

STEP A: The basic idea is very simple, although it's not always so easy to execute. Take the 8th-note flow (either straight 8ths or rounded 8ths) and play it on the snare drum in the simplest way, which happens to be with alternate sticking.

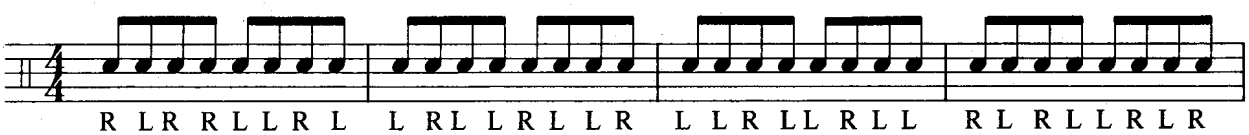


The reason for Step A is to make sure that the basic flow is both even and relaxed. If you can't do Step A properly, you will be on a shaky foundation when you attempt the next step. Even after going on to the next steps, it is good to go back to Step A from time to time. It's sort of like checking the focus on your camera to make sure you're still in line with what you started with.

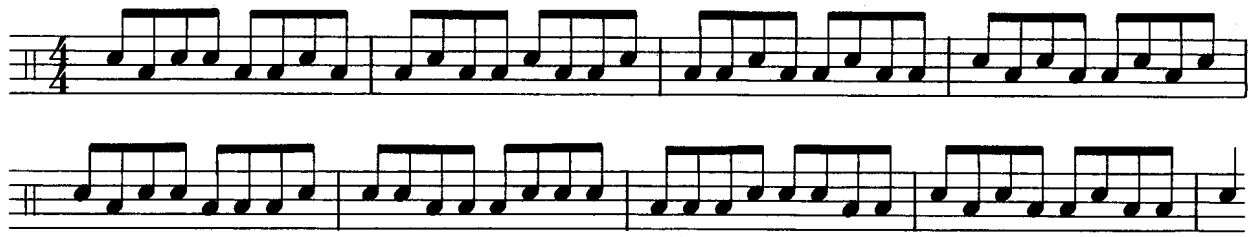
You can also practice Step A, adding bass drum on all four beats, and 2 and 4 on the hi-hat.



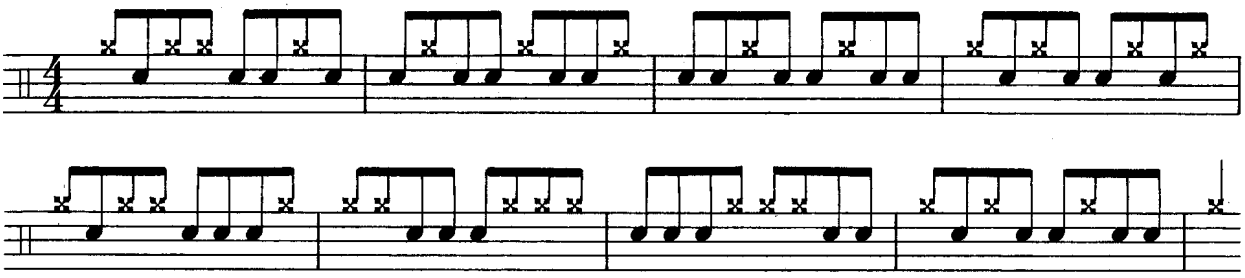
STEP B: This is the crucial step that leads *directly* to non-independent playing. Take the same 8th-note flow, but this time vary the sticking. Try to vary the sticking randomly — not consciously. The specific sticking is unimportant. How you're playing it *is* important. Is it even? Is it relaxed? The point is to concentrate more on the sound and feeling than on the particular sticking pattern.



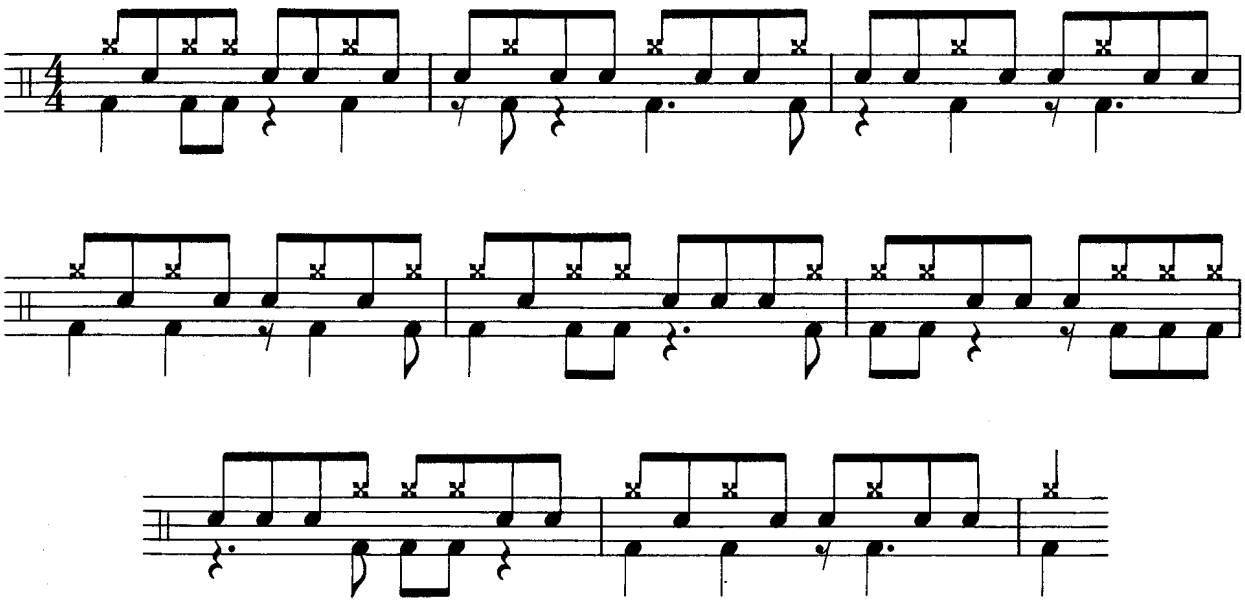
Put your two hands on different drums so that you can hear the melody that is created by your sticking. You'll find that, as you do this, you'll create melodies between the two toms or between the tom and the snare drum that will be pleasing to you. You will also find your own favorite stickings. The point is to concentrate on the sound and the feeling.



The next step is very simple: Move your right hand to the cymbal. This is what creates a continuum on the cymbal. Remember, you are not playing two rhythms; you are playing just one rhythm, but dividing it between the snare drum and the cymbal. (Note: Left-handed players should reverse these instructions, moving the left hand to the cymbal.)

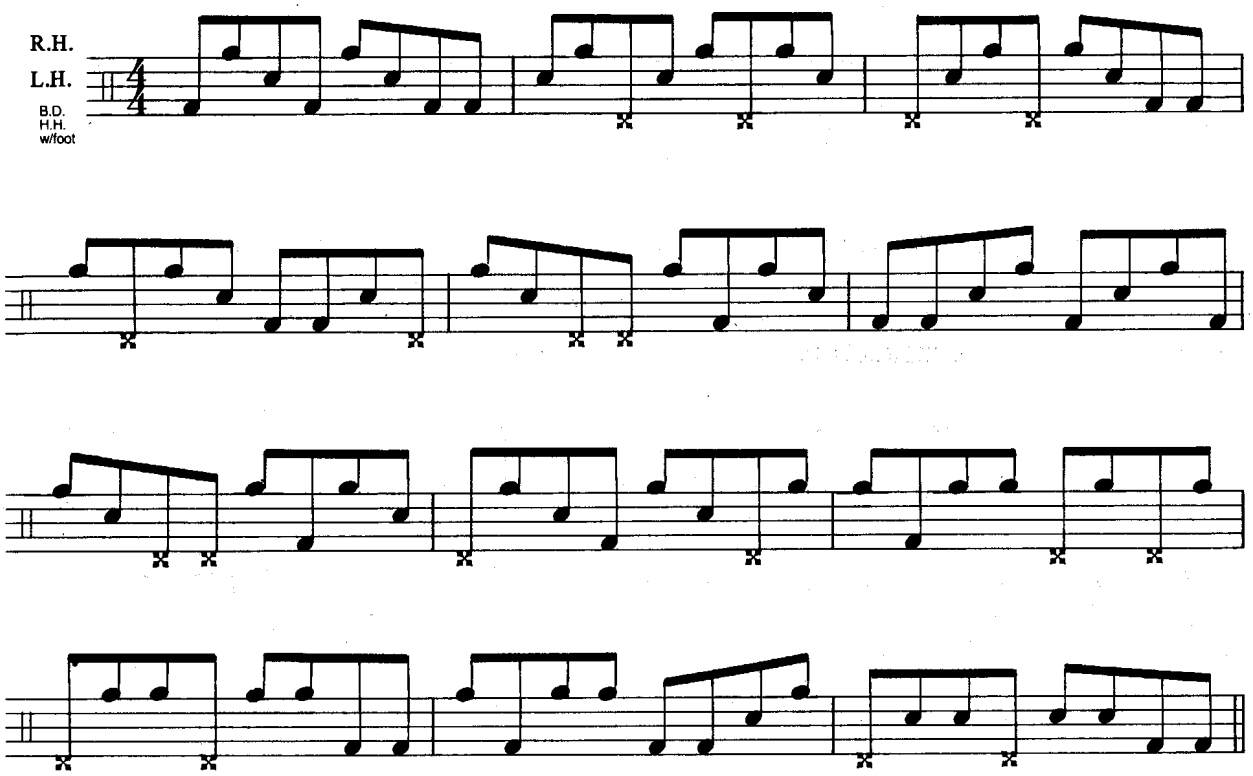


Now, what do you do with the bass drum? The bass drum is in unison with the ride cymbal. There are two beautiful things about this. First, it is very easy. Biologically, the right side of your body is connected, so it is easy for your right hand and right foot to hit together. The second beautiful thing is that it makes a very nice sound. To me, a cymbal without a bass drum is like icing without a cake. The cymbal needs that bass drum to sound full. A lot of drummers are very "top heavy" — all cymbals and no bass drum. Often these are people who are trying to play independently, and their right feet and left hands are not as involved in the music as they could be. With the non-independent method you can take the same flow, with the varied sticking, and play the right foot in unison with the right hand.



You don't have to play a bass drum note with every cymbal beat. Pick key spots, depending on the tempo, the type of tune, and where you want to put the notes.

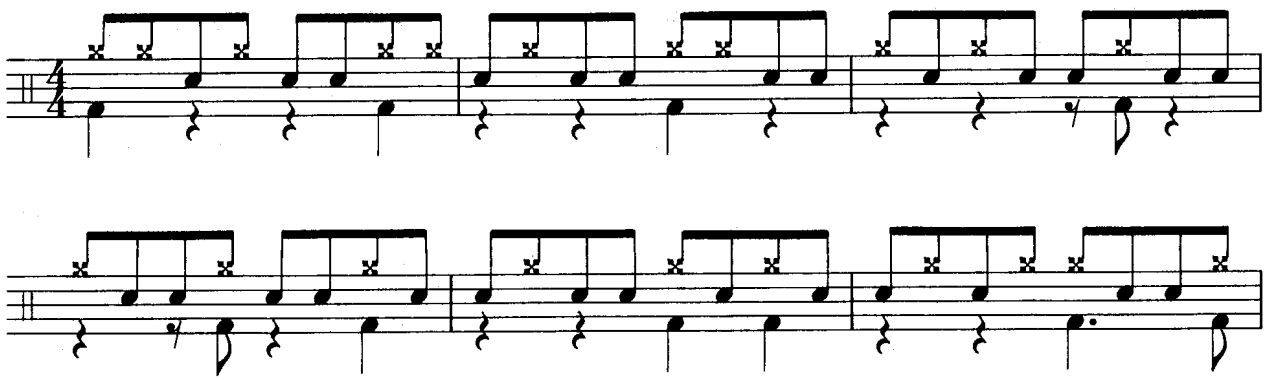
STEP C: This involves taking the same 8th-note flow and mixing it between all four limbs in a melodic fashion. Again, this is not independence; it's not taking two (or more) rhythms at once. It's just using all four limbs to play one rhythm. Step C is more useful for solo playing than basic timekeeping.

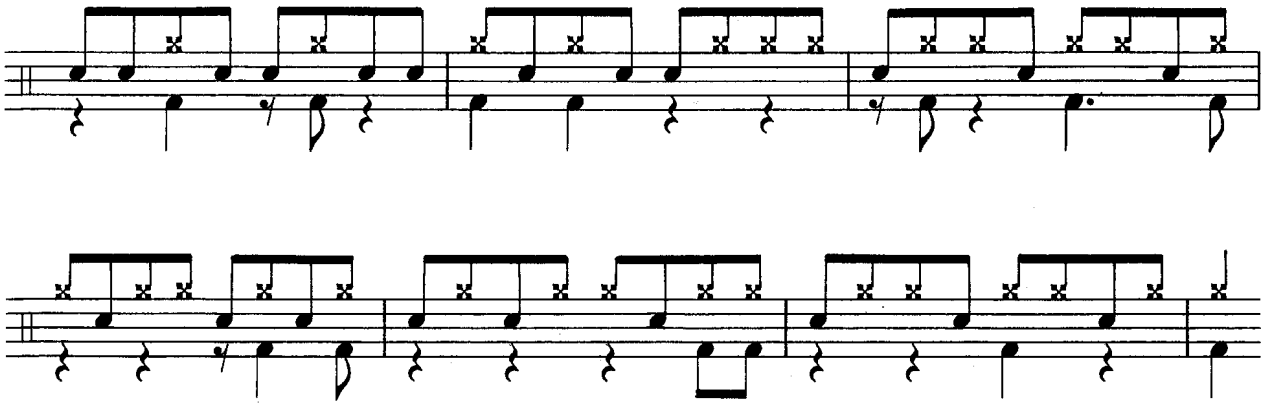


APPLICATION

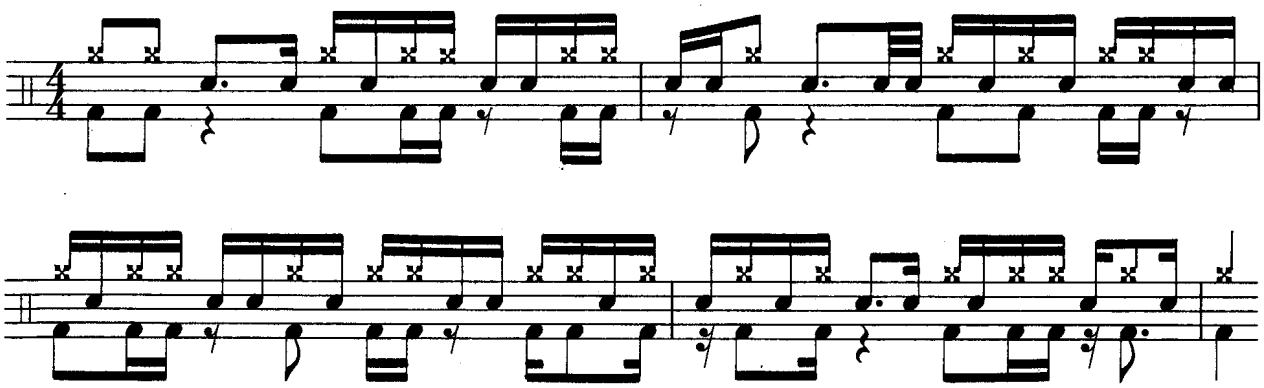
One of the most valuable things we can use the non-independent method for is playing fast tempos. This method doesn't demand that you have a lot of technique. I find that, even if I haven't touched the drums for a while, I can play a fast tempo with no problem because I'm not trying to play it all with one hand. When you try to play a fast tempo independently, using the standard ride cymbal rhythm, a couple of things can happen. One possibility is that you won't be able to keep it up and you will start to drag. Another is that you will keep it up, but you will become stiff. There are drummers who can do it, but they are the ones with fantastic chops.

Another disadvantage of independence is that there is not a lot you can do with the snare drum and bass drum. There's so much happening on the ride cymbal that there is very little room left for anything else. Usually people who play that style end up just doing little jabs here and there on the snare drum and bass drum. Playing non-independently allows the snare and bass drum to be much more involved in the total flow.



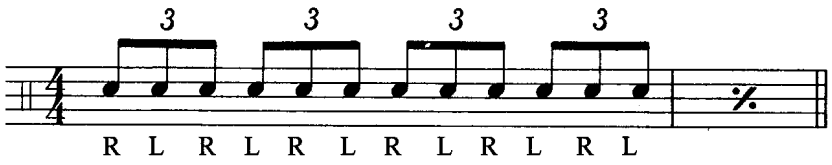


This method is also extremely valuable for funk playing. Again, it's one rhythm played hand-to-hand.

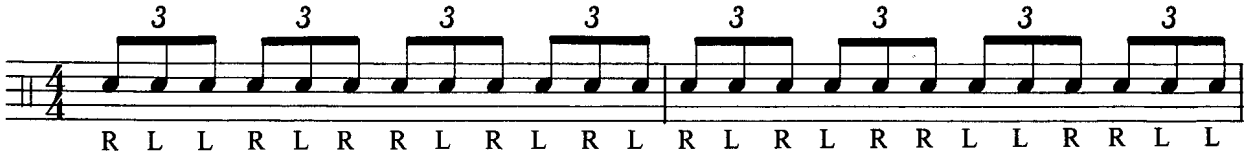


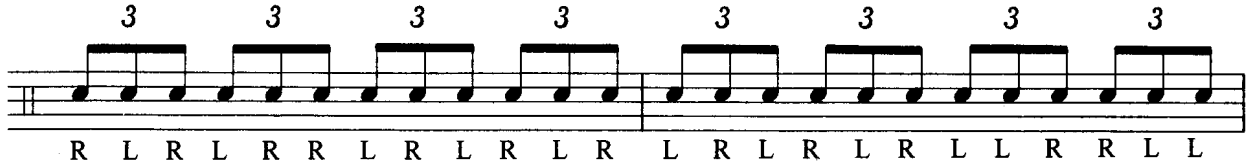
TRIPLET FLOW

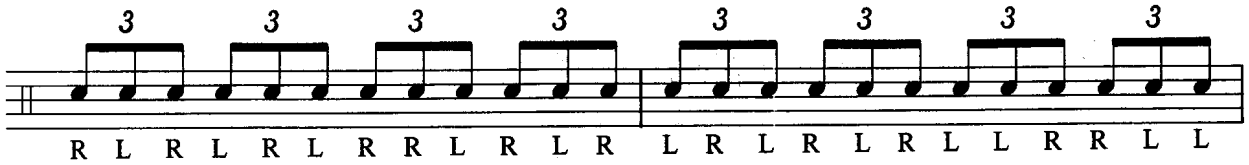
This is generally used for slower tempos. First review Step A, page 37, but use triplets.

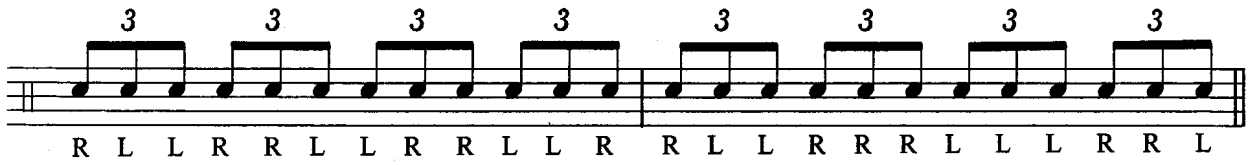


You can also practice Step A, adding bass drum on all four beats, and 2 and 4 on the hi-hat.
Step B is the same flow with mixed stickings.

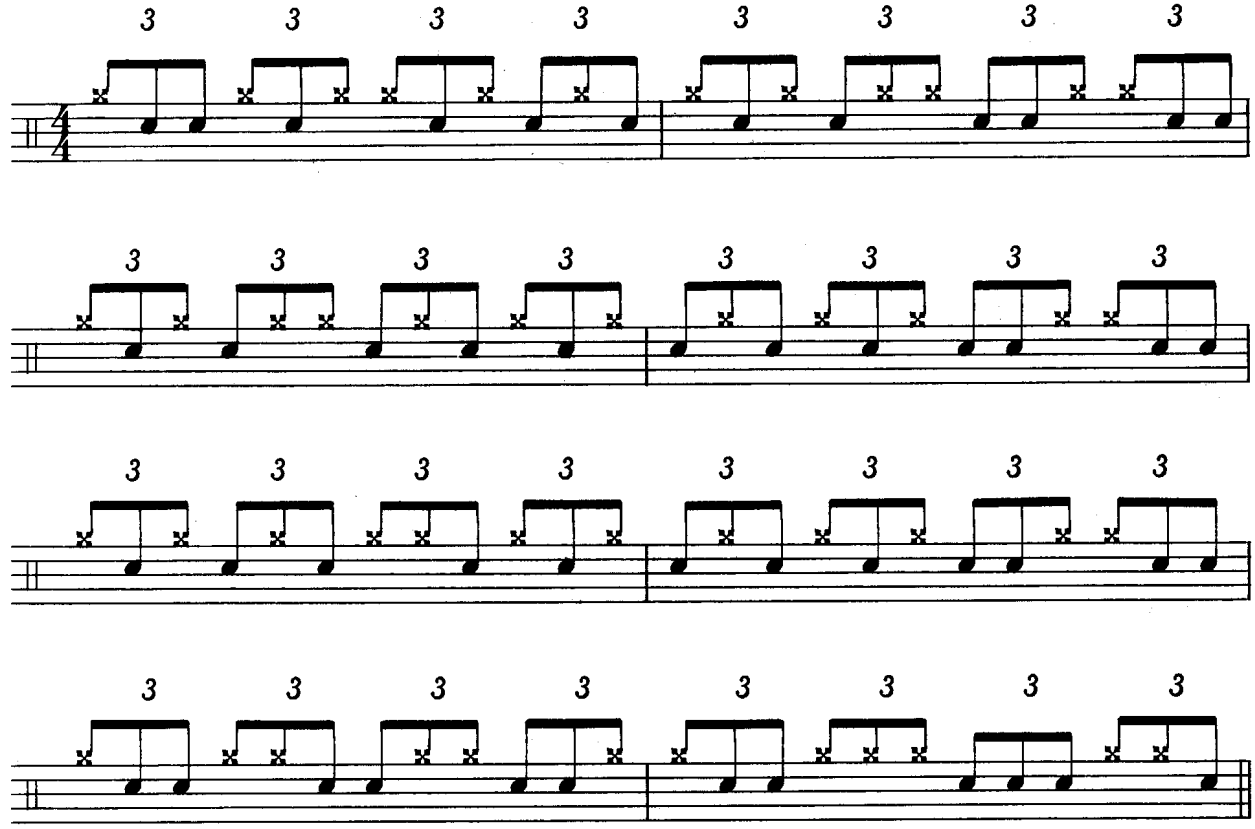




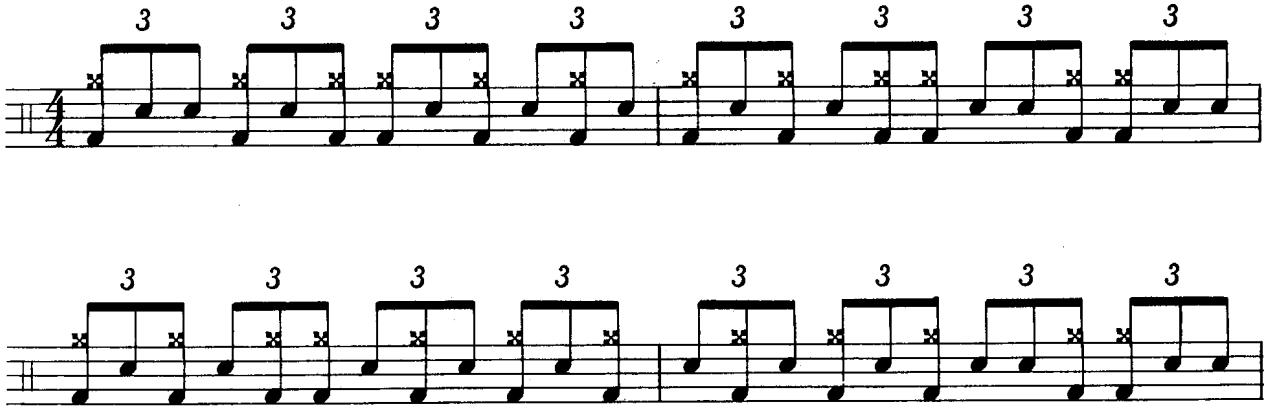


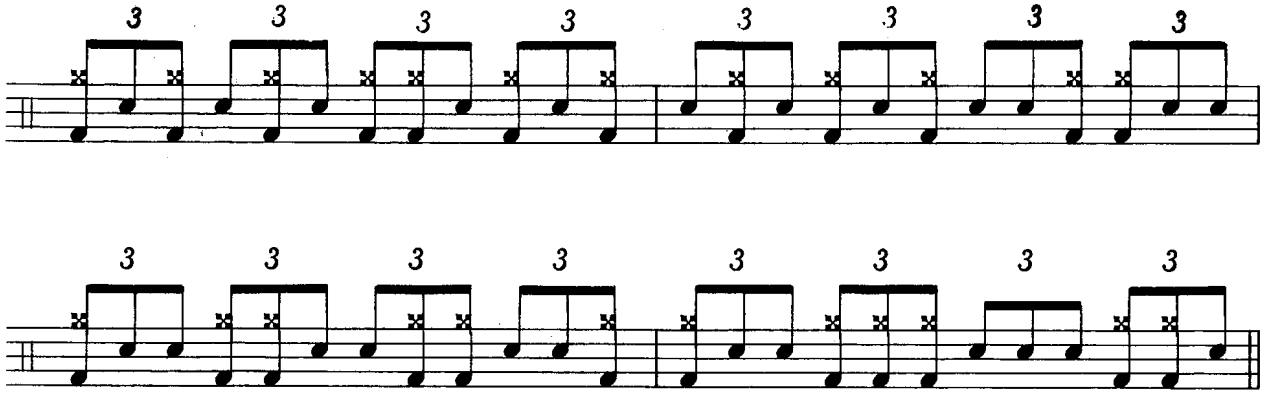


Next, transfer the right hand to the ride cymbal.

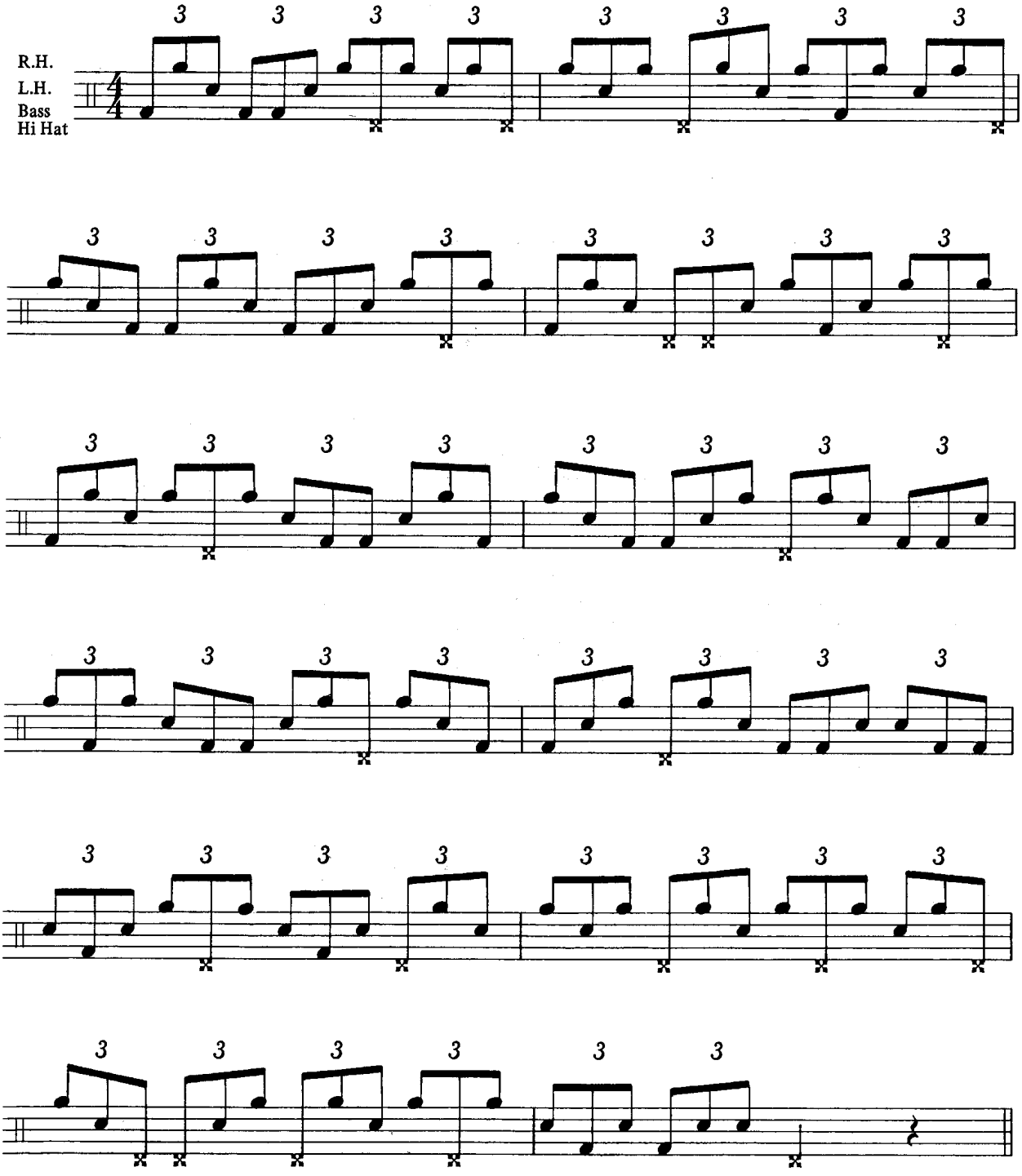


Add the bass drum in unison with the ride cymbal.

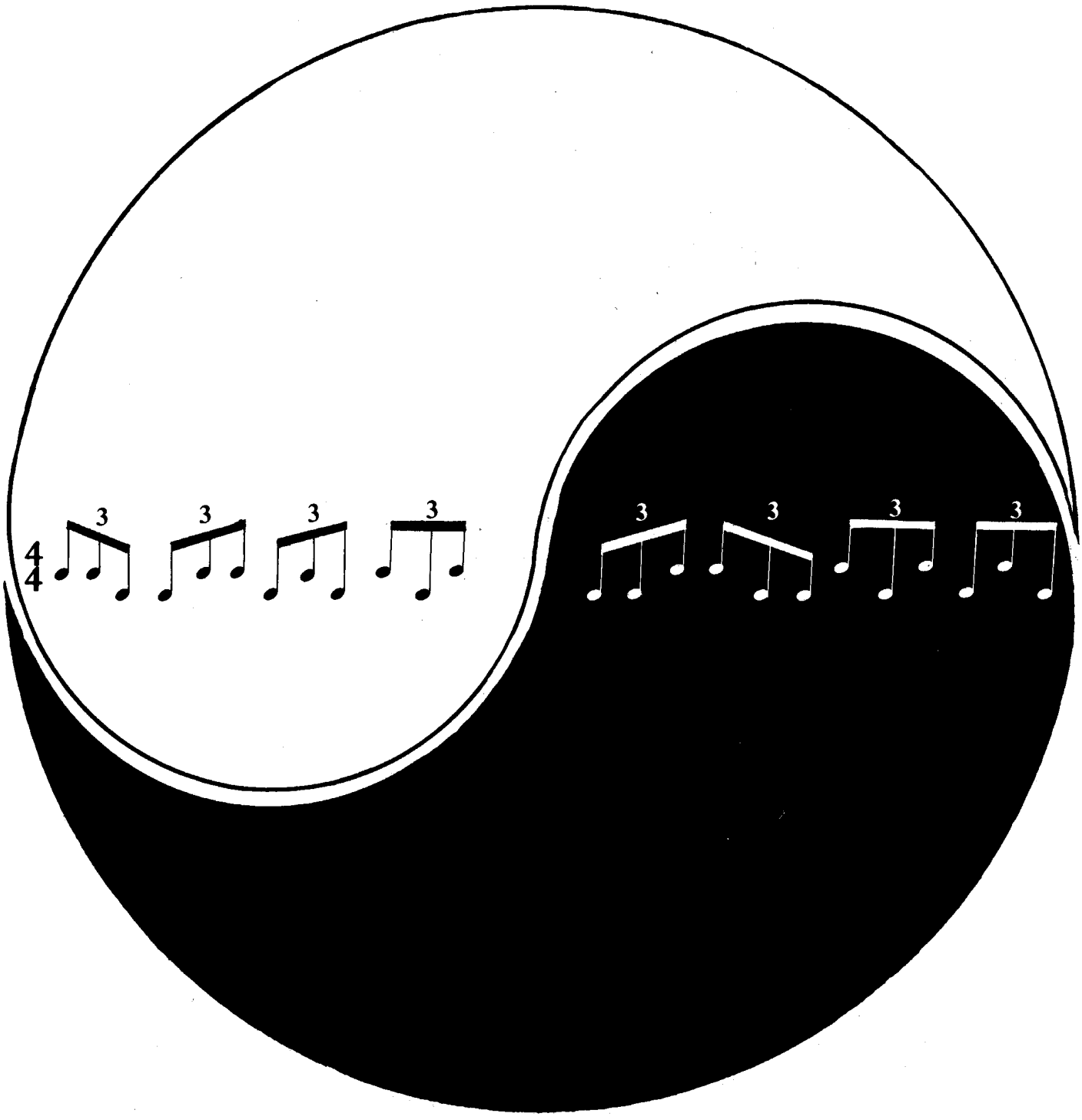




Finally, divide the flow among the different parts of the drumset. (Step C)



yin/yang triplets



The concept of Yin/Yang is based on the idea of two opposites joined together to form a perfect whole — day and night, man and woman, and so on. I came across this triplet exercise one day and, to me, it expresses that concept. First, the second bar is the mirror image of the first bar. Second, it shows the two ways triplets can be used: either in their obvious form, or "disguised" in groups of twos.

There are a variety of ways to use this exercise: The top part could be played with either hand (or both hands together) on any drum (or drums); the bottom part could be played on bass drum, hi-hat, or both. The more you play this exercise, and the more ways you find to use it, the more you'll see what a perfect archetype exercise this is.

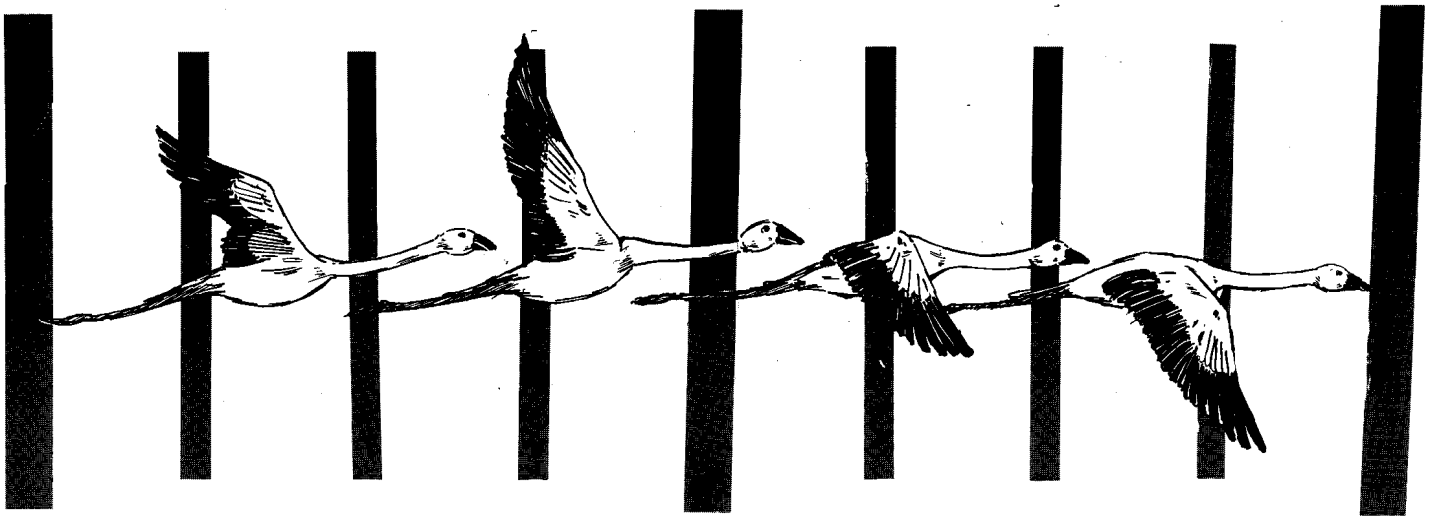
"organic" drumming

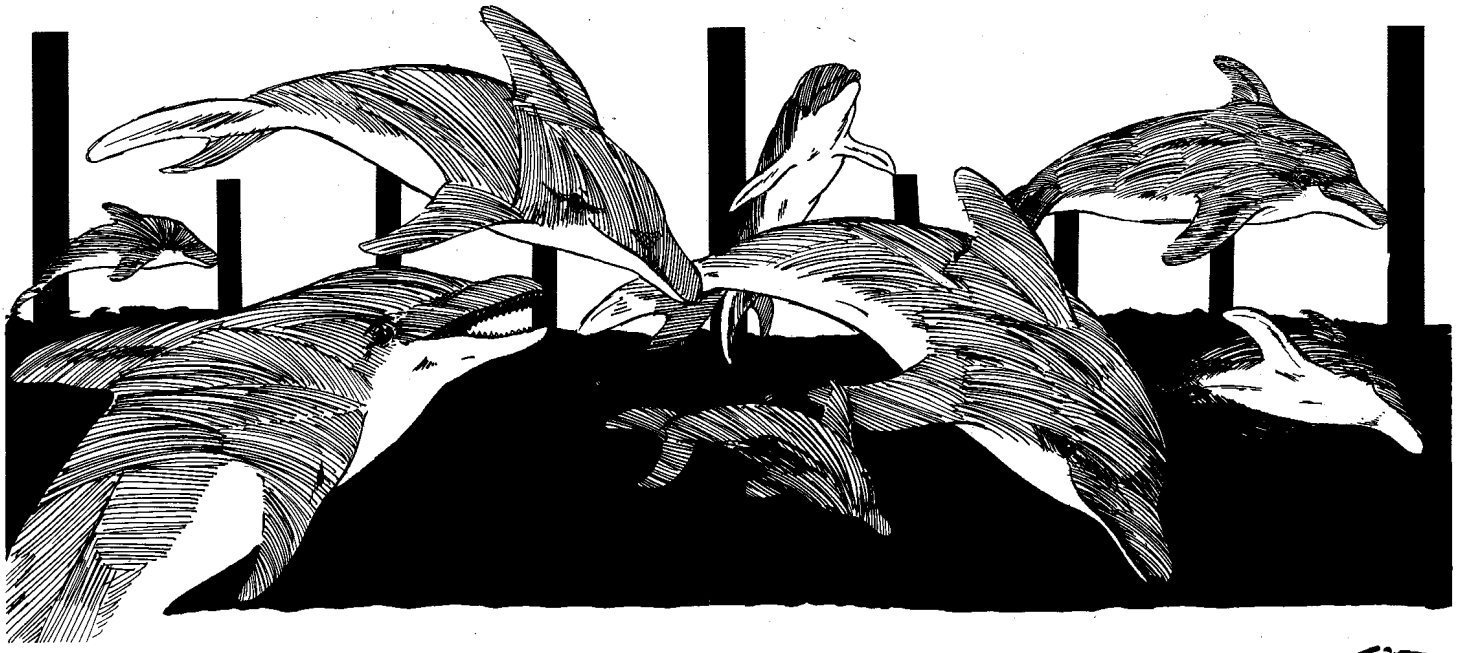
I sometimes use a style that I call "organic" drumming. By this I mean playing rhythms which cannot be broken down into quarter notes, 8th notes, triplets and so on. Two drummers who I consider masters of this style are Elvin Jones and Jack DeJohnette. Often the things they play seem to be random and free form, and yet, they always swing. Many people aspire to play like these two masters. The question is, how can you play organic-type drums without losing the groove or losing your function as timekeeper?

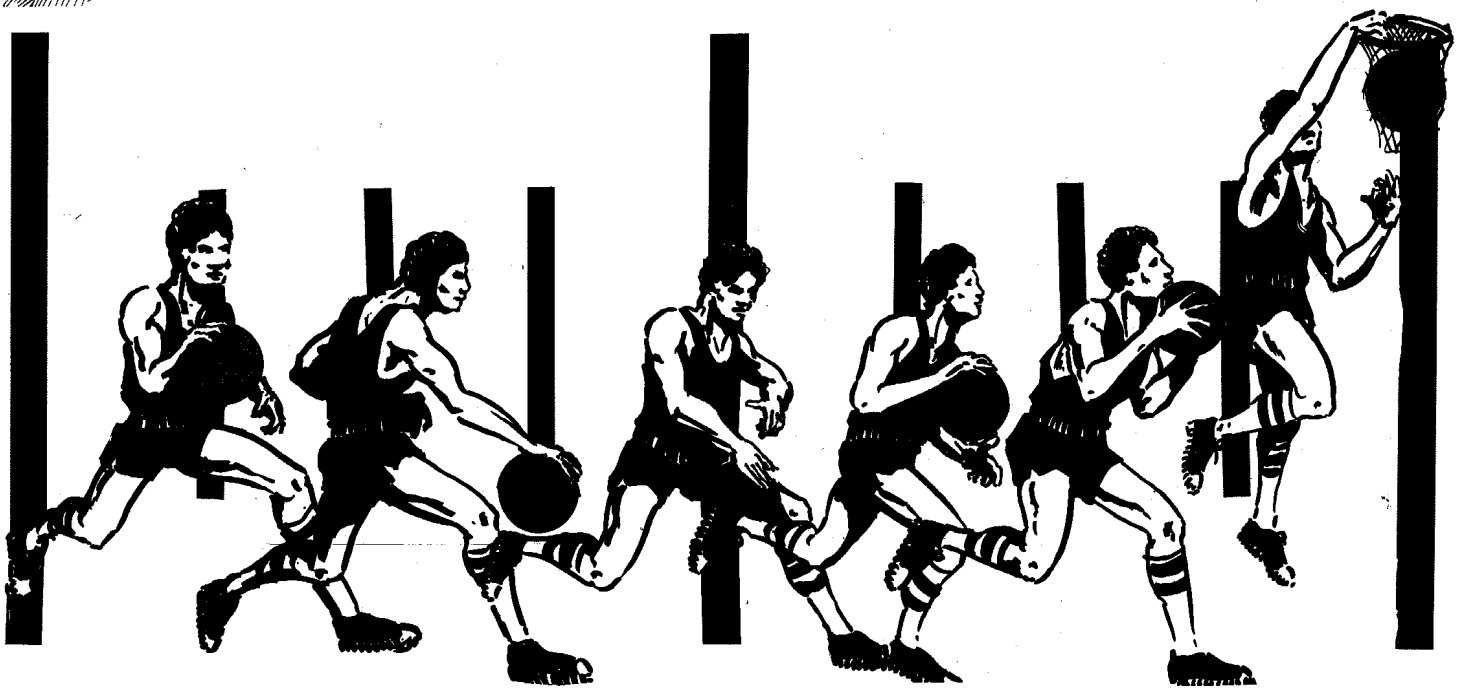
The answer lies in the mastery of internal hearing — learning to hold a very simple framework in your mind and concentrate on that while your body and your hands are moving organically. Perhaps your movements will not even be influenced by the framework, but will be influenced more by an organic motion of nature. Basically, music is movement. Every piece of music moves from point A to point B, whether it is a totally spontaneous improvisation or a completely written classical piece. You don't have to move from point A to point B in measured steps, such as quarter notes, 8th notes, etc. However, you can hold these measured steps in your mind and use them as a framework, while your playing is organic, like real life.

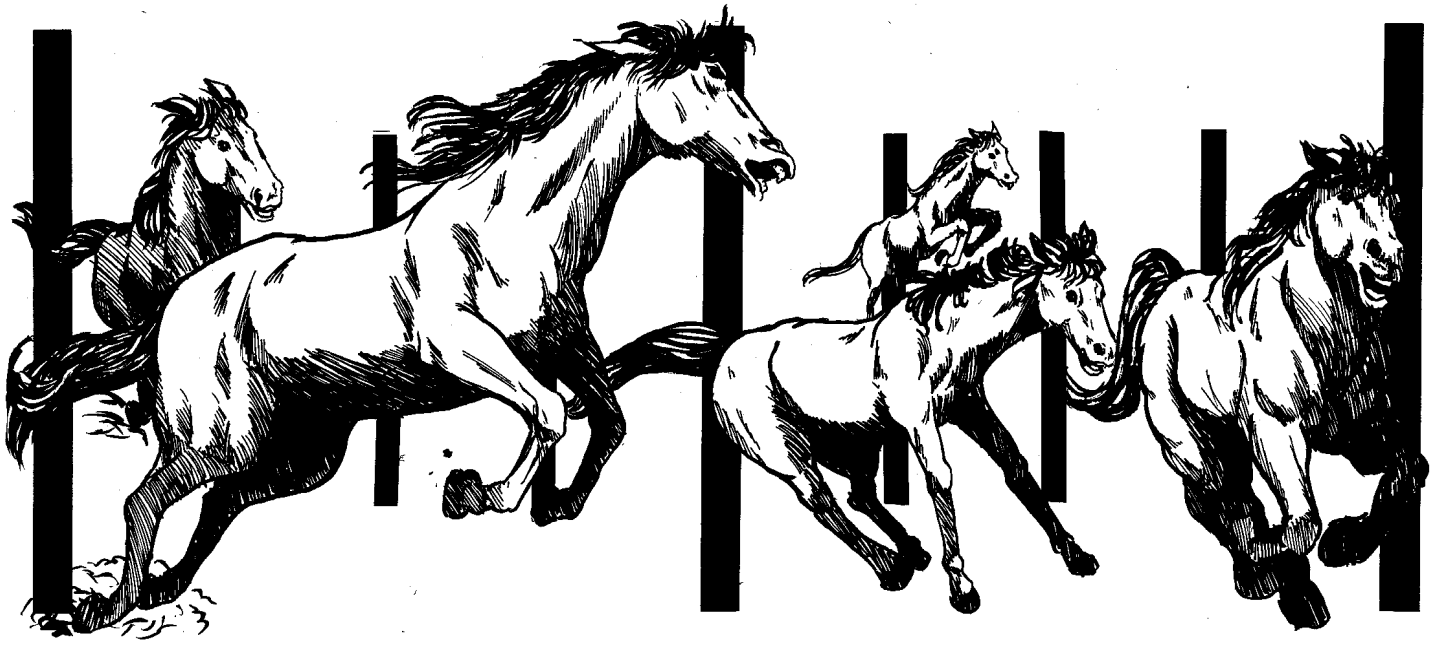
Very little in real life is metronomically even. A tree has an organic shape, and I can play that shape on the drums. I can play like a bear moving, like a bird flying, or like children rolling in the grass. The trick is to incorporate these graceful motions of life into given forms. When I play organically, I hold the given form in my mind so strongly that nothing I play, no matter how organic, can pull me off that form. I could play like the ocean on "Stella By Starlight"; I might be an avalanche on "All The Things You Are"; I could soar like an eagle on "Blue Bossa." I am still able to hear internally the form of the tune so strongly that, even when I'm playing something of a different dimension than the music, I can still keep my place in the form and fulfill my function as a drummer. This enables me to go back to a very simple 8/8 framework at any time.

I must caution that I don't recommend this type of playing for everyone. In fact, I recommend that a drummer first learn to be as creative as possible within the 8/8 framework. See how interesting you can be within a large, open, simple framework, trying to keep the 8th note as the fastest thing you play. The better you master the 8/8 frame, the freer you will eventually be to play organically.









movement and dancing

An important concept of my philosophy is that the stroke is the most important aspect of playing the drums. It's the one way in which you get to express your own personality. My belief is that, in terms of content, there really isn't much new to be played. When you think of the history of drumming, almost everything has been covered. There are certain rhythms that keep cropping up again and again because they feel good. So what really makes a rhythm come off and the listener respond? It's the *way* the rhythm is played. This is one reason why, as I said in the chapter on attitude, it's good to have a predetermined idea about what you're going to play. That way, you can concentrate your mental energy on *how* you're playing, rather than using that energy to think about *what* you're going to play. It's also a good reason for keeping the basic idea simple. In terms of ideas, you may think that one idea is "hipper" or more interesting than another, but the corniest idea can sound better than the hippest idea, depending on how it's played.

With this in mind, it's important for drummers to think about how they're making their strokes — how their bodies move. Playing the drums is a physical dance. If you watch great drummers such as Elvin Jones, Jack DeJohnette, Roy Haynes, Tony Williams, Art Blakey, Ed Blackwell, Billy Higgins, Sly Dunbar, Bernard Purdie, etc., their motion in the air is an incredibly beautiful, fluid, dancing movement. I have also observed and been greatly influenced by the beautiful motions of such great hand drummers as Don Alias, Patato Valdez, Mongo Santamaria, Olatunji, etc. I do not believe in the concept of "wasted motion." I think all motion is an integral part of the sound. The type of motion you make determines the sound you get. If you make a big, round, graceful motion, you get a big, round, graceful sound; if you make a short, tight, nervous motion, you get a short, tight, nervous sound. You have to define your aesthetic. What are you looking for in a motion? What are you looking for in a sound?

In my own mind, when I think of a stroke, I think of words like "circular," "round," "flowing," "sensual," "strong," "powerful," "subtle," and "gentle." Of course, these are just words, and words only go so far in describing qualities or emotions. But it's good to use words, because they help you get a picture in your mind of what you're going for. I feel that a "round" motion will never produce a harsh sound, because with drums, sound and motion are one and the same. With many instruments, the sound is more of a mental thing; if you can think a graceful sound, you can probably play it. But with drums, it's not enough to think it. You have to be able to move your body gracefully. Drummers have to look within themselves to discover what kinds of attitudes they're looking for in their stroke.

There's an aspect of drumming that has to do with confidence. In a sense, the drummer is the leader of the band because the rest of the band is playing off of the drummer's groove. So if you're not moving in a confident manner, that will come out in the music. It's necessary to be unafraid of your body, as well as to develop the power and love of your body and your motion. In order to do that, you have to become, in essence, a dancer. You have to be able to dance and feel good about the way you move, because until you do, you'll never be a great drummer. It really behooves all drummers to dance all the time. Put on your favorite groovable music, whatever it happens to be, and spend some time dancing. If you can dance with your whole body, it's really quite easy to dance on the drums.

There are many drummers who play correctly and who are good drummers. There's really nothing wrong with what they play, but they're not exciting. They're not *great* drummers. They're not dynamic drummers who will lift a whole room of people with the strength of the music. In order to do this, the music has to be more than correct. It has to dance; it has to breathe; it has to live. The content could be almost anything, but if it moves in a smooth, swinging, sensual way, anything that you play is going to sound good.

singing

The connection between rhythm and the human voice is based on tradition. The art of "speaking" a rhythm goes back to ancient times. In India, tabla players learn to vocalize the sounds they play. They will often sing a phrase and then play that same phrase back. In African music, the talking drum is often the lead instrument. In Latin music, timbale playing is based on call and response.

I have come to realize that people who cannot sing a rhythm are usually not able to play rhythm well. I've seen situations where a student seemed to understand a concept that I explained, but was then unable to play it well. I have then asked the student to sing the idea, and the ones who have trouble singing it are the ones who have trouble playing it. For example, I had a student who was having trouble landing on the & of 4, so I had him sing the basic 8th-note flow. The 8th notes he sang were so uneven that it became obvious to me why he was having trouble landing on one of them.

In order to groove, you have to be able to hear the groove in your mind. In order to know where the groove is, vocalize it — sing it out loud. Almost all of the concepts in this book are singable. I believe that you should be able to sing everything you play on the drums. The more melodic you can make your singing, the better. In the African tradition, the melody tells the drummer which drum to play. When the melody goes from low to high, it switches from large drum to small drum. Many drummers tend to be more concerned with rhythm than with pitch and tone, but you should be aware of all these elements. Drums do have pitch, and by being aware of that, you can make your drumming more melodic.

I believe that by becoming a better singer you will become a better drummer. You don't have to become the next Frank Sinatra or Sarah Vaughan, but you should be able to sing a rhythm so that it grooves in a way that's both even and relaxed. If there are things about your drumming that are not working out right, go to the source. The way you sing something is the way you hear it in your mind. If what you are singing is not musical or is not grooving, then your drumming will not be musical and will not groove, no matter how much time you spend practicing the drums.

One of the beautiful things about this concept is that you can practice it at any time, in any place. Singing a rhythm out loud is preferred, but if that's not possible, you can sing or hum a rhythm to yourself. I like to sing a rhythm to myself throughout a certain period of the day. Different rhythms come to me at different times of the day. I hear the natural, organic, chaotic sounds of life going on around me against the framework of whatever groove I'm internalizing and humming to myself. I call this "Living In Rhythm."

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