

JAZZ DRUMS

Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz

Online Jazz Handbook

**WELCOME TO THE DRUMS CHAPTER OF THE
THELONIOUS MONK INSTITUTE OF JAZZ'S
ONLINE JAZZ HANDBOOK!**

When learning jazz, there is no substitute for listening to the classic recordings and understanding the lineage. Please refer often to the albums listed at the end of this chapter for great examples of the material listed below.

Don't forget to practice with a metronome: This is important for drummers at all levels when learning new styles and ideas!

Introduction:

The drums can be heard in almost every style of music, and just like every instrument, the style helps dictate the specific roll of the instrument.

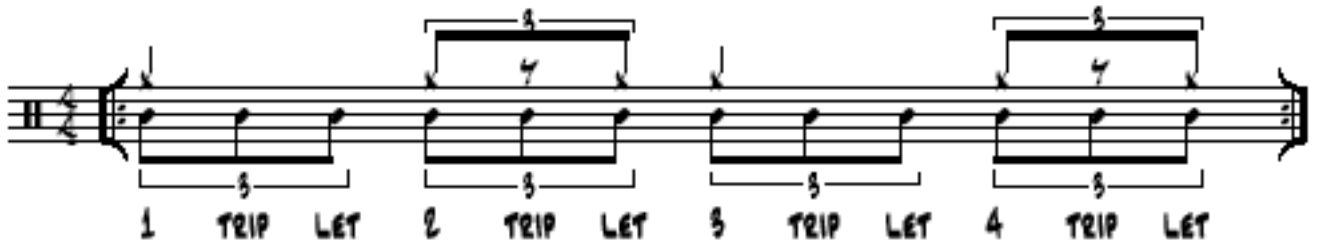
For example, in traditional Afro-Cuban ensembles, the many drummers and percussionists create the main body of music that the bass, guitar, vocals, and other instruments float above. On the opposite side of that, you might hear an orchestra in which the only job of the percussionists is to create interesting sounds and colors on top of a the string section.

In jazz, the drummer plays both a crucial part in creating a strong foundation, and helping add color and shape to the music.

The first step is creating that strong foundation with the ride cymbal!

Getting Started with the Ride Cymbal:

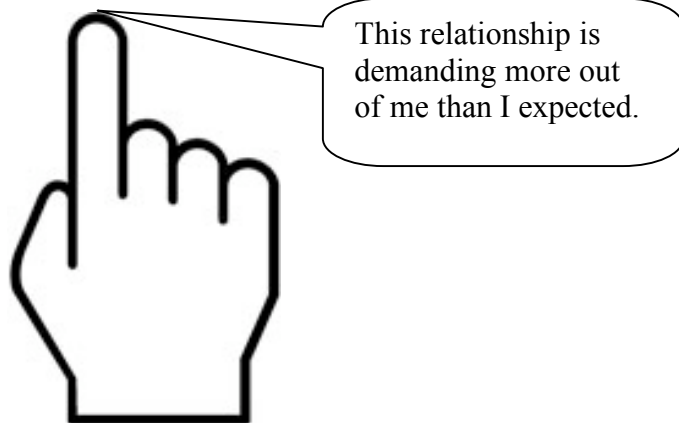
Since the 1930's and the beginning of the be-bop era, the main focal point on a jazz drum kit has been the **ride cymbal**. The phrasing of the ride cymbal is based around the quarter note, however instead of thinking in eighth notes (like most rock music on the radio today), we want to think in eighth note triplets. This first exercise is going to help you understand this triplet phrasing.



Play the top line on the ride cymbal and count the bottom line out loud. It's important to remember that as we count "1-trip-let, 2-trip-let, 3-trip-let, 4-trip-let," we do so very evenly (equal spacing between each syllable) and that the ride cymbal hits exactly with our counting. This triplet subdivision is the main rhythmic background for jazz, and what is referred to as swing rhythms.

This is something that requires a bit of practicing on your own in order to build stamina and strength.

As you increase tempos on songs, you will be asking more and more out of your right hand! Make sure to stay relaxed at all times.



Adding the Hi-Hat, Bass Drum, and Cross Stick:

The first addition to the ride cymbal is the **hi-hat** on beats 2 and 4. We add the hi-hat in order to reinforce the groove of the ride cymbal. The hi-hat should be played in perfect unison with the Ride cymbal, but is always secondary to it. Make sure the sound of the hi-hat is crisp and strong. A weak or mushy sounding hi-hat will only take away from the ride cymbal groove.

The third part of the equation is the **bass drum**, which you will play on all four beats (usually known as 'feathering' the bass drum). The bass drum is there to help ground the music and to quietly support the 'walking' bass line, but be careful not let the volume get too loud or in the way of the bass player! As the saying goes, "**the bass drum should be felt, not heard!**"

The last thing we can add to this is a **cross-stick** on the snare drum on beat four to help enhance the groove.



The above example is the product of all the parts we have talked about. As you practice this and any additional parts make sure to continue counting the triplets out loud until you are sure of the phrasing.

Make sure that any parts of the instrument that play together, play *exactly* together.

Comping:

When musicians talk about 'comping,' they are referring to a type of accompaniment that rhythm section players engage in to provide support and ideas for a soloist.

Comping has a few functions:

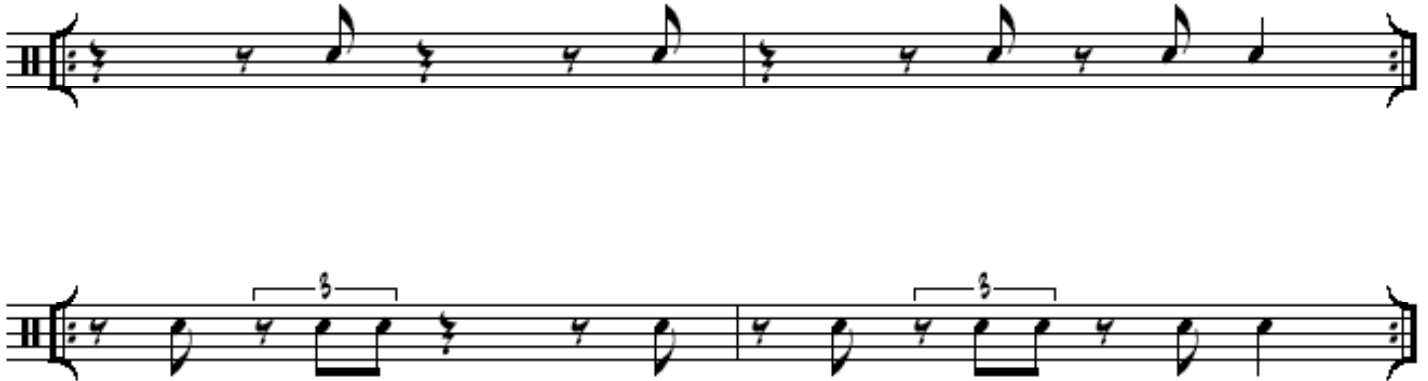
- 1) to enhance the groove and feel
- 2) to add variety to the time flow
- 3) to respond to the song or soloist
- 4) to stimulate the soloist.

It's very important to note that comping is NOT for displaying technique, disrupting the time flow, over-shadowing the soloist, or just because you are plain bored. If you're bored, you're not paying attention to all that's going on around you!

Below are a few basic comping patterns. Just as before, when practicing each of these, make sure that each drum part lines up exactly with the others and that the eighth notes are swung (singing the triplets is always a great place to start!).



The patterns above are beginning blocks that may be broken up and mixed together to create any number of patterns or variations. For Example:



- 1) Always keep the ride cymbal pattern happening exactly with the hi-hat and bass if used.
- 2) Make the snare drum phrasing with your left hand match the ride cymbal phrasing!
- 3) Use these comping ideas sparsely! You're there to support the soloist, not to show what you can do on the drums.
- 4) Just like in other sections of this handbook, you'll see that jazz is a conversation. These comping ideas are just part of the vocabulary to help have deeper conversations!

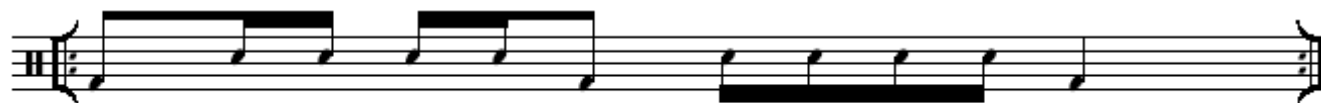
Soloing:

The drummer's main job in the rhythm section and jazz group is generally supportive, but you will also be given opportunities to solo! There are many different lengths in which you may be asked to solo. Sometimes you will be given a set of bars as a transition from one part of a tune to the next. Other times you'll trade sections of a performance (often 4 or 8 bar phrases) with other members of the ensemble, or play entire choruses. Either way, you must make sure that you play in a musical style that fits the song, musicians around you, and swings!

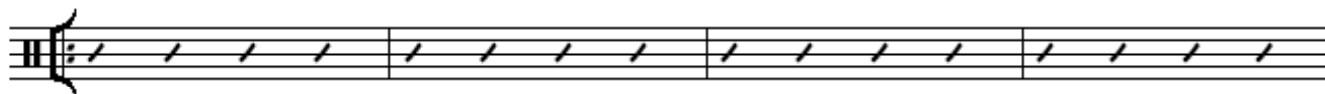
There are many ideas to use in creating a good solo including call and response, and theme and variation. No matter how you approach it, the solo should always feel good and help tell a story! To help develop these ideas, make sure that you memorize the melody and form of the song; again, the solo should always fit and serve the song!

Below are some one-bar ideas that you can practice to start creating a soloing vocabulary.





Practice each of these examples slowly and add the bass drum (feathering) and hi-hat, making sure the swinging feel stays comfortable. These ideas are great building blocks for creating call and response and variation, but first you must be comfortable repeating these ideas. Practice 'trading fours' with yourself (play four bars of time followed by a one-bar idea repeated 4 times) using each of the examples above.



The next idea is creating variation. The below examples are exact rhythmic replicas of examples 9 and 10. However, some of the notes in each have been moved to different drums in order to create variation. Practice each one-bar idea with their respective kit placements, and once you are comfortable practice the entire 4 bar phrase.





Now remember that each of these ideas are meant to be used to get you started and open up your mind to the possibilities, while reminding you that you have a responsibility to the music and your band mates to play musically and within the context of the group/situation. Listen to the recommended listening at the end of this text to find more ideas, and hear some of the greatest jazz drummers of all time in action using many of these very ideas!

Brushes:

The Brushes are a beautiful way to play time behind soloists, and your approach to playing the song and supporting the soloist shouldn't change. However, to create a great sound on the instrument requires a different technique: long sweeping motions where parts of the brush never leave the drumhead.

The most important and versatile pattern for brushes is as follows: The right hand plays the ride cymbal pattern while the left hand circles clockwise in half-notes. The hands cross on beats 2 and 4. Be careful not to push the left hand brush into the head; strive for a smooth, consistent sound where no change of directions can be heard, and remember to keep your left hand circling in time!



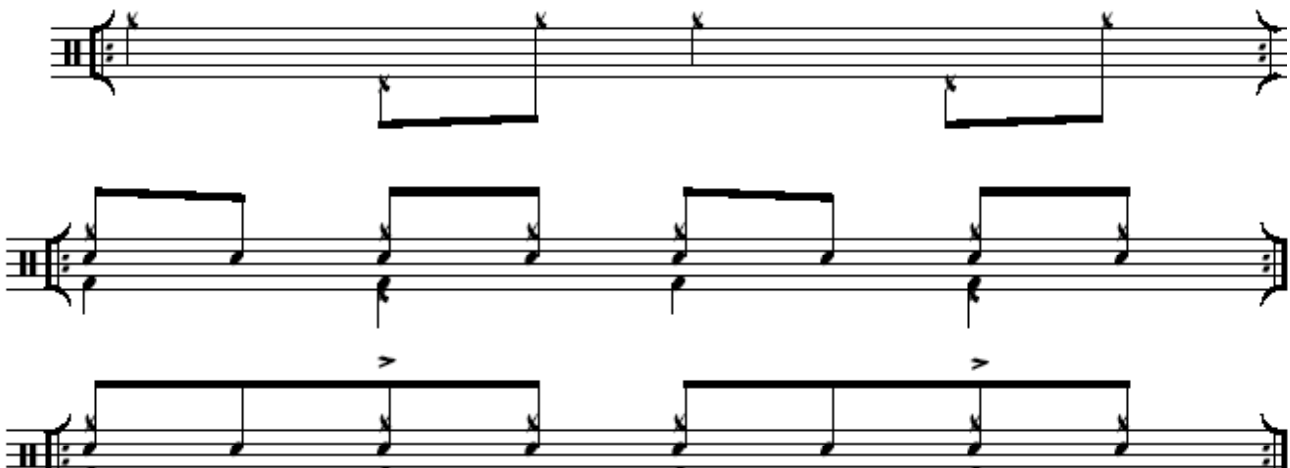
The brushes are an important part of jazz drumming. Work with a private teacher to learn the intricacies of this often overlooked style of playing.

Other Grooves:

Let's now look at some other grooves that you will need to function in a jazz group.

Shuffle:

This is an important part of the tradition, and can really feel great once you get in the consistent groove of it! This groove is created by playing the snare drum on each eighth note, just like one of the first comping examples. This first example is with the snare drum notes all staying at one low volume, but the second example brings out the accents on beats 2 and 4 with the snare drum. Make sure to keep the other snare drum notes quiet even though 2 and 4 pop out!



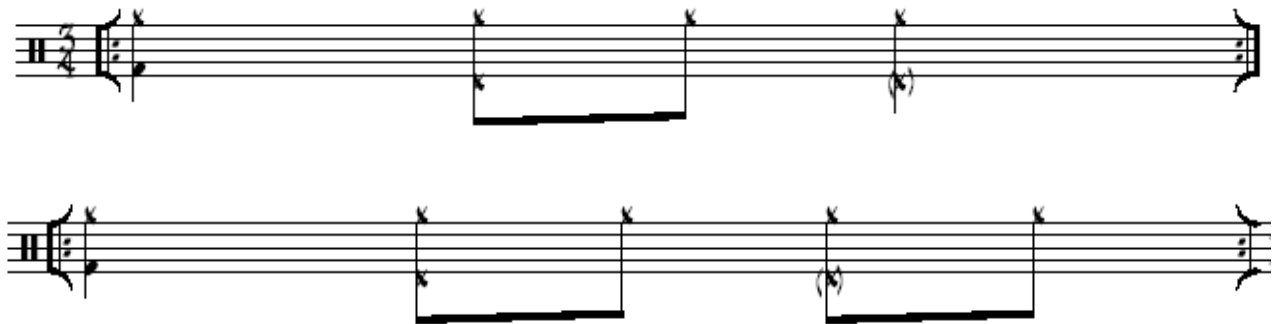
Playing in '2':

The important group member to pay attention to when playing in '2' is the bass player. Usually when walking a bass line the bass player plays a note on every quarter note. However, when playing in '2', he will only be playing half notes on beats 1 and 3. This means that as a drummer you will be playing less, creating a more open space for the soloist to play without changing the tempo or swinging feel.

As a drummer the two most common ways to do this are to play the usual ride pattern without playing 2 and 4 (but the hi-hat continues), or to move the ride cymbal pattern over to the hi-hat with your right hand without playing the hi-hat with your foot.

3/4 Waltz Time:

The ride cymbal and hi-hat patterns will change in this format since we have one less beat per measure, but the feel doesn't change. There are two different patterns to try on the ride and two different hi-hat patterns. Try each of these with different comping patterns, and try them with and without the bass drum.



This is another style of music where the bass player will help dictate the style in which you play. The drums won't change to drastically, but take notice of what the bass player is playing and how you can help create a time flow.

- 1) "In 1" – the bass player plays a dotted half-note on beat one and lets it sustain the entire measure.
- 2) "In 3" – the bass player walks through each of the three quarter notes per measure.
- 3) "Broken Feel" – The bass player plays ideas based around dotted quarter notes.

These are Brazilian styles of music that have a swinging feel of their own, but for the most part are felt in 16th notes or straight 8th notes (not swung). They have similar patterns on the ride cymbal and hi-hat between each, but slightly different cross-stick patterns. The other big difference is the fact that a Samba can be considerably faster in overall tempo and thought of 'in 2'!

The first system of the musical score for 'The Rose Tree' is written on a single staff. It begins with a treble clef, a key signature of one sharp (F#), and a common time signature (C). The melody consists of a series of eighth and sixteenth notes, with some notes beamed together. The lyrics 'The Rose Tree' are written below the staff, aligned with the notes. The system ends with a double bar line.

This is another swinging kind of feel, but it lays the triplet feel out much more clearly than the jazz ride cymbal pattern. A 12/8 feel is often written in 4/4 with triplets. The ride cymbal pattern is important to keep intact at all times, don't let it change back to the jazz ride pattern! Make sure and work your way comfortably through the first example before moving on to the more complicated second pattern. Try both patterns below on their own, and similar to practicing the shuffle, get into a consistent groove with each of these.

Rock Feels:

This is a feel that has grown considerably in the last 35 years through the advent of fusion music. Rock music is characterized by a heavier ‘feel’ from the drums that include the bass drum and snare drum playing very consistent, trance-like beats. Notice that your ride cymbal is no longer the most important part of the beat in this style, as it is often replaced by your right hand playing on the hi-hat instead. Below is the most basic, but probably the most used beat in all rock music.



Listening:

Milestones – Miles Davis Group w/ Philly Jo Jones on drums

Kind of Blue – Miles Davis Group w/ Jimmy Cobb on drums

Live at Basin Street – Clifford Brown and Max Roach w/ Max Roach on drums

Moanin' – Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers w/ Art Blakey on drums

We Three – Roy Haynes Trio w/ Roy Haynes on drums

Art Pepper + Eleven – Art Pepper w/ Mel Lewis on drums

Walkin' – Miles Davis w/ Kenny Clarke on drums

Workbooks:

The Art of Bop Drumming by John Riley

-This book is a more in depth study of all of the ideas and examples above plus many more.

Stick Control by George Lawrence Stone

-A classic snare drum book that focuses on making your hands work together. This is indispensable for mastering the drums.