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# Canon for the Drumset

BY MICHAEL PETIFORD

**A** *canon* is a type of musical composition derived from *canonic imitation*, a form of musical repetition in which a leading voice plays a melodic subject accompanied by one or more additional voices that follow, imitating the subject a number of different ways. Except in certain circumstances, the following voices always enter later than the leading voice and are always either an exact imitation or a variation of the subject.

The simplest form of canon is the *round*, in which the imitation is exact—no changes in pitch or rhythm—and the melody is repetitious. Children’s songs such as “Row Row Row Your Boat” and “Three Blind Mice” are commonly sung as rounds. In a round, a singer begins a simple repetitive melody. After a few beats or measures, a second singer begins singing the exact

same melody. The two sing simultaneously, the only difference being that the second voice is delayed. This continues until all voices have entered and are singing the same thing at the same time, each with a different starting point. (See “Playing a Round on Drumset,” *PN* August 2002.)

The more complex forms of canon apply variations to the following voice(s) and the leading voice generally develops without falling into cyclical repetition. Four basic variations commonly applied to the melodic material of a canon are *inversion*, *augmentation*, *diminution*, and *retrograde*. These variations can be applied singly or in any combination and are by no means the only possibilities available. Look at this four-measure phrase and note the relationship between it and the following variations.



*Inversion:* The melody is turned upside down. Thus an ascending phrase becomes a descending phrase, and vice versa. Low notes and high notes swap places.



*Augmentation:* The note values in the following voice are increased uniformly, extending the overall length of the melody. For instance, doubling the value of each note makes the phrase twice as long.



*Diminution:* Like augmentation, diminution effects the overall length of the melody. In this case the overall note values are decreased by a given increment. By subtracting one-half value from each note, for instance, the four-measure phrase is compressed into two measures. (Canons in augmentation and diminution are cases in which it is acceptable—but not a requirement—for the following voice to begin on the same beat as the leading voice.)

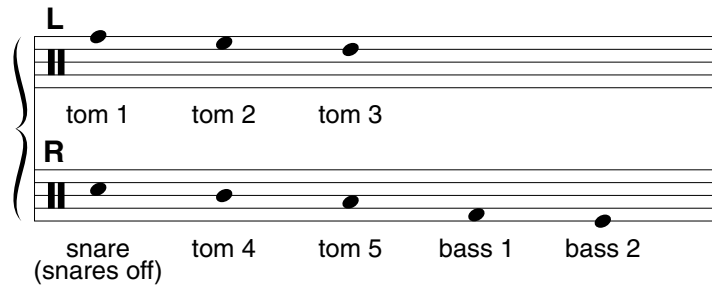


*Retrograde:* Backwards or reverse. In this instance, the melodic subject is literally flipped around and played backwards. In a retrograde canon the leading voice and the following voice begin on the same beat; however, the following voice consists entirely of the leading voice in reverse. A composer may reverse the actual rhythmic structure of the melody or simply reverse the order of pitches. It is common practice to play a canon of this sort once from left to right, and to then repeat it playing from right to left, allowing each voice to act as both leader and follower. Canons in retrograde are often called *crab canons* because the side to side movement is reminiscent of the way a crab walks.



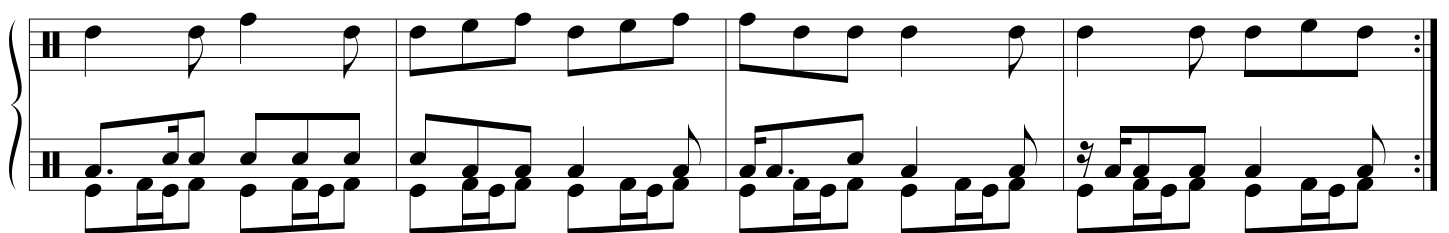
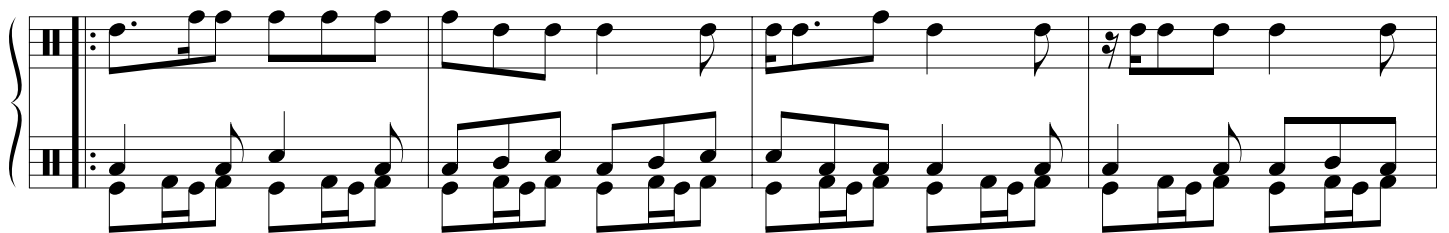
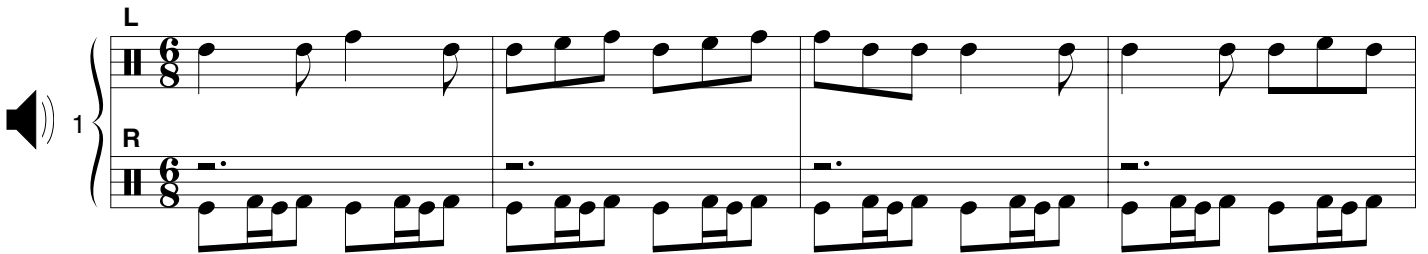
It is important to point out that I am addressing melodic concepts not normally applied to the drumset. Specifically, canons are *polyphonic* compositions. In other words, they are compositions comprising multiple melodic lines executed simultaneously. A drum is not considered a melodic instrument because it produces a single pitch, and in order to compose melody multiple pitches are required. A *drumset*, however, consists of multiple drums and can therefore be thought of as a melodic instrument.

In the following examples, two staves are used. The upper staff is labeled L for left hand and the bottom staff is labeled R for right hand. Bass drums are noted on the bottom of the lower staff, with the stems down so that they can be seen as a separate voice. The following key illustrates the left/right division of the drumset as well as the configuration of the staves.



The following canonic etudes are each based on the same melodic subject and incorporate the variation techniques. I want to accentuate the sensation of layering, or stratification characteristic of polyphonic compositions, so I have written each canon over a double bass ostinato accompaniment.

**ROUND**



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All PAS members are eligible for nomination. Self nominations are acceptable. Nominations must be made in writing and should include nominee's name, address, telephone number, fax number (if available) and email address (if available).

Send letters of nomination to PAS,  
Board of Directors Nominations  
701 NW Ferris Avenue, Lawton, OK 73507-5442  
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Nominations are now being accepted for 2003 inductees into the Percussive Arts Society Hall of Fame. This award is presented at the annual PASIC, this year to be held in Louisville, Kentucky, November 19-22.

Please send all letters of nomination to PAS,  
701 NW Ferris Avenue  
Lawton, OK 73507-5442  
E-mail: [percarts@pas.org](mailto:percarts@pas.org)

Deadline for nominations is February 3, 2003.

### CANON IN INVERSION

Musical notation for Canon in Inversion, first system. It features a left hand (L) and right hand (R) part in 6/8 time. The left hand plays a melody of eighth notes, while the right hand plays a rhythmic accompaniment of eighth notes. A speaker icon and the number 2 are on the left.

Musical notation for Canon in Inversion, second system. It continues the melody and accompaniment from the first system, ending with a double bar line.

### CANON IN AUGMENTATION (1/2)

Musical notation for Canon in Augmentation (1/2), first system. It features a left hand (L) and right hand (R) part in 6/8 time. The left hand plays a melody of eighth notes, while the right hand plays a rhythmic accompaniment of eighth notes. A speaker icon and the number 3 are on the left.

Musical notation for Canon in Augmentation (1/2), second system. It continues the melody and accompaniment from the first system, ending with a double bar line.

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**CANON IN AUGMENTATION (DOUBLED)**

Musical score for Canon in Augmentation (Doubled). The score is presented in two systems. The first system features a speaker icon on the left, a large bracket labeled '4' encompassing two staves (L and R), and a treble clef. The second system features a grand staff with two staves (L and R) and a treble clef. The music is in 6/8 time and consists of four measures. The left hand (L) plays a melody of quarter notes, while the right hand (R) plays a rhythmic accompaniment of eighth notes.

**CANON IN DIMINUTION**

Musical score for Canon in Diminution. The score is presented in two systems. The first system features a speaker icon on the left, a large bracket labeled '5' encompassing two staves (L and R), and a treble clef. The second system features a grand staff with two staves (L and R) and a treble clef. The music is in 6/8 time and consists of four measures. The left hand (L) plays a melody of quarter notes, while the right hand (R) plays a rhythmic accompaniment of eighth notes.

**CRAB CANON (RETROGRADE)**

Musical score for Crab Canon (Retrograde). The score is presented in two systems. The first system features a speaker icon on the left, a large bracket labeled '6' encompassing two staves (L and R), and a treble clef. The second system features a grand staff with two staves (L and R) and a treble clef. The music is in 6/8 time and consists of four measures. The left hand (L) plays a melody of quarter notes, while the right hand (R) plays a rhythmic accompaniment of eighth notes.

**CANON IN INVERSION AND AUGMENTATION**

The image shows a musical score for a piece titled 'Canon in Inversion and Augmentation'. It features two staves at the top, labeled 'L' (Left) and 'R' (Right), with a speaker icon to the left. The 'L' staff contains a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes. The 'R' staff contains a rhythmic accompaniment of eighth notes. Below these are two grand staff systems (treble and bass clefs) with a piano (p) dynamic marking. The music consists of rhythmic patterns and melodic fragments.

**Michael Petiford** received a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from Arizona State University, where he graduated *summa cum laude*. He is a member of the Golden Key National Honor Society and has performed in college marching band, concert band, stage band, and orchestra. He has played drumset in numerous club acts, church bands, and community theater productions. PN

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