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Expanding Coordination Exercises Around the Drumset

BY SAM RUTTENBERG

Have you ever mastered a coordination exercise on the drumset, but then messed up the coordination simply by moving one of your limbs to a different part of the kit? If the answer is yes, then it's probably the different sound that distracts you, not the coordination itself. The best way to conquer this problem is to practice the exercise a variety of ways, orchestrating it around the drumset.

In my previous PN article, "New Ways to Use Old Exercises" (August 2001), I included an exercise that involved playing eighth-note triplets between the large tom and the bass drum while the snare plays the melody (top line) from page 37 of Ted Reed's *Syncopation* book (page 38 in the newer edition).



Example 1: Musical notation for a drumset exercise in 4/4 time. The top staff shows a snare melody with eighth notes. The bottom staff shows eighth-note triplets on the large tom and bass drum. The exercise is marked with a speaker icon and the number 1.

Now try moving the large tom notes around the set. Start on the large tom, then move to the ride cymbal, then to the small tom, then back to the cymbal, and then to the large tom. Keep doing this for the entire page. Play the hi-hat on 2 and 4 or on all four beats.



Example 2: Musical notation for a drumset exercise in 4/4 time. The top staff shows a snare melody. The bottom staff shows eighth-note triplets on the large tom, ride cymbal, and small tom. The exercise is marked with a speaker icon and the number 2.

Is this something to play on a gig? Not at all. It's strictly a coordination exercise for your limbs and your ears.

Now let's expand another exercise from my previous article in which the bass drum and hi-hat pedal are playing patterns from page 5 of George Lawrence Stone's *Stick Control* in a swing style while the snare drum plays ghost notes on the second triplet and the right hand plays the standard jazz ride-cymbal pattern.



Example 3: Musical notation for a drumset exercise in 4/4 time. The top staff shows a snare melody with ghost notes on the second triplet. The bottom staff shows eighth-note triplets on the bass drum and hi-hat. The exercise is marked with a speaker icon and the number 3.

Instead of playing all the ghost notes on the snare, break them up between the snare (S) and the small tom (T). Try STST (example 4), SSTT (example 5), and STSSTSTT (example 6). If you see patterns here, you are right: STST are alternated singles; SSTT are doubles; STSSTSTT are paradiddles.



Example 4: Musical notation for a drumset exercise in 4/4 time. The top staff shows a snare melody with broken ghost notes between the snare and small tom. The bottom staff shows eighth-note triplets on the bass drum and hi-hat. The exercise is marked with a speaker icon and the number 4.



Example 5: Musical notation for a drumset exercise in 4/4 time. The top staff shows a snare melody with broken ghost notes between the snare and small tom. The bottom staff shows eighth-note triplets on the bass drum and hi-hat. The exercise is marked with a speaker icon and the number 5.

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Play the ostinato with your left hand, and then with the right hand play rhythms from the *Syncoption* book or from any snare drum reading book. You'll be playing over the barline here because there's an accent on every third eighth note. Play each hand on a different surface so that you can hear the difference between them.

7

Once you've mastered that, move the right hand to different parts of the kit.

8

Now let's take it one more step. Count the number of bars you're playing out loud. Start out by counting 1234, 1234, 1234, 1234. Then try counting 1234, 2234, 3234, 4234. This tells you what measure you're on in addition to incorporating another part of your body into the coordination: your voice.

In addition to building coordination, these exercises build confidence.

Sam Ruttenberg teaches drums and percussion at Camden County and Burlington County Colleges in New Jersey. He has a bachelor's degree from the University of Miami and a master's degree from Juilliard. He has toured and recorded with the Houston Symphony Orchestra, Houston Ballet, and Houston Pops. Ruttenberg has also performed with such artists as Lena Horne, Charo, and Steve Allen. Currently he freelances with the Settlement Music School Faculty Percussion Quartet and the Philadelphia Classical Symphony, and he is an active clinician.

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