




Sound Enhanced

Hear the music examples marked  in the Members Only section of the PAS Web site at www.pas.org

Playing a Round on Drumset

BY MICHAEL PETIFORD

For some time I have been interested in polyphonic compositions based on canonic imitation—rounds, canons, and fugues. At some point it became apparent that it ought to be possible to play such a composition on the drumset. I have always loved the challenge of independent coordination, and the idea of a drumset canon or fugue struck me as offering some interesting challenges. What follows is an introduction to the most commonly understood type of canonic polyphony: the round.

A polyphonic composition consists of multiple melodic lines played simultaneously. A round is derived from canonic imitation, a distinctive form of musical repetition characteristic of polyphonic composition. The term “canonic” comes from the Greek word for rule or law. A canon basically consists of a leading voice that plays a musical subject, accompanied by one or more additional voices that follow, imitating the subject a number of different ways. The following voices always enter later than the leading voice (except in specific circumstances) and

are an exact imitation or a variation of the subject.

A round is the simplest type of canon. Most people, even non-musicians, are familiar with the form. In a round, each voice imitates the subject with no changes in pitch or rhythm, and the melody continually repeats. 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 melody and lyrics, each with a different starting point.

While this may sound simple, especially since we tend to associate the technique with children’s music, executing this technique on the drumset is extremely difficult. Even a very simple rhythmic phrase offers an advanced level of technical difficulty.

Apply the technique to the drumset by first creating a repeating rhythm that you can play with one hand on the snare drum.



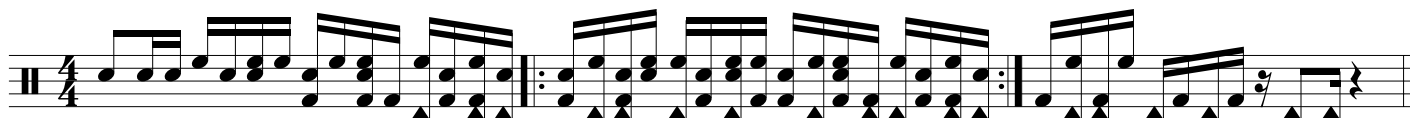
Repeat the pattern with your other hand on a tom-tom, delaying the rhythm by one or more beats.



Now play the original phrase with your right hand on snare drum, bring your left hand in on the second beat playing tom-tom, and bring your right foot in on the third beat playing bass drum.



Finally, make this an exercise in four-way coordination by adding a pedal cowbell (or second bass drum or hi-hat) with your left foot.



As you can see, the level of difficulty seems to increase almost exponentially with each additional voice. One of the advantages to an exercise of this nature is that it requires each limb to play the same thing with equal facility, while at the same time forcing each to play independently.

Up to this point we have looked at only a one-measure subject. The next logical step is a multiple-measure subject. I like to use

the rhythm of “Row Row Row Your Boat” for this exercise because it is so commonly sung as a round, and because it is easily recognizable by both its melody and rhythm. I recommend using a cowbell or jam block with a foot pedal for this exercise, as it will make the four parts more easily distinguishable.

Rhythmic examples like this are challenging and they serve to exemplify the basic concept of canonic imitation very well. The next challenging step is to incorporate the technique into some simple melodic structure, thus making it truly polyphonic. A drumset, of course, is made up of multiple drums and can, therefore, be thought of as a melodic instrument.

When I began writing polyphonic compositions for the drumset I very quickly encountered a notation problem. If I wrote two or more melodic lines on one staff using standard drumset notation, the separation of the voices was not immediately evident and the sticking was unclear. I needed a method that would clearly delineate which hand is to play what, while allowing me to see at a glance the individual parts of the composition. My solution was to employ a grand staff similar to that used for piano music.

Two staves are barred together like the treble and bass clef notation for piano. The upper staff is labeled L for left hand and the bottom staff is labeled R for right hand. Assuming a typical right-handed drum setup, with tom-toms in descending order from left to right, this generally puts the higher notes on the upper staff and the lower notes on the lower staff. If a drum on the right side of the set is to be played by the left hand it will simply be notated on the upper staff, and vice versa.

If the bass drums are being used to play an ostinato (repeating figure) or an additional melodic figure, they will be noted on the bottom of the lower staff, with the stems down so that they can be seen as a separate voice. If a bass drum is serving as an integral part of a left-hand or right-hand melodic figure, it will be noted on the corresponding staff.

This takes some getting used to; however, I have found it to be a practical solution. The following diagram will help illustrate the left/right division of the drumset as well as the configuration of the grand staff.

In the following melodic exercise I have mentally divided my drumset in half, assigning to my right hand the snare drum (snare off), low tom-tom, and floor tom. To my left hand I have assigned three higher tom-toms. The feet are on bass drums. Each hand is thus assigned high, medium, and low pitches, and there are three zones of sound: high (left hand), medium (right hand), and low (feet).

Over a double-bass ostinato, the right hand begins by playing a one-measure melodic phrase between two or three drums, followed by a simple one-measure answering phrase on the lowest drum it has been assigned. While the right hand plays the second, simpler phrase, the left hand imitates the previous melodic phrase in the higher register.

Continuing the imitation, when the left hand begins the simple answering phrase on its lowest drum, the right hand plays a different melodic phrase. The two voices overlap and interweave as they alternate the melodic material and rhythmic answer in a kind of “call and response” or musical “follow the leader.”

The image displays a musical score for a drum set, specifically for a snare drum (S) and a tom (T). The score is written in 4/4 time and is organized into seven systems of staves. The first system includes a speaker icon and a '2' indicating two measures. The notation uses various rhythmic values and rests to represent drum patterns.

System 1: The snare drum part (S) starts with a quarter rest, followed by a quarter note, a quarter note, and a quarter note. The tom part (T) plays a continuous eighth-note pattern. A speaker icon and the number '2' are positioned to the left of the first two measures.

System 2: The snare drum part continues with a quarter note, a quarter note, and a quarter note. The tom part continues with the eighth-note pattern.

System 3: The snare drum part continues with a quarter note, a quarter note, and a quarter note. The tom part continues with the eighth-note pattern.

System 4: The snare drum part continues with a quarter note, a quarter note, and a quarter note. The tom part continues with the eighth-note pattern.

System 5: The snare drum part continues with a quarter note, a quarter note, and a quarter note. The tom part continues with the eighth-note pattern.

System 6: The snare drum part continues with a quarter note, a quarter note, and a quarter note. The tom part continues with the eighth-note pattern.

System 7: The snare drum part continues with a quarter note, a quarter note, and a quarter note. The tom part continues with the eighth-note pattern.

Not Insuring Your
Instrument...

Having It Insured
With Clarion...



- EO: Same Day Coverage
- EO: Insuring Over 14,000 Musicians,
Studios, Dealers & Orchestras
- EO: Superior Coverage & Rates
With No Deductibles
- EO: Expedient Claim Settlements
- EO: Setting Industry Standards
For Service & Satisfaction
- EO: Low-Cost, All-Risk Equipment
Insurance For Recording Studios

ASSOCIATES, INC.
CLARION
MUSICAL INSTRUMENT INSURANCE

1-800-VIVALDI 1-866-2-FIDDLE
FAX: 631-423-2821 www.clarionins.com

The round is a great way to begin exploring drumset melody while developing independence. I would like to point out that the idea of rounds and canonic imitation are nothing new. In fact, one of the oldest known rounds dates from around the thirteenth century, and polyphonic composition in general is considered to have reached its zenith in the Baroque period of the seventeenth century, the so-called "golden age of polyphony."

However, the drumset is a modern instrument and its melodic potential is often overlooked. For this reason these concepts may be new to many drummers. If this is new to you, I suggest researching the work of Johann Sebastian Bach. There is no better resource for learning about and gaining an understanding of polyphonic music.

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

SoundArt Series Tambourines

THE PREMIER LINE OF ORCHESTRAL TAMBOURINES

Our full size, hand hammered jingles have the guts to cut through any ensemble. 4 types of jingles and 6 models. Check out our timbre chart at www.blackswamp.com to find the right sounds for you.

Our solid ash shell provides superior articulation and projection, all dressed up in a beautiful lacquer finish.

Hey Bev! Everyone's talking! Your tambo is so **Awesome!**



Of course, dear, it's a **Black Swamp!**

Our genuine calfskin head helps you pop out lively, articulate rhythms and sensitive flourishes.

The Mark of Excellence.
Accept no substitutes!

Grab a handful of our ergonomic handle, contoured thumb rest, and comfy thumb hole.

Black Swamp Percussion

www.blackswamp.com