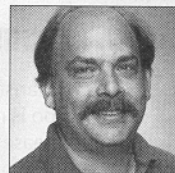


DRUM MACHINE PROGRAMMING



NORMAN WEINBERG

SWING, PART 1: THE BASIC PATTERN

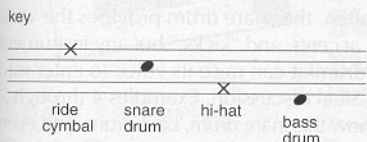
ASK A DRUMMER TO DEFINE A ROCK and roll beat in five words or less and you might hear "boom, chack, boom-boom, chack." If instead, you had asked about a swing pattern, you might hear

"spang, spang-a lang." One of the stylistic trademarks that separates swing from rock drumming is the former's emphasis on cymbals rather than drums.

Timing. The basic cymbal pattern is shown in Example 1a. Even though the ride cymbal is commonly written as straight eighth-notes (or as a dotted-eighth with a sixteenth as in Example 1b), it is most often played as though it were the first and third notes of an eighth-

note triplet (as in Example 1c). But, as the tempo decreases or increases, this ride cymbal figure

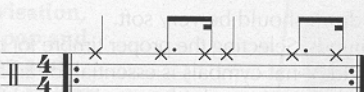
Norman Weinberg teaches percussion and electronic music at Del Mar College in Corpus Christi, Texas. His latest book, The Electronic Drummer, is distributed by Hal Leonard Publishing.



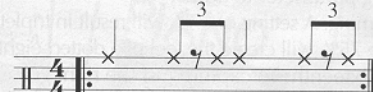
Ex. 1a. Standard notation for the basic swing ride cymbal pattern.



Ex. 1b. Alternate notation for the basic swing ride cymbal pattern.



Ex. 1c. How the basic swing cymbal pattern is usually played.



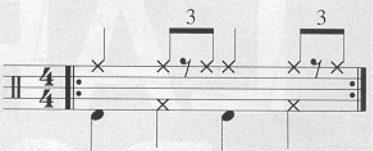
Ex. 2. Basic swing cymbal pattern as it is played at a very slow tempo.



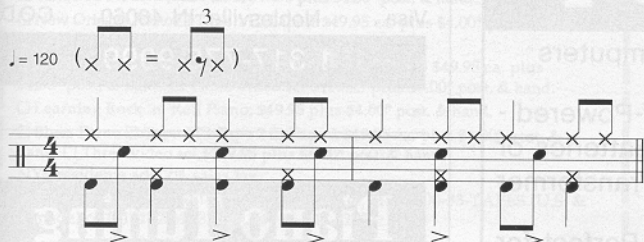
Ex. 3a. A steady pulse is provided by the bass drum and hi-hat in swing.



Ex. 3b. A simpler steady pulse for the bass drum and hi-hat in swing.



Ex. 4. Basic swing pattern, showing how the snare drum moves within the basic structure.



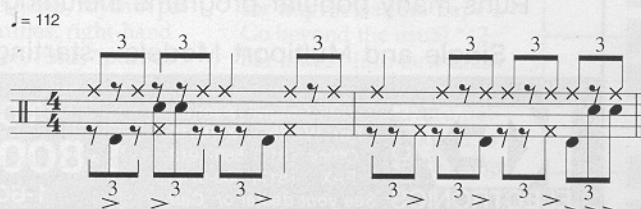
Ex. 5. Another basic swing pattern, showing different accents in the snare drum.



Ex. 6. In this swing pattern, both the snare and bass drum move in and out of the basic structure.



Ex. 7. Here not only the snare and bass drum but also the ride cymbal and hi-hat weave in and around the basic swing pattern.



DRUM MACHINE PROGRAMMING

undergoes a transformation.

If the tempo is moderately slow, drummers will often increase the space between the two notes and perform it more like a true dotted-eighth and sixteenth. If the tempo is very slow, the drummer may give the impression of a double-time feel by increasing the space between the two notes to a doubly-dotted-eighth and 32nd (see Example 2). As the tempo increases, the space between these two notes decreases. At very fast tempi (240 bpm and above), the ride's rhythm comes very close to true eighth-notes.

If you're using a drum machine or software sequencer, you may be able to enter the basic pattern as straight eighths and use the swing parameter to adjust the timing. A setting of 67% will result in triplets, while 75% will create the feel of a dotted-eighth and sixteenth. To capture just the right groove for different tempi, experiment with settings be-

tween 52% (for an up-tempo burner) and 88% (for a slow ballad). If you're sure that the groove calls for a triplet feel, you might find it easier to enter your patterns in 12/8 time or quantize to a triplet value, ignoring the sequencer's swing feature.

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WHILE THE DRUMS' PRIMARY PURPOSE IS TO PROVIDE THE TIME-KEEPING, A GOOD DRUMMER WILL IMPROVISE A DIALOG WITH OTHER INSTRUMENTS IN THE ENSEMBLE.

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bass drum should be very soft.

Sounds. Selecting the proper timbre for the ride and hi-hat cymbals is essential for an authentic effect. A good ride sound should offer

Time Keeping. The bass drum and hi-hat provide a steady pulse underneath the ride cymbal. Traditionally, these two instruments perform a very simple pattern. As shown in Example 3a, the bass drum plays on all four beats while the hi-hat plays on counts two and four. Another possibility (as in Example 3b) is to have the bass drum play only on counts one and three, alternating counts with the hi-hat.

In the basic pattern, the bass drum and hi-hat serve only to reinforce the driving motion of the music. The hi-hat should be strong, to provide the two and four. The

a clear stick "ping"—as if the stroke caught the cymbal halfway between the bell and the edge. A ride cymbal's attack should not cut off a previous note's decay, so make certain that your sound generator is set to play polynomially.

A foot-closed hi-hat is an absolute must. Its sound should be tight and crisp. If your sound generator doesn't have a foot-closed hi-hat, you may be able to create a workable substitute by adjusting the sample start point or altering the sound's attack envelope.

Patterns. The basic swing pattern should be approached as a skeletal structure. While the drum's primary purpose is to provide the time-keeping, a good drummer will improvise a dialog with the other instruments in the ensemble. Most often, the snare drum provides the variations, accents, and "kicks," but any instrument in the drumkit can raise its voice to enter into the musical discussion. Examples 4 through 7 show how the snare drum, bass drum, and even the ride cymbal and hi-hat can weave in and around the basic swing pattern. Since the drums are interacting with the ensemble, each two bars should be unique. Patterns should lend support to the feel while staying interesting and responsive to the music.

Next month, we'll explore more swing patterns and discuss some basic fills that are used in this genre. ■