DRUM MACHINE PROGRAMMING

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## SWING, PART 2: FILLS— COMMENTS AND STATEMENTS

ONE OF THE BIG DIFFERENCES BE- tween rock and jazz drumming, as we saw last month, is that jazz emphasizes cymbals, while rock focuses more on drums. Another major trademark of jazz-style drumming is the high degree of improvisation involved. Rock drummers tend to work out beats, plan the exact location of fills, and "drumestrate" their parts. Jazz drummers often blur the line that separates beats from fills and compose their parts on the fly.

An improvising drummer listens to the

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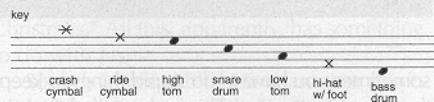
Ex. 1. The drum part comments on the rhythms of the verse melody, then provides a statement that leads to the next section.

Ex. 2. Here, the drum part comments on the rhythms of an improvised solo, then fills with a short statement at the end of the phrase.

musical fabric of the ensemble at the moment and adds his or her musical thoughts to the conversation. Sometimes the thoughts are little comments that are integrated and absorbed into the basic time-keeping patterns. Other times, the thoughts are more structured and act as statements to the other musicians in the group.

Comments develop continually in the flow of musical ideas. When visiting with a group of people, you're likely to voice little comments, such as, "Yeah," "Uh-huh," "I think it was Wednesday," or, "Really!" In the same way, a drummer's comments can serve to underscore, explain, or illustrate the music of the other musicians.

Statements are more substantial and seem to organize or direct the musical conversation. According to the dictionary, statements are expressions of fact or opinion. An improvising drummer might play a statement that leads the group from the verse into the chorus. When there is a lull in the conversation, the drummer's statement can easily offer up new topics of interest.

In Example 1, notice how the drum part comments on the rhythm of the verse melody, and then provides a statement that leads into the next section of the piece. Example 2 shows a similar interaction between the drum part and the rhythm of an improvised solo.

Sound Selection. Generally speaking, the snare drum in swing jazz should sound bright, clear, and crisp. If a snare sounds heavy or thick it will cloud the texture during any busy passages. It's a good idea to use a rimshot with a lot of crack for accents and for kicking the ensemble.

Likewise, toms in swing tend to be brighter and higher, and to offer more natural sustain than their rock counterparts. While it's common for a drummer to use a wooden beater on the bass drum for rock and funk, jazz drummers often use a hard felt ball. The bass drum should have a punchy (not brittle) attack, moderate decay, and a clear tone. On all instruments, dynamic contrasts can run the gamut from ghost strokes (notes that are all but inaudible) to powerful rimshots.

Programming Tip. By definition, improvisation calls for immediate musical actions and reactions created on the spot during a performance. While it's difficult to capture the spontaneity of an improvised performance with a drum machine or sequencer, here is a programming tip that may help.

Lay in your music with a scratch drum track. Then, when a good deal of the music is completed, erase the old drum track and build a new one. Work with long patterns. By programming longer patterns (try eight or sixteen bars), you're less likely to come up with ideas that sound repetitive. Record the voices of the drum kit one at a time, and feel free to let each instrument comment upon the music taking place. When the drums are complete, go back and finish the other instrumental tracks while relating to the drum kit's comments and statements. ∎