DRUM MACHINE PROGRAMMING

DRUM FILLS CAN BE A SIGNIFICANT factor in determining a song's energy and sense of movement. Certain fills can increase the forward momentum of a tune, while others seem to let the energy subside. Let's take a closer look.

Rhythmic Density: Let's say that your song needs an energy boost going into the chorus. One technique for programming fills that drive forward is to increase the rhythmic activity during the fill. For the fills in Example 1, the note values grow increasingly shorter and the density intensifies. These fills are easy to program, but at the start of the fill, the momentum created by the fill is released at the start of the chorus.

Drum fills create a dynamic flow that propels the listener forward. In Example 2, the fills are shorter and more intense, creating a powerful entry into the chorus.

Drum fills can also serve as a bridge between sections, as shown in Example 3. These fills are used to transition smoothly from one section to another, maintaining the momentum and energy of the song.

Drum fills can also be used as a punctuation mark, as shown in Example 4. These fills add a dramatic effect to the song, marking significant changes or transitions.

Drum fills can also serve as a rhythmic anticipation, as shown in Example 5. These fills build tension and create a sense of excitement, preparing the listener for the next section of the song.

Drum fills can also be used as a rhythmic opposition, as shown in Example 6. These fills create a contrast to the rhythm, adding interest and variety to the song.

Drum fills can also be used as a rhythmic suppression, as shown in Example 7. These fills are used to slow down the rhythm, creating a sense of tension and anticipation.
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next structural division. In this case, the chorus.

Let's pretend that you want to relax while coming
out of a chorus back into a verse. You can change
the musical energy by decreasing the amount of
rhythmic activity in the fill. In
Example 2, the rhythm "slow down," so that
the fills seem to march the ending of a structural
section. Instead of driving forward, fills of this
type come to a stop.

Rhythmic Patterns. Along with rhythmic
dynamics, the rhythmic patterns that make up the
funk have a lot to do with the perception of forward
motion or relaxation. The patterns shown in
Example 3 have a stronger forward drive
than the one in Example 4. Rhythmic
patterns that have activity toward the end of bars
usually progress into the following beat. This is
because the crotchet tends to group short notes
together with the closest count. In Example 4,
all of the activity happens during the first part
of the bar. Again, we will group the shorter
notes to the beats. The rhythms in Example 3
might be considered "end-accented" while the
rhythm in Example 4 is "beginning-accented." Final-accented groups have more drive.

By carefully considering rhythmic and
rhythmic patterns, a drummer can make a
fill serve double duty. Example 5 seems to
end the previous section and acts as a pickup
into the following section. Notice that a forward
motion comes to a halt on the second beat of the
measure. Beats 3 and 4 act as a pickup into the
next structural division.

Anticipations and Suspensions: Like their
tempo counterparts, rhythmic anticipations
and suspensions serve to increase the musical
variance. A rhythmic anticipation arrives at its
resolution ahead of the expected beat. The
performer sets up the listener to expect a resolution
on the downbeat of the bar. Take a look at
Example 6 and you'll see what I mean. The
rhythm used in this fill is one that strongly stresses
each beat. After three or four repetitions of
this pattern, the listener will expect the pattern
to resolve to the downbeat. After five or six repetitions
the listener realizes that this rhythmic figure is now an
estimation. By the seventh repetition, most listeners
will assume you've got 'em just where you want 'em that the rhythmic pattern is going to
progress to the next part of your drum
section. Surprise! An anticipation on the last half
of the last beat of the bar is entirely unexpected
and should come as quite a shock.

Suspensions are the reverse of anticipations.
Instead of arriving at the resolution early, the
expected resolution is delayed until after
the beginning of the next section. Example 7
shows a very hip suspension. This example
is actually a suspension on two levels. At the
level of the measure, the resolution is delayed until
the second beat. At the beat level, the resolution is delayed until the second half of the
bar. If you want your fills to be effective, ask yourself this important question: What is the
function of this fill? Once you make your de-
cision, it's easier to make your fills work for you
rather than against you.