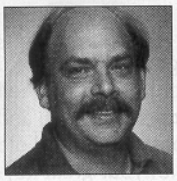


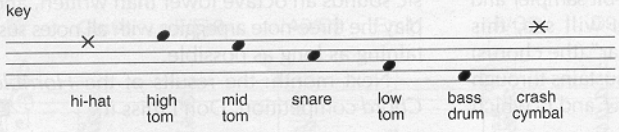
DRUM MACHINE PROGRAMMING

NORMAN WEINBERG

DRUM FILLS REVISITED

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 activity intensifies. These fills seem to propel themselves into the following measure. The musical tension created by the fill is released at the start of the



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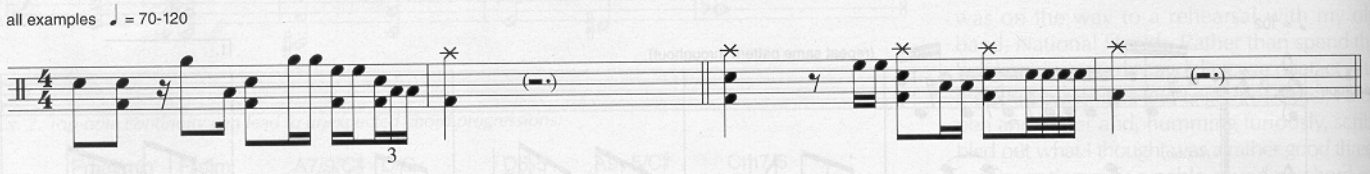
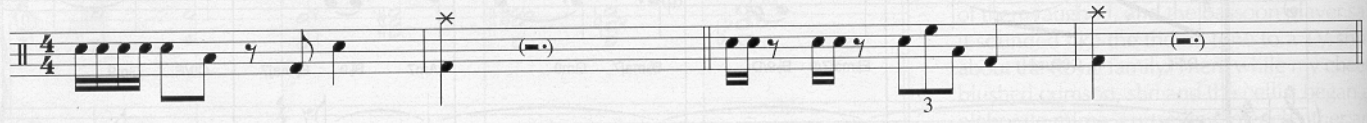
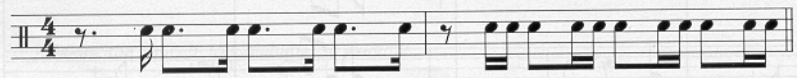
Ex. 1. In these fills, the note values grow increasingly shorter and the activity intensifies.



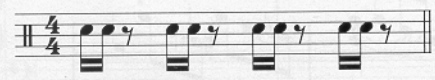
Ex. 2. Notice how the rhythms "slow down" so that the fills seem to mark the ending of a section.



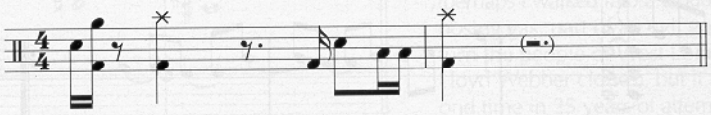
Ex. 3. A couple of "end-accented" patterns.



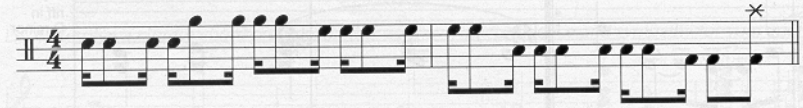
Ex. 4. An example of a "beginning-accented" pattern.



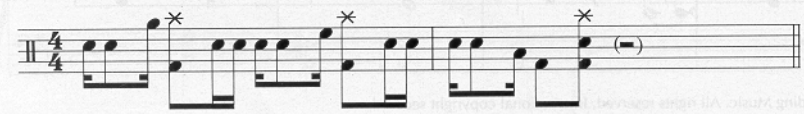
Ex. 5. These fills serve as segues from one section to another.



Ex. 6. An example of rhythmic anticipation.



Ex. 7. An example of rhythmic suspension.



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 reduce the musical energy by decreasing the amount of rhythmic activity in the fill. In Example 2, the rhythms "slow down," so that the fills seem to mark the ending of a structural section. Instead of driving forward, fills of this type come to a standstill.

Rhythmic Patterns. Along with rhythmic density, the rhythmic patterns that make up the fill 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 figures that have activity toward the end of beats generally progress into the following beat. This is because the ear tends to group short notes together with the closest count. In Example 4, all of the activity happens during the first part of the beat. Again, the ear 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." End-accented groupings have more drive.

By carefully considering rhythmic density and rhythmic patterns, a drummer can make a fill serve double duty. Example 5 seems to end the previous section and act as a pickup into the following section. Notice how 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 harmonic counterparts, rhythmic anticipations and suspensions serve to increase the musical tension. 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 only 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 change. By the fifth and sixth repetition, the listener realizes that this rhythmic figure is now an ostinato. By the seventh repetition, most listeners will assume (you've got 'em just where you want 'em) that the rhythmic pattern is going to continue until the downbeat of the next measure. 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 too 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 beat.

If you want your fills to be effective, ask yourself this important question: What is the function of this fill? Once you make your decision, it's easier to make your fills work for you rather than against you.