

On Drumset/Studio Percussion

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CREATIVE PROGRAMMING IDEAS

GOOD MORNING MR. PHELPS. You have before you, a tape of 'The Company's' newest product. This group of highly talented, unique individuals has created an entirely new musical concept. The Company feels that their unique sound requires a rhythm track which complements their extraordinary approach. Your assignment, if you should decide to accept it, is to create an entirely original rhythm track. This track should be unlike any heard before. As always, if you or any of your team should be caught not meeting this challenge, the Company will disavow any knowledge of your action."

A distinctive groove can often influence the compositional direction of a tune, and a unique rhythm might be the

By Norm Weinberg

hook which captures a listener's attention. But, it's not easy to be original. As musicians, we bring preconceived ideas and years of musical experience to every project. One way to arouse the muse of originality is to turn off these musical experiences and influences of the past. Want to get weird? Experiment with these exercises in forced creativity.

Blind Programming—Here's a simple, yet effective technique for building drum machine patterns that are totally unique. First, turn off all the audio outputs coming from your drum machine. Next, put the machine into record mode and start hitting buttons. That's all there is to it!

Since you won't be able to hear the machine's metronome, you can't support the meter in the traditional manner (like putting the snare on counts two and four). In addition, you won't be influenced by one instrument interacting with another (bass drum relating to snare or high hats).

Once you've banged on the buttons for a while, turn up the audio outputs and see what you've got. If it sounds too busy, don't press so many buttons next time. If it sounds too empty, press more buttons next time. You may want to try playing at different dynamics, assigning different sounds to the buttons, or even recording with different levels of quantization.

The nicest aspect of this technique is that you can create 40 to 50 patterns in

How would you like your drumsticks, Ed?

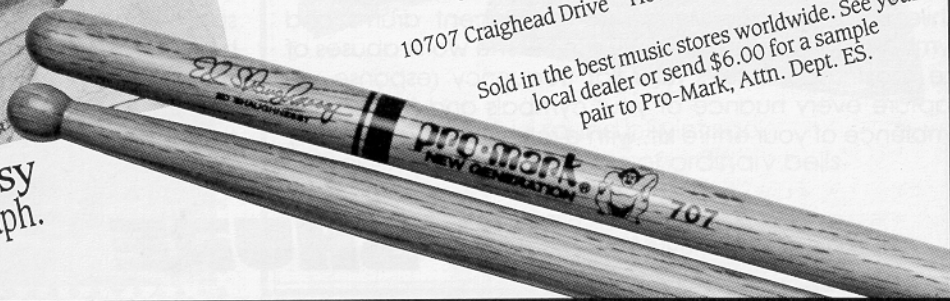
Count Basie, Tommy Dorsey, Benny Goodman, Stan Getz, Charlie Mingus ... and dozens of others. They've all called on Ed Shaughnessy for his distinctive drumming style. Add 30 years with the world famous Tonight Show Band, and you know why he has been called a "Genius of Modern Percussion." Ed does it all ... TV, Recording, Big Band, Combo, and clinics. And he does it with Pro-Mark's Autograph Series Oak 707.

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Ed Shaughnessy
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a very short amount of time. From that large number, you should find at least three or four patterns that sound very hip. Another five or six might work fine with just a few minor changes such as adding a single bass drum, snare drum, or cymbal crash, in just the right place.

Alternate Sound Generators—A drum machine is nothing more than a box of sounds with an internal sequencer. Have you ever thought of sending the sequenced MIDI information from your drum machine to a different sound generator?

One technique that works extremely well is to MIDI your drum machine directly into a multi-timbral sound generator that contains percussion samples (like the D-110, Proteus, or M1, to name just a few). Sometimes, the timbres will correspond (the drum machine's bass drum will also fire the sound generator's bass drum), but the most original patterns occur when the timbres don't "line-up." Maybe the drum machine's bass drum will fire a cowbell or a timbale. Even if the drum machine's rhythm track is fairly standard, the relationship of the different percussion colors coming from the sound generator will make the pattern distinctive.

If you use a software based sequencer, you might consider recording the drum machine pattern into your computer and then transposing the track. Since multi-timbral instruments typically contain 60 or more drum sounds, you're likely to find a transposition that contains many interesting timbral relationships.

Wrong MIDI Channel—If you're working with a fairly complex MIDI system, you've probably run across this next technique by accident. Simply send the melody or bass line of some song from your sequencer to your drum machine. Since melodic passages are usually longer than rhythmic grooves, the trick is to listen to the entire passage and try to find an interesting phrase. Once you run across something you like, loop the passage and see how it feels as a drum pattern. If

single melodic lines are used, the rhythm track will sound "linear" in nature. A polyphonic section, like a fugal passage, background chords, or a melody/counter melody structure, will produce a "vertical" drum track.

As an example, let's build a new rhythm track from other tracks within an existing tune. To create the drum track, the bass line was shifted forward by one eighth-note and transposed down a minor seventh (See Example No. 1). It was then sent to a Roland D-110 using the default drum/note-number assignments. By transforming this single bass line, the result is a linear sounding drumset groove. The rhythmic relationship between the two parts is very close, but not immediately obvious to the listener.

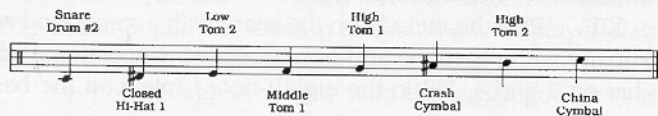
An additional percussion track was created by looping two measures of the organ part from the middle of the verse and sending it to the D-110 as-is (See Example No. 2). Since the D-110 has percussion sounds assigned to its upper registers, it sounds like two percussionists playing together. When these two rhythmic lines come together, they form an interesting groove.

When trying to be creative, keep an open mind and an open ear. The real beauty of MIDI and electronic instruments is that hundreds of ideas can be tried quickly and inexpensively. If you come up with something that doesn't work, just throw it away and try again. Your next effort may please "The Company," and you can take the credit. PN

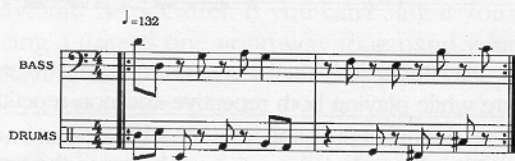
Norm Weinberg is Percussive Notes' editor of Focus on Drumset/Studio Percussion and the Electronic Percussion column. Any comments or suggestions for articles should be directed to: Norm Weinberg, Music Department, Del Mar College, Corpus Christi, TX USA 78404.

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Key for Example No. 1



Example No. 1



"Wrong MIDI channel" drum part created by shifting a bass part forward one eighth-note and transposing down a minor seventh

Key for Example No. 2



Example No. 2



"Wrong MIDI channel" percussion part created by using two bars of an organ part