

DRUM MACHINE PROGRAMMING

NORMAN WEINBERG

FUNK, PART ONE: THE SEVENTIES

FOR THE NEXT TWO MONTHS, WE'LL take a look at some funk-style patterns. Instead of starting back at the "dawn of funk," we'll begin this month with some funk grooves of the mid-1970s. Groups such as Tower Of Power and Average White Band, along with solo performers such as Herbie Hancock, began to blend the raw energy of earlier funk with a newfound sophistication. Trying to describe funk always reminds me of that old line: "I don't know nothin' 'bout music, but I know what I like." Ask several drummers to play their funkier grooves, and

you'll likely hear a variety of rhythms that are very different, yet share certain general characteristics.

Rhythmically, funk patterns tend to have a very strong two and four rimshot on the snare drum. Bass drum rhythms include irregular, syncopated accents that contrast with the solid backbeat. In an ensemble, the bass drum is free to double the bass guitar, punctuate the most important rhythms of the bass, or weave in and around the bass player's notes. The hi-hat often plays a constant ostinato of quarters, eighths, or sixteenths with accents of varying degrees.

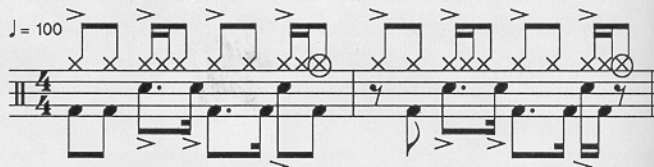
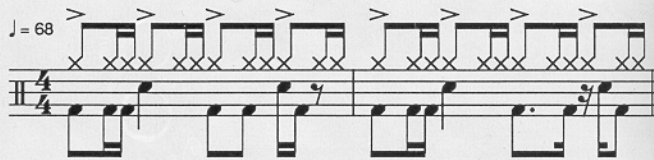
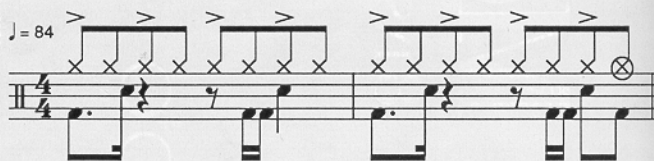
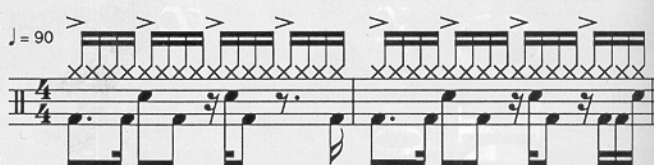
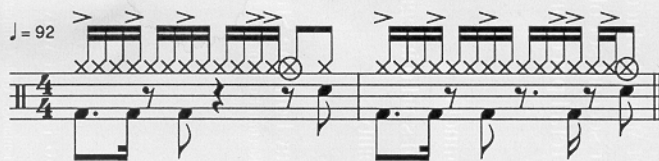
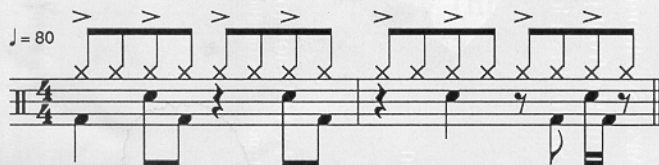
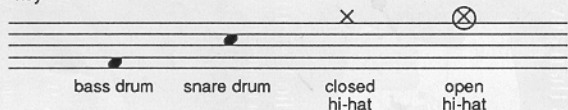
Accents are the life-blood of funk drumming.

Snare drum notes that don't fall on two or four are accented only if they anticipate or delay the backbeat. Anticipating and/or delaying the backbeat is one of the most important aspects of funk drumming. Most non-two-and-four snare drum notes are ghost strokes (notes so soft that they can hardly be heard).

Funk is an attitude as much as a pattern. In

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fact, a great funk groove relies heavily on the other instruments in the band. A nasty slap-bass line, stabbing horn riffs, certain keyboard voicings and colors, and even that "skank" guitar, can turn a lame drum pattern into funky gold.

If a picture is worth a thousand words, then each funky pattern is certainly worth a few hundred. It's one thing to discuss the concept of funk; it's quite another to hear it and feel it.

Program these patterns into your drum machine or sequencer and draw your own conclusions concerning the definition of funk. Ex-

periment with different volumes and colors on the hi-hats, try adding additional ghost notes on the snare drum, and create subtle variations to build more patterns or longer phrases. Determine the characteristics that are unique to each pattern, and determine which musical aspects are common to all. ■

