the components of rhythm and drum technique

DRUMMING PATTERNS

by chuck braman

DRUMSTROKE PUBLICATIONS
About Drumming Patterns

Drumming Patterns is an encyclopedia of technique. Its approach is broad; the material it presents ranges from basic stick technique to advanced drumset techniques in a variety of styles. It is not intended to be a method book to be practiced strictly from beginning to end, but rather a reference book to be practiced selectively according to each reader’s interests and level of ability. Because of the breadth of its content, it may be approached in several different time frames throughout the reader’s life, rather than worked through and completed in any particular timespan.

Because Drumming Patterns illustrates a system with a theoretical foundation, this foundation is described in the Preface, the Introduction, in Appendixes I and II, and in the introductory video at DrummingPatterns.com/book. It is the author’s belief that a conscious understanding of the theory behind Drumming Patterns, as well as a theoretical understanding of drum technique and rhythm in general, will enhance the reader’s comprehension of the material and further his musicianship as well. However, not all drummers are oriented towards theory; some prefer instead to learn through direct application. These readers are advised to skip both the introduction and appendixes and proceed with the text beginning on page 16.

Praise for Drumming Patterns

Magazines:
“The approach is broad-based, integrating rhythm, styles and techniques into a unified, comprehensive system. The commitment, both in time and thought, that Mr. Braman has made to this book will be obvious to anyone who studies its contents. Drumming Patterns is an impressive publication.”
—Percussive Notes

“…a systematic presentation of practice materials that can be used in much the same way that other instrumentalists use scale and arpeggio systems.”
—Kansas Music Review

“A long awaited book for developing stick and limb control.”
—Downbeat Magazine

“Chuck Braman did a fantastic job with Drumming Patterns, and I highly recommend this book for everyone who wants to work seriously on the drumset.”
—Rimshot Magazine

“Extremely clear and very well noted… the fold-out pages are an excellent idea that works well…the appendixes include a lot of good conceptual ideas on drumming…an excellent book.”
—Modern Drummer

“‘If you enjoy taking an idea to the nth degree of possibility, check this book out.’”
—Rhythm Magazine

Celebrities:
“Drumming Patterns explores every area of drumming. This creative, valuable book is for every drummer’s library.”
—Louie Bellson, drummer (Duke Ellington, Count Basie)

“All drummers, regardless of their level of ability, will profit from studying this book. Drumming Patterns’ unique approach is to be applauded.”
—John Beck, Former president of the Percussive Arts Society, Chairman of Percussion at the Eastman School of Music

“Extremely valuable… shows great insight into the mechanics of drum technique.”
—Jim Chapin, author, “Advanced Techniques for the Modern Drummer”

“A wonderful resource for stretching the technical and musical imagination!”
—Ed Soph, Percussive Arts Society Hall of Fame

Readers:
“I am currently borrowing Drumming Patterns from my local library, which I find fantastic! I am a beginning drummer who finds this book so accessible and approachable to use. I love the format. It invites the reader, and takes him/her by the hand, carefully and slowly strolling through the concepts. There is no room for confusion. Your book is great!”
—Joanna Tu, Redondo Beach, CA

“Your book is extremely helpful. I highly appreciate the kind of exhaustive analysis that you have taken on here. Do you have any recordings available? I would love to hear what you have been able to unleash with the kind of background you appear to have.”
—James Musser, Lomita, CA

“Drumming Patterns is very thorough, very comprehensive and beautifully produced. I have seen several books on the subject and yours appears to be the best.”
—David Cole, New Carrollton
Dedication:

This book is dedicated to the memory of Paul Motian, whose music has provided some of my life’s greatest pleasures.

Acknowledgements:

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Dr. Peter Webster, Troy Sartain, and the students and faculty of the Case Western Reserve University Music and Technology Lab for the generous use of their equipment during the production of this book; Chip Stephens, Bob Fraser, Ray Parker, Bill Braman, Glen Schaft, Mike Wahl, Mark Gridley, John Richmond, Audrey Braman, Gary Aprile, Henry Avellone, Dave Brewer, Bob McKee, Tom Fries, Val Kent, Don Friedman, Ed Bobick, George Judy, Skip Hadden, Jennifer Stepien, Ron Godale, Kyp Volans, Maureen Sickler, Scott Kenya, Joe Brigandi, Andy Green, and especially Troy Sartain, Dave Norris, Barbara Samuels, and Gary Baker for their editing and re-writing suggestions; Tim Yamasaki for generously providing a meticulous proofreading of the digital edition while offering many insightful suggestions; Charlie Ross of Ross Printing in Cleveland, Ohio for his extraordinary patience in dealing with a perfectionist and his extraordinary competence in achieving perfection; and Mike Wahl for introducing me to the philosophy of Ayn Rand and Rand’s novel “The Fountainhead,” which helped provide me with the will and the confidence to pursue this project.
Preface

Through the years people have created systems in every discipline, from science to mathematics and music. In music, the system of musical harmony provides a theoretical basis for musical creation. It also provides tools, such as scales and arpeggios, which form the basis of most non-drummer’s technical studies.

Without such a system, harmonic music as we know it would not exist. In addition, the level of technical development now commonly attained on melodic and harmonic instruments could not have been achieved. It is odd, then, that in these centuries of development no such system has emerged to define rhythmic theory and drum technique.

Drumming Patterns represents the discovery, identification, and organization of this system. It integrates the fundamental patterns of rhythm with the fundamental technical patterns used in drumming since the underlying patterns for each are the same. It is based partially on elements that for years have been used, in a non-systematic fashion, in the drum rudiments, and in previously published drumming textbooks such as Stick Control.

Drumming Patterns represents:

• The identification of the fundamental patterns of technique used in previous materials
• The elimination of the non-essential patterns of technique used in previous materials
• The progressive arrangement of the fundamental patterns
• The filling-in of the gaps between identified fundamental patterns with previously unidentified fundamental patterns
• The elimination of all non-essential elements of presentation
• A method for converting technical patterns into rhythmic patterns, and vice versa

Drumming Patterns is an encyclopedia of technique and rhythm, rather than a method book to be practiced from beginning to end. Because it identifies the basic building blocks of rhythm and drum technique, Drumming Patterns is intended for all drummers, from beginning students to advanced professionals.
Introduction

The components of rhythm and the components of drum technique are not random or arbitrary, but specific and objective. They are based on a progression of patterns which for both technique and rhythm are the same.

Drum technique may be divided into two categories: stick technique and drum set technique. Although the components of both are similar, stick technique is more basic since it involves only two limbs (hands) at a time, as opposed to the four limbs (hands and feet) required to play a full drum set. Therefore, let us define the fundamental components of stick technique.

Stick technique is comprised of strokes, in which a drumstick strikes a drum head. There are two basic kinds of strokes: single strokes, in which the stick rebounds once off the drumhead; and double strokes, in which the stick rebounds twice off the drumhead.

Single or double strokes may be executed with either the right stick or the left stick. This means that there are four fundamental units of stick technique:

1) A right-handed single stroke (R)
2) A left-handed single stroke (L)
3) A right-handed double stroke (RR)
4) A left-handed double stroke (LL)

Once these four fundamental units of stick technique have been identified, it is possible to identify all their possible combinations, as well as to create a mathematical progression organizing all the combinations from shortest to longest (up to nine digits in length). This is illustrated on the facing page.

In addition to these, there are four longer combinations which are also fundamental:

TEN DIGITS  R+R+R+L+R+LL
           R+R+R+L+RR+L+LL
           R+R+R+L+RR+L+RR

TWIN DIGITS  R+R+R+L+RR+L+RR
           R+R+R+L+RR+L+RR

In addition to these, there are four longer combinations which are also fundamental:

TEN DIGITS  R+R+R+L+R+LL
           R+R+R+L+RR+L+LL
           R+R+R+L+RR+L+RR

TWIN DIGITS  R+R+R+L+RR+L+RR
           R+R+R+L+RR+L+RR

Together, these patterns comprise all the fundamental units of technique available to drummers, arranged from shortest to longest, simplest to most complex, most practical to most esoteric. Part I of Drumming Patterns is based on the systematic presentation of these patterns and their embellishments.

1. Can you think of more patterns within each given length than the ones listed? These are not actually different patterns, but rather are inversions of the patterns listed above. For more information, refer to item 3, “Inversions,” in Appendix I, page 162.
Like technique, rhythm can also be broken down into its most fundamental components. These components are based on the same progression of patterns that underlie the stickings illustrated on the previous page, converted into rhythmic notations.

To do this, simply substitute a note for each “R,” and a rest for each “L.” (We will now also add repeat signs since patterns tend to be repeated.)

The preceding diagram illustrates the fact that the fundamental patterns underlying both stickings and rhythms are the same.

It is this progression of patterns underlies all of the basic components of stick technique, drumset technique, and rhythm. In one form or another and throughout history, every drummer in every part of the world deals with these patterns every time they make music. It is this progression of patterns and their applications that underlie all the material, and the presentation of the material, in Drumming Patterns.

The advantage of thinking in terms of fundamental patterns—as opposed to endless, arbitrary, unrelated and unconceptualized concrete individual stickings and rhythms—is that all our information becomes interrelated, reduced and simplified. We no longer need to separately compartmentalize playing snare drum versus playing rock versus playing jazz versus playing solo versus playing accompaniment etc. We learn that all of these areas use the same underlying patterns and thus are fundamentally related. As a result, they become easier to learn and easier to comprehend.¹

The first section of Part I of Drumming Patterns, “Sticking Patterns,” presents these patterns as stickings. After the sticking pattern section are several sections consisting of the same sticking patterns systematically embellished by flams, accents, etc. The whole of Part I presents the progressive arrangement of all the primary components of stick technique. Part II of Drumming Patterns converts the underlying patterns into rhythms and shows how these rhythmic patterns may be applied to every musical style that can be performed on the drumset, in both solo and accompaniment.

For an animated tour that walks you through through the concepts above, I recommend watching “An Introduction To Drumming Patterns” at DrummingPatterns.com/book.

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¹ This is analogous to the advantages of understanding language in terms of grasping a finite number of principles of grammar as opposed to memorizing an infinity of concrete instances of usage, or of learning to spell by means of understanding the principles of phonics as opposed to memorizing an infinity of concrete instances of word spellings.
PART I: SNARE DRUM PATTERNS
Part I: Snare Drum Patterns

Note: Throughout this text, “R” is a symbol for a right-handed stroke, “L” is a symbol for a left-handed stroke. All quarter notes are equal to one beat.

Practice Method
- Each pattern should be practiced by repeating it continuously, proceeding to the fastest tempo at which it can be executed precisely and in a relaxed manner.
- At a given tempo, each pattern should be practiced at soft, medium, and loud dynamic levels. The use of a metronome is recommended.
- Each pattern should first be practiced in the Sticking Pattern section before attempting the embellished versions of those patterns introduced in subsequent sections.

Budgeting Practice Time
Drumming Patterns is an encyclopedia of technique and rhythm, rather than a method book to be practiced strictly from beginning to end. Therefore, depending on the amount of practice time available, the reader may want to select only some of the patterns for practice, rather than attempting to practice them all. The shorter, simpler, and more symmetrical patterns are more useful than some of the more elaborate patterns. Therefore, you should concentrate on learning these patterns before considering the more elaborate ones. In Part I, the most important patterns to practice are:

I. Sticking Patterns (pages 16-39)
- All two, three, four, six, and twelve digit patterns
- Eight digit patterns phrased in double subdivisions (eighth notes and sixteenth notes)
- Nine digit patterns phrased as eighth note triplets

II. Embellishment, Accent, Flam, Single, and Double/Buzz Patterns (pages 40-85)
- All two, three, and four digit patterns.

Organizations Of Part I
Part I is divided into nine sections of four types:
- The Sticking Patterns section presents various unembellished combinations of the four fundamental units of snare drum technique: R, L, RR, LL.
- The Embellishment Patterns section superimposes accent, flam, single, double, and buzz stroke embellishments over single stroke (RL, RLRL, etc.) sticking patterns.
- The Accent Patterns, Flam Patterns, Single Stroke Patterns, and Double/Buzz Stroke Patterns sections superimpose these same embellishments over more complex (RLL, RRLL, etc.) sticking patterns.
- The Roll Patterns and Alternating Roll Patterns sections present roll pattern notations to which the above patterns may be applied.

Sticking Patterns Section Vs. Subsequent Sections
In the Sticking Patterns section, each sticking pattern is presented phrased in four different ways: as eighth notes, sixteenth notes, eighth note triplets, and sixteenth note triplets. As a guide to clarify the beginning and end of each sticking pattern, the first digit of each sticking pattern is underlined.

Upon learning the pattern in the Sticking Patterns section, you will have acquired the ability to phrase each pattern in these four ways. Therefore, in subsequent sections, each pattern is presented only once, without any musical notations. However, each pattern should still be practiced as eighth notes, sixteenth notes, eighth note triplets, and sixteenth note triplets. In contrast to the sticking patterns section, in subsequent sections underlined digits indicate embellishments, such as accents, flams, etc.

1. In addition to developing dynamic (volume level) control, at a given tempo when the patterns are practiced from soft to loud each increase in dynamic level will increase the height that the stick will rise. Correspondingly, the speed at which the stick will travel will also increase, thereby easing the transition to the next faster tempo.
2. For a more detailed discussion of this subject, see “Appendix II: Determining A Pattern's Utility,” page 164.
Sticking Patterns

Sticking patterns are the basic patterns of drum technique upon which other patterns are built, and are the basis for all the material in this book. Of the sticking patterns themselves, those two to four digits in length are the most basic and are the basis for all subsequent sticking patterns.

Each pattern is presented in four different ways: eighth notes, eighth note triplets, sixteenth notes, and sixteenth note triplets. The inversions of each sticking pattern are shown in vertical columns (a definition of this term is found on page 162). To clarify the beginning of each pattern, its first digit is underlined. (In this section the underlining of digits does not signify embellishments.)

Each exercise should be practiced by repeating continuously. “R” is a symbol for the right stick; “L” is a symbol for the left stick. In this and all subsequent sections, each quarter note is equal to one beat. For detailed practicing guidelines, see “Part I: Snare Drum Patterns” on page 14.

The most important patterns to practice in this section are:

• All two, three, four, six, and twelve digit patterns
• Eight digit patterns phrased in double subdivisions (eighth notes and sixteenth notes)
• Nine digit patterns phrased as eighth note triplets
FIVE DIGIT PATTERNS

Sticking 5A: RLRLL

1) RL RL LR LR LL
2) LR LR LL RL RL
3) LL RL RL LR LR
4) RL LR LR LL RL
5) LR LL RL LL RL

Sticking 5B: LRLRR

1) LR LR RL RL RR
2) RL RL RR LR LR
3) RR LR LR RL RL
4) LR RL RL RR LR
5) RL RR LR LR RL

SIX DIGIT PATTERNS

Sticking 6A: RLRLLL

1) RLR RLL RLL RLL RLL
2) LRL RLL RLL RLL RLL
3) RLR LRL RRL RRL RRL
4) LRL LRL RRL RRL RRL
5) RLR LRL RRL RRL RRL

Sticking 6B: LRRLLL

1) LRL LRR LRR LRR LRR
2) RLR RRR RRR RRR RRR
3) LRL LRR LRR LRR LRR
4) RLR RRR RRR RRR RRR
5) LRL LRR LRR LRR LRR
6) RLR RRR RRR RRR RRR
SEVEN DIGIT PATTERNS

Note: Because seven does not divide easily into eighth note, sixteenth note, eighth note triplet, and sixteenth note triplet groupings, all but the first inversions of the seven stroke patterns are omitted, as these patterns have relatively limited utility. ¹

Sticking 7A: RLRLRLL

Sticking 7B: LRLRLRR

Sticking 7C: RLLRLLL

Sticking 7D: LRRLLRR

¹ For a definition of the term “inversion,” see Appendix I, Item 3 on page 167. For an explanation of the concept of utility, see Appendix II on page 164.
EIGHT DIGIT PATTERNS

Sticking 8A: RLRRLRLR

1) RLR RLR LLR RLL  
2) RLR LLR LRL RLR  
3) RLR LRL RLR LRL  
4) LRL RLR LRL LRL  
5) LRL LRL LRL RLR  
6) LRL RLR LRL RLR  
7) LRL LRL LRL RLR  
8) LRL RLR LRL RLR

Sticking 8B: RLRLRLLR

1) RL RL RR LL  
2) LR LR LR RL  
3) RL RL RR LL  
4) LR LR LR RL  
5) RL RL RR LL  
6) LR LR LR RL  
7) RL RL RR LL  
8) LR LR LR RL
Thank you very much for reading this far. I hope you have found value in this sample of the book.

Please know that there are 16 more sticking patterns detailed in the remaining 16 pages of this chapter (pp 24–39).

If you might like to continue, you can purchase individual chapters, as well as the entire book, at https://www.drummingpatterns.com/book.