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PREFACE

Welcome to the Erskine Method.

Whether you are just considering taking up the drums and have come home with your first pair of sticks, or you are an experienced player who wishes to revisit some basics and challenge yourself to learn new things, this book and companion video will clarify most of the mechanical and musical ways of drumming for you.

I have written this book as if I were explaining the "how to" of drumming to a best friend or student. I've tried to make these explanations as close as possible to what a private lesson would be like with me. The video completes the picture, with clear explanations, examples and musical performances.

Audio tracks are included with the online media; there are play-along tracks without drums as well as complete

band tracks with which you can listen to my drumming approach and style. (I also include video examples of my own drumming with some of these tracks.) You are encouraged to listen to as many different drummers and styles of music as possible. Just as hungry readers increase their knowledge and vocabulary with books, musicians learn the most by listening to music and then applying and incorporating what they've heard into their own musical speech. Music is a language. Let's have fun speaking it now.

Good Luck in Life and Music ... and Have Fun!

Sincerely,



Peter Erskine

"Knowledge is not skill. Knowledge plus 10,000 times is skill."

—Shinichi Suzuki, Zen master

Acknowledgements

I'd like to offer my thanks to all of the good people at Alfred Music. A word of appreciation as well to colleagues Dan Morris and Aaron Serfaty for their help with some of the exercises and concepts: thank you. Thanks also to my students from the University of Southern California Thornton School of Music's jazz drumming program for their invaluable assistance in this living laboratory of music study I call my teaching studio; particular appreciation to Matt Slocum for his constant enthusiasm, help, and expert transcriptions.

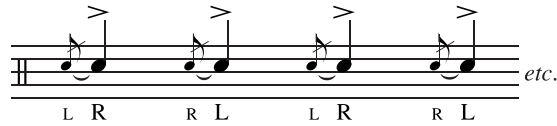
My editor, Dave Black, and his staff have the experience and work ethic to guarantee that all of the information contained herein is accurate and user-friendly. I'd also like to express my gratitude for the generosity of the various record labels, composers and arrangers who allowed their work to be included in the book and media. Bravo to my son, (the director of the video) Taichi Erskine, and his production company, Image Farm. Big thanks to the musicians who play in the video. I encourage you to take advantage of all of the play-along tracks that are included. Finally, my biggest thanks go out to my family, who tolerated long absences away from them while I locked myself away in my studio to complete *Drumset Essentials* and the *Erskine Method*, works that pretty much tell it like it all is when it comes to my understanding of drumming.

The Erskine Method is dedicated to the memory of Elvin Jones.

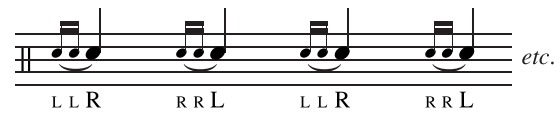


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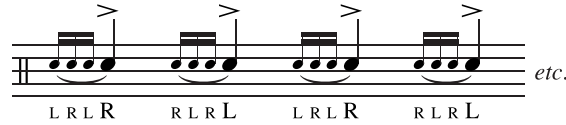
The Flam



The Drag



The Ruff



The Single Paradiddle



The Double Paradiddle



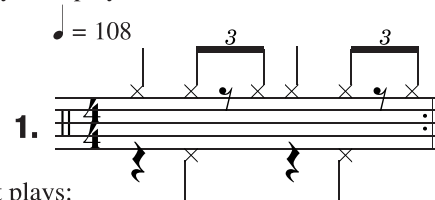
RHYTHMIC STYLES

For now, let's define the two basic drumming styles as follows:

Swung Eighth Notes

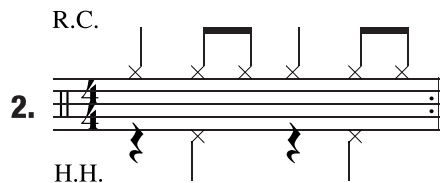
Jazz is played with a *swung* eighth-note feel, expressed as either a triplet subdivision...

Ride Cymbal plays:



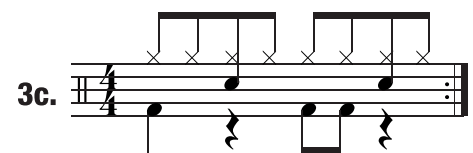
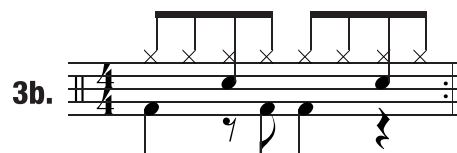
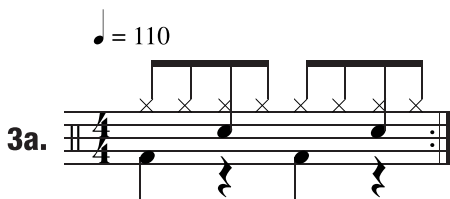
Hi-Hat plays:

...or a "milder" swing feel with straight eighth notes in the ride pattern while the band's phrasing emphasizes the offbeat eighth notes.

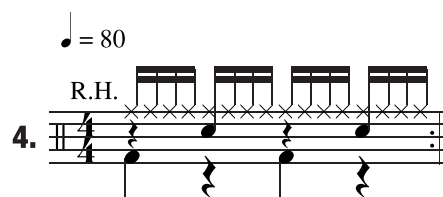


Straight Eighth Notes

Most rock and pop styles have a *straight* "up-and-down" eighth-note feel...



...with funk music utilizing more of the sixteenth-note subdivision:



More on these beats later.

BEATS AND EXERCISES

The Job of the Drummer in Music

I believe the job of the drummer is as follows:

1. Play in rhythm, to provide a comfortable (and exciting) framework for the other musicians. I like to think of myself as the “cushion” for the band. I also try to play in such a way as to increase the feeling of confidence in all of the other musicians I’m working with.
2. Have fun.

That being said, now is a good time to discuss...

Basic Coordination Skills on the Drumset

You will need a drumset including throne, bass drum with pedal, hi-hat with pedal, snare drum with stand, tom-toms, and ride and crash cymbals on stands.

In order to be able to simultaneously hit various parts of the kit with your hands and feet, keep the following points in mind:

1. The bass drum pedal, hi-hat pedal, and sticks should have equal rebound height and distance.
2. Start each stroke from the same place (simplify the calculation required to move the stick a certain distance in time).
3. *Volume* comes more from velocity than from stick height/distance or just sheer power.
4. A good *tone* (touch) is achieved with consistent and specific motions, as described next.

The Big Secret to Getting the Best Tone Out of Your Drums and Cymbals

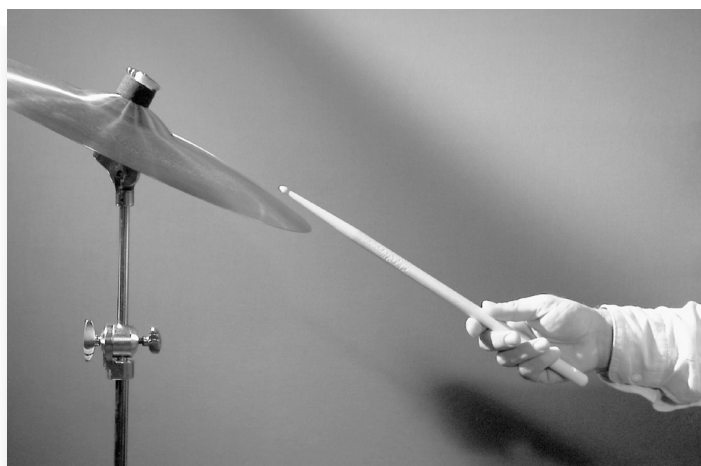
The best way to hit a drum is with a consistent striking motion that allows the stick to come into contact with the head as parallel as possible. This allows for several things:

1. Your efficiency is improved due to less travel distance for your arms, the ability to relax by keeping your left arm down, and a much better and user-friendly rebound from your stick.
2. Tonal consistency and rhythmic accuracy are improved.
3. The sound is greatly improved because the stick is not glancing downward at or off the head.
4. You’ll be amazed at how much simpler it is to play the snare drum, move around the kit, etc.

Remember to keep your shoulders down and always be aware of your breathing and general state of relaxation. As a result, you’ll find your beat will start to open up a bit as well, and all will be good with the world.



When I play the cymbals or drums, my arm will usually fall beneath the playing surface of the instrument so the weight of my arm, combined with the snap in my wrist and fingers, will bring out the fullest tone. The arm moves along with the wrist and fingers to play each quarter-note pulse on the ride cymbal; the syncopated “swing” or triplet figure is played while the arm is in its up-stroke motion during this series of quarter notes, and the fingers of the right hand relax and open their grip slightly on the stick, closing once again for the next quarter note, and so on.



Another valuable lesson I learned from another teacher, Freddie Gruber, is to draw the sound out of the instrument and not play too deeply into the drum. Freddie likes to use the analogy of a tap dancer not dancing beneath the surface of the floor.

Let’s now put these ideas to work so we can have some fun making music.