

the fabric of time

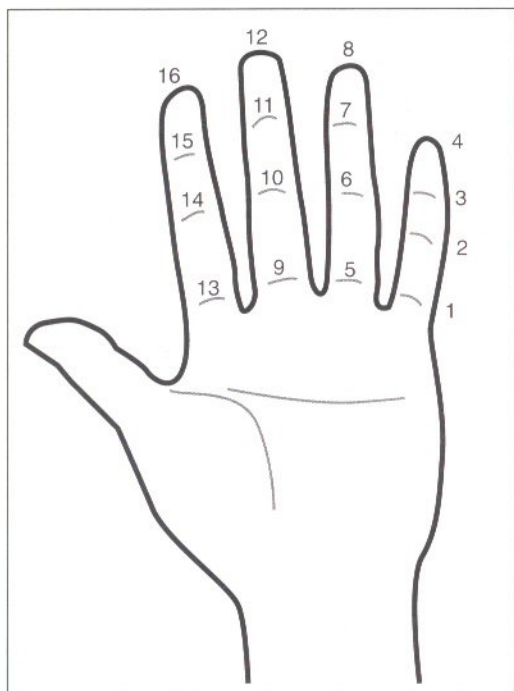
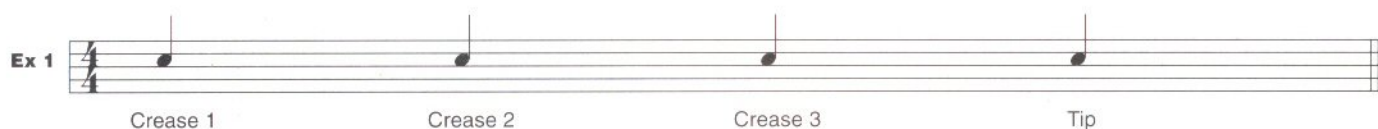


INDIAN RHYTHMIC

CONCEPTS FOR DRUM SET PART 23

One particularly interesting thing about Indian music is the way they use clapping and motions of the hands to dictate the divisions of particular rhythms. As mentioned in previous articles this is known as clapping the tallum. 'Tal' translating roughly into 'Palm of the hand'. These clapping cycles can become quite intricate, sometimes not only involving claps and waves of the hand but also incorporating smaller claps with individual fingers. There are thirty five traditional clapping cycles currently in use in South India, although there used to be hundreds.

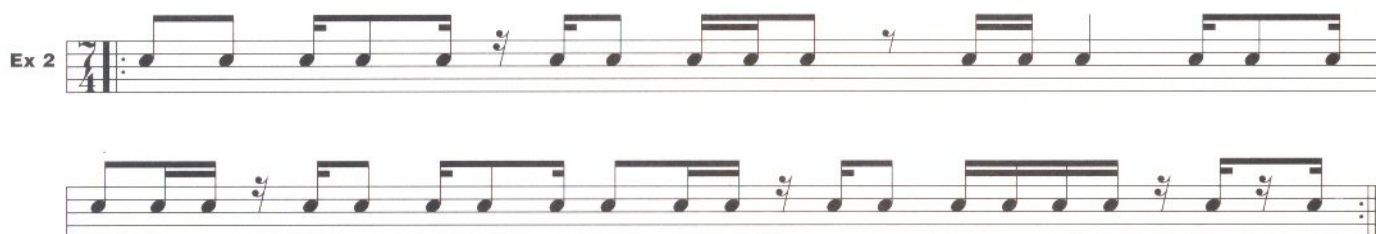
This month I'll begin by explaining a system from North India of using the fingers of one hand to count off beats and bar lengths. It is particularly useful in music where there are odd length phrases and bars. This counting system involves one hand only. Turn your hand palm up as in the diagram. You'll notice that each finger has three creases and a tip. Bring your thumb across to the base of the little finger and strike the first crease, then the second crease of the same finger, then the third crease and finally the tip of the same finger. If you do this to a crotchet pulse you should get this.



Now go on to the next finger and do the same, then the third finger and finally the last finger. This gives you sixteen in all (Beats, not fingers). Here is the diagram to eliminate any confusion. Now I've explained the basics of this counting system we can look at a number of ways it can be used. If you think of each finger as a bar of 4/4 then you'll have four bars of 4/4. The first way we can use this system is to count off bars of a tune we might be hearing for the first time. This could be useful, particularly in a new situation where we might need to work things out quickly.

As I said before, it is most useful when it comes to working out oddly phrased rhythms. Let's for example construct a two bar pattern in 7/4. What I want you to do is to sing one bar of the written phrase (Example 6) whilst counting off the crotchets in the manner described above. (If you can't sing then a monosyllable will do).

When you have sung the phrase through once, you should have counted off seven beats on your fingers. Repeat this round as a loop, only going up to seven each time on your fingers (four beats on the first finger and three beats on the second finger, before returning to the first finger). The point of this is to show that you don't have to go up to sixteen each time, you can go up to any number and repeat that as your unit. It's a bit like having a portable rhythmic abacus that you can never leave behind. Now try singing both bars of example two whilst counting the beats. This will mean you are counting off two groups of seven.



Try this theory with a sight-reading book containing some odd time signatures. If something is in 5/4 then you can sing what is written, count off the beats on your fingers and immediately test whether you are right. To extrapolate momentarily from the task in hand, here is Example two with the crotchet clapping cycle played on the hi-hat (with a stick!) whilst the phrases are split between the bass and snare. Try this theory with some solo snare music.

Ex 3

Here are a couple more to get you started. For Example 4 you will use a five beat cycle and for Example 5 you will need a nine beat cycle.

Ex 4

Ex 5

Another useful way of using this counting technique is when you are trying to work out an unusual rhythm from a record. For example, if there is an odd length bar then beat one will no longer come at the base of a finger. From this you can then work out what has changed. Was there one beat more or one beat less in that odd bar or, was it half a beat; is your beat now coming in the gaps of the rhythm? It's then up to you to work out how the music turned around. The finger counting system can help. Sometimes you might need to count at double the speed, making each beat a quaver instead of a crotchet.

Anyway, enough creases and finger tips, let's look a 'Narray' style rhythm from South India. It's in 6/8 and is divided 5+7.

Ex 6

On the kit;

Ex 7

Now juxtaposed with a more straightforward 6/8.

Ex 8

► This change is quite tricky, especially with a click track or a metronome. Each click of the metronome should be a dotted crotchet. Notice how the rhythm appears to accelerate at 'B'. It is easier to keep the hi-hat regular through both patterns as in Example 9.

Ex 9

A

B

Finally we'll play it as we did in Example 6, but this time on the ride cymbal whilst the hi-hat foot keeps the dotted crotchet pulse.

Ex 10

See you next time for the remedy to mad metronome disease.

