

Developing Great Inner-Groove: Creative Tips for Effective Metronome Use

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From day one of your percussion experience you are taught that a metronome is an invaluable tool for musicians. The steady chirp of a metronome instantly propels us into an involuntary foot-tapping frenzy. It seems that this age-old musical tool serves

us well, but our uses for the metronome can be expanded. In this article, I will present easy and effective alternatives to the same old approach in developing good time using a metronome.

USING A METRONOME

Many people think that using a metronome means turning it on at the beginning of your practice session and off at the end. In this case, you are using the metronome as a crutch more than a tool. It is often easy to spot students who fall prey to this, because they can play a musical excerpt with a metronome very well until it is shut off and they are asked to play it again while maintaining tempo. I find that their ability to feel themselves drag or rush is hindered because they are more used to playing time with the metronome than keeping time themselves (which takes energy and thought.) Here are a few suggestions to try when using a metronome:

Hit more than just the standard times (100, 112, 120, 132, etc...). In doing this, you are increasing your sensitivity to time. You are teaching yourself to feel the difference between 110 and 112 instead of 100 and 112. A famous musician was quoted saying, "no one plays truly 'in tune;' the greats just catch it before others do." The same is true for time. Increase your sensitivity to time, and you will find yourself among those who can keep a great groove.

Rhythms, like harmonies, need to be resolved. Let's face it; syncopations scare a lot of musicians. More times than not, these syncopations end on an up-beat or another unfriendly count. Use the metronome to find and solidify the quarter note pulse in a given syncopation. In doing this, you will find

that you can play the rhythm more effectively. The metronome can also be used to resolve these syncopations which do not end on a downbeat. The more you can identify and feel the quarter note through rhythms of this nature, the more you will be able to master these difficult rhythms.

Try using the metronome in a creative way. Set the metronome to a comfortable tempo and play your favorite exercise or etude with the click representing the upbeat. This method is common among drum set players where the click represents the hi-hat. After experimenting with this, try the same exercise with the click representing other notes of a subdivision (maybe 'e' or 'a' of a 16th note based exercise.) Now you are getting creative with your use of the metronome. There are plenty of possibilities here, and I would suggest you explore as many as possible.

Once you get the hang of this, try playing an 8th note based exercises with triplets set on the metronome or vice versa to reinforce the common 2-over-3/ 3-over-2 polyrhythm. In doing so, you are not just playing *to* the metronome, you are playing *with* it!

Rehearsing odd meters with a metronome is one of the best ways to solidify time and feel. Try practicing 7/8 or 5/8 to a metronome, and you will find that the quarter note falls on the beginning of the measure every 2 bars. Don't shy away from the metronome when facing an odd meter.

BURYING THE METRONOME

In order to be an effective musician, you need to be an effective listener. Learning how to accurately listen to the metronome is as important as learning how to accurately play with the metronome. Since the articulation of our instrument is often very short and the chirp of the metronome is even shorter, mistakes and inaccuracies are obvious. It seems that when you can hear the metronome and you are steady with it, everything is fine. Try this alternative approach to using the metronome:

Turn the volume of the metronome so that you can only hear it if you are not playing with it. Start with something simple such as triplets or 16th notes at one height. Make sure every quarter note click is exactly with the metronome. This is not as easy as it seems. At this point, you should only hear the metronome when you are not exactly with it. If you hear the sound of the metronome in front of your sound, you are too slow. If the sound of the metronome is behind your sound, you are too fast. This concept is called "burying the metronome" and

is a great step towards gaining a natural independence of time.

After an amount of time has been devoted to crafting this concept, you will be able to make quicker, less noticeable adjustments while playing. After applying this concept to a variety of musical and technical examples, you will find that your ability to feel time breathe (which is not necessarily a bad thing) has increased.

Now that your sensitivity to time is starting to increase, you can begin to develop a more commanding rhythmic approach to your music. Although these concepts are not the end-all approach to music (remember, music is the goal), they can be filed away in your arsenal of tools to becoming a better musician. Enjoy!

Examples of exercises for developing great inner-groove with the metronome will be available shortly.

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