



DRUM SET LESSONS

CURRICULUM / TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

Phase 1: The first phase emphasizes proper grip and technique in order to assure that the student plays correctly and reduces the chance of acquiring a repetitive motion injury. Good technique is stressed throughout the entire span of lessons and the foundations are laid forth during the first month or so. The 40 International Drum Rudiments are used in conjunction with “Stick Control” to teach proper technique including grip, fulcrum, stick columns, rebound control, wrist strokes, finger strokes, accents, and relaxation. Proper practice techniques are also covered. Beat studies are implemented in order to expose students to tempo, time and meter. Reading fundamentals are covered as well as basic music theory pertaining to rhythm. It is important to note that no two students are alike and that the amount of time devoted to practicing as well as the student’s individual skill level plays a pivotal role in determining the progress of the student.

Phase 2: The second phase emphasizes the building of a vocabulary utilizing the rudiments and sticking patterns covered previously. The concepts of “One Surface Learning” as well as Coordinated Independence are introduced. Coordinated Independence is one of the most challenging aspects to playing the drums and much time is spent breaking the techniques down. Creativity is encouraged and the students will learn how to multiply the patterns they’ve learned exponentially! The student will also be introduced to different styles of drumming and how they are inter-related.

Phase 3: The third phase includes having the students choose songs they want to learn. They will learn the fundamentals of writing and reading a chart for the song and playing along with it. Advanced styles will be introduced as well as specific techniques pertaining to the genres

the student wishes to concentrate on.

Teaching Philosophy: The goal of this curriculum is to accommodate each student's potential and cater to each student's individual needs and wants. There are no definitive black and white lines as to where the aforementioned phases start and stop. Rather, each of the phases can overlap and intertwine as the student continues the learning process. The end result is to keep the student interested, challenged, rewarded and most importantly, playing the music they want to play as quickly as possible! The tools learned from this curriculum are designed to stay with the students indefinitely and create a solid foundation with which to achieve their musical goals.

There are five tools I strongly feel should be the foundation of any drummer's toolbox.

They are:

- Technique
- Rudiments
- Coordinated Independence
- Reading
- Knowledge of different styles

PRACTICE

Without solid practice habits, the student cannot hope to better themselves musically.

Here are some practical guidelines to ensure good practice habits:

- Practice slowly
- Quality not quantity
- Schedule each practice session
- Focus on what you cannot yet do rather than practicing what you can already do
- Have realistic goals
- Don't be overly critical
- Set aside time at the end of the practice session to have fun and jam!

Muscle memory is an important concept in practicing. Our muscles have memory and therefore it is critical to practice slowly. If you relax and concentrate on the proper muscle movements, you will train your muscles to play the figure correctly and it will be easier for you to play faster in the long run. The bottom line is that if you learn it incorrectly, you have to waste time unlearning it before you can learn it properly.

Every drummer has a comfort zone where he or she feels best playing. Our goal through regular practicing is to expand that comfort zone. By focusing on that which we cannot yet do, eventually we will become successful. There are two hurdles to overcome when learning new material. First, the technical hurdle. This is comprised of all the various techniques and motions needed to execute the task at hand. The second hurdle is the emotional hurdle. Once we have the ability to play the material, we must make it feel good and groove. The more we clear these hurdles, the more these former obstacles become new tools to find their way into our toolboxes and into our “everyday” playing.

RUDIMENTS

Rudiments provide an instant vocabulary on the drum set for beats, fills and solos. The name rudiment implies something foundational, and as such we stress their importance as essential to proper learning.

READING

Reading music is a powerful tool that allows the musicians to write down ideas, figure out phrases, expand their learning from instructional books and compose “cheat sheets” for auditions, gigs and sessions.

I encourage all my students to bring in CD’s of songs they are interested in learning. Drum notation, chart and transcription reading become far more palatable when presented in this fashion. There are several fringe benefits to this method as well. These include playing along to enjoyable music that is in time and analyzing the recorded drummer’s phrasing, fills, beats and style. There is an old saying that good artists borrow and great artists steal. Copying your favorite drummer is another effective way to increase your drumming vocabulary. Even if you play the pattern note for note, it still won’t sound exactly like the original drummer. We all are different and we feel time differently.

COORDINATED INDEPENDENCE

Coordinated Independence is a fancy phrase that simply describes a drummer’s ability to do different things with different limbs in an organized manner. I believe the concept of “One Surface Learning” to be an immeasurable aid in achieving a level of proficiency with multi-limb independence. The concept is simple. It is based on patterns (such as rudiments) that are played on one surface such as a practice pad or snare drum repeatedly until the muscles have memorized the motion. Once the pattern is learned, the limbs move the sticks around the various sound sources of the drum set. This concept allows you to squeeze the most you can out of each pattern you learn. I feel it

is one of the quickest and easiest ways to amass a vocabulary of multi-limbed patterns on the drums.

Reading music also helps in the quest for Coordinated Independence.

TECHNIQUE

While sitting up straight at the drum throne, allow your arms to completely relax and fall to the floor. Make sure your shoulders are relaxed. From this position, slowly raise your forearms so that they are parallel to the floor, but make sure your shoulders and hands are still completely relaxed; the hands should be drooping at the end of your forearms. Your elbows should be close to your sides. As silly as this position may look, it is what I call the “home position” and is the healthiest and most natural position I’ve found to play drums from! This position promotes ergonomic body motion. This healthy approach to drum set playing focuses on natural body motions as opposed to unnatural or forced body motions. All the techniques I teach ranging from grips to the various strokes (wrist, arm, finger) are all based on this natural approach to playing the drums.

RELAXATION + CONTROL = SPEED AND ENDURANCE