

# MATT MURPHY PERCUSSIVE SERVICES

## Drum Set Lessons

### What to Expect

#### INTRODUCTION

There are two pitfalls that the serious drum student must strive to avoid. The first is to become consumed with the pursuit of technique. Technique is a means to an end as opposed to an end in itself. Technique should be a tool the drummer uses to best express musical ideas. The second is to view any particular technique in a dogmatic fashion. All techniques should be sampled to see if they suit the individual drummer's needs. Everyone is different. For example, two people working out in the gym may have different methods for exercise. One may prefer the stair-stepper while the other prefers the treadmill. Both achieve a good cardiovascular workout, however the methods used vary significantly. The following principles have dramatically helped my playing and that of my students.

#### OVERVIEW

I have had much success in my teaching practice employing a comprehensive approach to drum set playing. In the past, it was quite normal for a beginning drum student to stay on a practice pad for a year or more prior to sitting behind a set of drums. While this makes for a good set of hands, all but the most diehard students tend to become bored and discouraged. By working on several areas at once, the student stays motivated while learning the fundamentals.

All musicians should view themselves as craftsmen with a job to accomplish. Like all good craftsmen who take pride in their work, we need to have the proper tools for the job. The more tools we can put into our toolboxes, the better prepared we will be to handle the job at hand. 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*

These fundamentals will create a solid base on which the student can build their drumming future and continue to accumulate additional tools for their toolbox.

My approach entails each student becoming familiar with the basics of each fundamental. Once the student displays a level of proficiency in the basics, we shift to a more comprehensive style involving the student having multiple goals from each area of the fundamentals to practice simultaneously.

## **PRACTICE**

Practice does not make perfect. Perfect practice makes perfect! Without solid practice habits, the student cannot hope to better themselves musically. Taking lessons without practicing is like going to the doctor's and not taking the prescribed medicine! As a teacher, I can educate, diagnose, encourage, demonstrate and monitor. I cannot magically impart the skills needed to become a solid drummer. One must practice diligently in order to grow.

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 try to push and force the speed, you will train your muscles to play sloppily. If you relax, 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 right.

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. Firstly, 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. This is how the comfort zone is expanded.

## **RUDIMENTS**

Rudiments are a point of contention among many drummers. When I was young, many thought rudiments were old fashioned and strictly for marching bands. When I was a little older, I began to realize just how vital the rudiments are to drumming. Besides the history behind them, rudiments are essential for building technique. They also provide an instant vocabulary on the drum set for beats, fills and solos. The name rudiment implies something foundational. There is a reason they have endured all these years. It is impossible to play the drums without playing rudiments whether the drummer playing is aware of them or not! Why try to reinvent the wheel? It is much easier to accept a method of sticking patterns that have stood the test of time and are tried, true and proven to work.

## **READING**

Reading music is another sore spot amongst musicians. I personally feel it is an invaluable tool, just like reading and writing any language. 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. We all have different backgrounds and influences. This is what makes us unique. As babies we learn to talk by emulating our parents. Even though they are exerting their influence upon us pretty much 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, we eventually grow up to be our own person. There may be resemblances, but we are unique in every way.

### **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. You will be surprised at how different it sounds when in actuality you are playing the same pattern. 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. The concept of drum notation is not unlike the "connect the dot" puzzles we all did as children. If one can count and connect the dots so to speak, one can learn Coordinated Independence.

### **COUNTING**

I cannot express the importance of counting. Again, many drum students tend to agonize over the virtues of counting. I view counting much like I view training wheels on a bike. Counting helps you learn. Once you learn, you no longer need to count and can rely on feel.

### **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***

## **Teaching Philosophy & My System**

The goal of this system is to accommodate each student's potential and cater to each student's individual needs and wants. There are no definitive lines or timetables as to where the following 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 that they want to play as quickly as possible! The tools learned from this system are designed to stay with each student indefinitely and create a solid foundation with which to achieve their musical goals.

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. Groove 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.

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.

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.