

# DRUMWORKS

## How to improve your timekeeping

It may sound obvious but every drummer needs to be able to play in time! In other words, a drummer should be able to set the speed of a song and be able to maintain the same speed throughout.

### *How can drummers improve their 'internal clock'?*

#### ***The 'click'***

There are a number of ways to achieve this, the first of which is to get used to playing along to a 'click' (ie. a metronome or drum machine). Although many drummers feel that playing along to a click is cold and has no feel, it will help improve time keeping, especially when playing grooves and fills. The best time to use a click is during practice times when learning new techniques and chops. It is advisable, at first, to practice these at slower tempos allowing your limbs to get used to the correct motions before playing at the desired tempo.

#### ***The sequencer***

If you cannot stand the sound of a plain 'click', using a sequencer may provide a more interesting alternative. There are a wide range of sound options available such as shakers, keyboard samples, congas and cow bells and these can be very effective when used in live performances.

#### ***Backing tracks***

There are many backing tracks available which have a full band but without the drums in the mix. The only disadvantage of using these tracks is that you cannot control the tempo. Getting used to practising along to backing tracks will be beneficial for when a drummer is required to play in a studio setting.

### ***Some things to think about:***

- In the music industry today most recording situations require you to be '*click friendly*' and to be able to play along with a click or backing track
- Knowing how to play along with a click or sequencer effectively can open up many possibilities for live performances eg. connecting a click to coincide with lighting and audiovisual displays
- Don't rely on the click as a crutch; the point of practicing/playing with a click is to keep better time, it is just as important to play without the aid of a click
- Remember that you're a human and not a machine. You will never be able to keep perfect time all the time

- Learning to play along with the above time-keeping devices does not happen overnight, this is a skill that develops over a long period of time

### **Practical exercise working with a click**

Here are just a few exercises that you can put into your practice times. All you need is a metronome, a pair of sticks and a practice pad. Spend a minimum of five minutes on the first two exercises per day and watch your time keeping improve. If you fancy more of a challenge, move onto the other exercise. Enjoy!

#### **Exercise 1**

Set your click to 60bpm with a quarter note pulse. Take a few moments to get comfortable with the feel and tempo of the click and perhaps count out each quarter note beat. Once comfortable, play the quarter notes with alternating hands beginning with your leading hand (see below).



After a minute or so, move to the next bar - this time playing 8<sup>th</sup> notes. I have included a counting system below each staff.



Next, move to 8<sup>th</sup> note triplets for a further couple of minutes.



Then move to 16<sup>th</sup> notes and repeat until this feels comfortable.



When you feel that you have mastered the above (i.e not just being able to play the notes but more importantly, being exactly in time with the click and playing notes evenly spaced), try playing one bar of each line starting with quarter notes and finishing with 16<sup>th</sup> notes.

If you want more of a challenge, try adding quintuplets, sextuplets, septuplets and 32<sup>nd</sup> notes and/or taking the tempo up in increments of five bpm.

## **Exercise 2**

Play the first exercise but at a slower tempo (35-40bpm) this may sound simple but it is harder than you think. As drummers we need to be able to play within the widest range of tempos possible. Some things we learn on a drum kit can be very hard to play at slower tempos therefore it is important to spend some time working on these areas.

A tip for this exercise is to count the subdivisions aloud. Start by counting 16<sup>th</sup> notes and then when comfortable, count 8<sup>th</sup> notes and then quarter notes.

## **Exercise 3**

As drummers, we rely so heavily on beats 1 and 3, you would think our lives depended on it! Why not set the click so it just plays on 2 and 4. You will have to reduce the speed of the metronome by half in order to do this and count out a quarter note pulse (counting beats 1 and 3 in between the click pulses). When comfortable with this exercise, why not incorporate it with Exercise 1.

## **Exercise 4**

If you enjoyed the previous exercise, try taking it to the next level by setting the click so it plays on the "&" of each beat.

Still not challenged? How about setting the click so it falls on the "e" or "d" of the beat?!!!