

Grooving and Syncopated Fills Part 1

By Bill Stuhly

Drum fills are an expression of the music on the drums. If we were to play groove all the time it would sound monotonous. Even dance songs, which are ALL about the groove, have some sort of syncopated rhythmical device to break it up. On the flip side too many fills and music becomes secondary. As an example, if you were to play all 16th notes unorchestrated as a fill over two measures it would eventually sound something like this: implayingadrumfillthats16thnotesthatlaststtwomeasuresormore

Hard to read but if you add breaks and punctuation to the sentence the point becomes clearer. The pauses let you reflect on what you've heard and give you a chance to decide on your response. Music especially drums needs breaks and punctuation to make it clear and get the point across.

In this article we'll take a well know syncopated rhythm and use that as a guide for inspiration on the drums. The theme with all my articles is—listening and singing becomes feeling.

Syncopated Listening:

Let's make a fill from the syncopation of "Kashmir" by Led Zeppelin. The drums play a solid backbeat and the vocals are long stretched out phrases. The Da Da Da rhythm of the gtr and bass is the major syncopation in the song and counterbalances the simplicity of the other instruments. Technically it's a 12 beat long syncopation, which is a rhythmical take on a standard blues form.

Looking like this:

Musical notation for a 12-beat syncopated rhythm in 4/4 time. The notation shows a series of eighth notes and quarter notes with stems pointing down, indicating a drum fill. A metronome symbol is shown below the first beat.

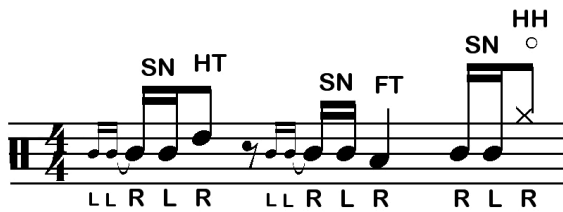
To use this as a fill rhythm let's use the first measure of the phrase:

Musical notation for the first measure of the 12-beat syncopated rhythm in 4/4 time. The notation shows a series of eighth notes and quarter notes with stems pointing down, indicating a drum fill. A metronome symbol is shown below the first beat.

Now adding some flare or articulations we can spice it up. In this fill we'll add The Ruff in the beginning of the phrases:

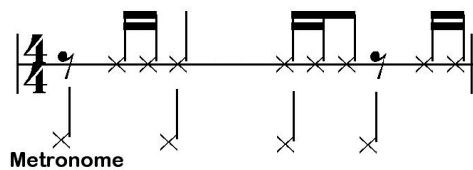
Musical notation for a drum fill with articulations in 4/4 time. The notation shows a series of eighth notes and quarter notes with stems pointing down, indicating a drum fill. A metronome symbol is shown below the first beat. Below the notation are the letters LLR LR LLR LR RLR.

Do a little orchestration and you have the final product:

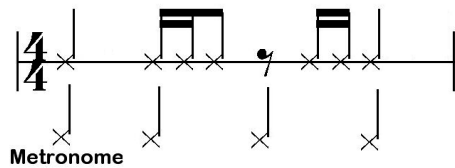


Now take measures 2 and 3 start the process over:

Measure 2:



Measure 3:



After you master the timing and feel of these syncopations, play a groove then use one or more of these as fills. For later studies, take your favorite song, find the main syncopation and use the same technique to tap into more rhythms.

In part 2 we'll use more Ruffs, Flams, stickings, and faster rhythms to accentuate the syncopations that will be discussed.

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