

Drum Kit Coordination Patterns

Jazz and Blues



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ISBN: 978-0-9957273-9-7

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Preface

This book presents a collection of patterns that are functional within swing and ternary contexts, especially pertinent to jazz and blues styles. The patterns are presented in systematic collections that allow the student to see precisely where each limb is placed, and how the patterns fit together.

This book aims to fill a certain hole left by many coordination books that require the student to mentally combine and visualise the different voices as a coherent pattern. Many books that tackle coordination rely on presenting the different voices separately to avoid writing out pages and pages of similar combinations. The student is then instructed to combine a certain cymbal pattern with a certain bass drum and snare drum pattern to produce the combined pattern to be practised. For new students especially, this creates an insurmountable challenge because they lack the experience required to mentally link the separate voices (and their limbs) in such an abstract way.

When teaching from such books, I often found myself writing out the finished pattern for the student to practise. Other students would likewise write them out for themselves so that they could ensure accuracy. For this reason, I decided to bite the bullet and write out the pages and pages of patterns once and for all. The results, of course, are much closer to a reference guide – a dictionary – than a book of concept, hence this book's title. Nevertheless, having something like this to hand in the studio has proven immensely useful for guiding students through new coordination patterns without either of us having to write them out from abstract instructions.

This book is not an attempt to create a comprehensive and complete guide to total four-way coordination. Firstly, such attempts already exist, and secondly, such books are generally more conceptual than practical. Four-way coordination does exist, and it is somewhat necessary within most aspects of drumming, but it is not something to be gained by simply working through endless permutations and ticking off every possibility. In my book *Broken Time Drumming*, I tackled four-way coordination in a very specific way, linking the coordination to musical motifs within a jazz context. For a similar reason, the coordination patterns presented here are done so within a timekeeping context, practical within the eponymous styles of music. This is not a book of four-way coordination, but a reference book for coordination *within a timekeeping context* and, as such, as practical as such a book could possibly be.

It is my hope that teachers and students alike will find benefit from having these reference sets readily available for them to study. It is also my hope that this book will provide players of all levels with new vocabulary and timekeeping ideas in a practical and applicable way.

- Jonathan Curtis, August 2022

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Introduction

This book fulfils one very simple role: it provides a categorised selection of reference patterns for drum kit coordination in a timekeeping context. In simple terms, these patterns provide a specific route for developing coordination for different types of drum grooves.

This book is not an attempt to provide stylistic, conceptual, or musical analysis, and for this reason it should be tackled with a competent teacher who can apply this material in its correct context. Instead, this book is a centralised reference for the common patterns used when playing music of a certain style. This allows the student (and teacher) to quickly address issues of coordination, and provide structured practice material for the student to use in a simple and easily accessible manner.

This volume covers the fundamental patterns for use in jazz, blues, and swung styles of drumming. Though these sets in no way cover the entirety of possibilities within these musical contexts, they represent the fundamental coordination patterns required to produce timekeeping patterns of a more advanced nature. In studying the fundamentals as presented here, the student will learn a stronger grasp of the instrument, and with it an insight into how the more complex patterns are created.

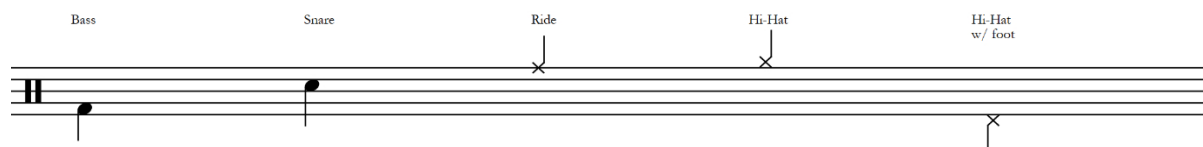
Students should begin by reading the following section that details this book's intended usage. On a basic level, the sets can be tackled individually, either in order or in isolation. The beginning of each set features a brief explanation of how the pattern has been derived, and presents it leading with either hand where appropriate. Students are encouraged to go beyond this first step and apply the ideas from the following section to each of the sets, exploring the pattern and developing their own comprehensive vocabulary.

Ultimately, the incorporation of vocabulary results from a deep and familiar knowledge of fundamental patterns, and more importantly, a working knowledge of how they can be applied, combined, varied, and expanded. These sets provide a reference guide for coordination patterns fundamental to many styles of drumming, but they can also provide the basis for a deep and comprehensive vocabulary, should the student delve deeply enough into their application.

A book like this necessarily deals with a vast number of combinations and permutations. Realistically, it cannot hope to include every possible combination involving every possible permutation for each voice. A balance must be struck between practicality and completionism. By necessity of practicality, certain permutation and combination possibilities have been excluded.

The choice of which possibilities to exclude has been made based on their idiosyncrasy in application. In other words, possible combinations that rarely feature in the actual playing of drum grooves have been excluded.

How to Use This Book



The pattern sets in this book present the typical combinations found in contemporary drum kit playing, geared towards jazz, blues, and swung styles of music, including ternary patterns in 6/8 and 12/8. The patterns chosen represent the most common, functional, and applicable ways that the drummer might keep time within those contexts.

Set 1 comprises patterns based on the fundamental jazz swing pattern. The ride cymbal maintains a steady pattern; quarter notes in **Set 1.0**, and swung 8th notes on the second and fourth beats in **Set 1.1**. The foot-operated hi-hat plays on beats 2 and 4 throughout.

The subsets focus on the bass and snare drum placements, the foot-operated hi-hat placements, and combinations of those three voices against the ride cymbal pattern, plotted on both an 8th note and triplet subdivision. The patterns represent the ways in which it is possible to place the requisite voice against an unchanging ride cymbal pattern.

Set 2 presents patterns that can be played as shuffles, most often found within blues music. All patterns in this set maintain an accented downbeat on the snare drum. Sometimes this is accompanied by ghost notes, but emphasis is always maintained on the downbeat.

Set 3 is focused on fundamental grooves in 6/8. This comprises two dotted quarter notes to the bar, each containing three 8th notes or six 16th notes. The downbeat is again on the second beat of the bar, but the 8th notes are played straight and evenly spaced throughout. The subsets present 8th and 16th note bass and snare drum placements, as well as paradiddle variations between the cymbal and snare drum, again with the downbeat maintained on the second beat.

Set 4 presents a version of a half-time shuffle in 12/8. The downbeat is on the third beat of the bar, and a ghost note pattern is played between the cymbal and snare drum. The patterns present bass drum placements before and after the downbeat.

Combinations

Material from the sets can be combined in various ways. Firstly, lettered exercises within each set can be combined to create longer phrases. For example, within **Set 1.1 – Bass Drum Set**, the student may combine *b* with *c* to create a four-beat combination.

Secondly, material from within the same category can be combined. For example, the student may combine pattern *d* from **1.1 – Bass Drum Set** with *f* from **1.1 – Snare Drum Set** to create a more intricate four-beat combination with two moving parts, namely the bass drum and the snare drum.

Thirdly, material from different sets can be combined, such as combining **Set 1.1 – Bass Drum Set** pattern *f*, with **Set 1.4 – Three-Voice Patterns** pattern *d* to create a unique four-beat combination. Some sets will be more suitable to combination than others.

With regards to pattern combinations, it is neither necessary nor productive to attempt to tackle *all possible* combinations using any of the above approaches. The main idea is to discover new patterns, learn the coordination required, and to apply them musically. Rather than attempting to

tackle as many combinations as possible, a more productive approach is to deeply integrate a smaller selection of patterns into an deep vocabulary.

Likewise, this combinatorial approach can be used to create grooves of different time signatures. A pattern can be created in 3/4 time by taking an exercise from a particular set, and half on an exercise from another exercise. For example, we might begin with exercise *a* from **Set 1.1**, and then add the second beat of *b* to make a combination that is three beats long. We can follow a similar process to create a groove in 5/4, combining two full exercises and half of a third.

A similar approach can be adopted in later sets involving ternary time signatures. A pattern in 9/8 can be created by combing one pattern and half over another from **Set 3**, or by removing a beat at the end of patterns from **Set 4**. Students should experiment to find other possibilities within the material.

Alternate Endings

Certain sets conclude with a subset entitled **Alternate Endings**. These present a list of phrases that occupy the second half of the patterns from that set without the preceding beat. This is to enable students to create further combinations by applying their chosen ending to all of the bass drum patterns from the preceding set. Writing out every one of these endings with every possible bass drum placement would have resulted in thousands of patterns per set. Presenting the alternate endings in list form enables students to focus on one, and to apply it throughout the preceding sets with relative ease.

Vocabulary

Despite the title of this book, its ultimate purpose is the acquisition of new vocabulary. Working on coordination patterns like those presented here exposes the student to new ideas, combinations, and applications, which will directly inform and expand their repertoire when it comes to timekeeping and groove playing.

The student is encouraged to spend time truly internalising and memorising the patterns within the sets, such that they are available and ready to be played when called upon in a musical situation.

Hi-Hat and Ride

All of the patterns in this book can be played on either the ride cymbal or the hi-hat. In many cases, the cymbal pattern is written on the ride cymbal, with the foot-operated hi-hat playing on beats 2 and 4 of the bar. However, students are encouraged to try the same patterns using the hi-hat instead of the ride cymbal. In this instance, the student simply keeps the hi-hat closed, and the hi-hat foot notation can be ignored.

Students new to a particular pattern are in fact encouraged to begin with the cymbal pattern on the hi-hat, removing the necessity for foot operation. This simplifies the coordination requirement, and allows the student to familiarise themselves with the core pattern before tackling the more advanced version.

Practice

There are many theories and working models that address the concept of practising. Long or short sessions; the frequency of sessions; working on a single idea or rotating a small number of ideas;

there are arguments available in the literature for each of these concepts, and it is beyond the scope of this book to address them all here. Suffice it to say that the one thing that links all theories of practice is the necessity of repetition.

Students will find far more benefit – and far faster results – when a smaller number of patterns are practised for greater periods of repetition. Simply put, practising two, three, or four patterns for one hundred repetitions each will produce more effective results than practising the whole set four times each.

Within these repetitions, the student is further encouraged to switch between the selection of patterns frequently. If they are working on d , e , f , and g from a particular set, rather than practising them one hundred times each in order, the student could instead try practising them twenty-five times each, four times, varying the order each time:

1st set of 25: $d-e-f-g$

3rd set of 25: $g-e-f-d$

2nd set of 25: $d-f-e-g$

4th set of 25: $e-d-g-f$

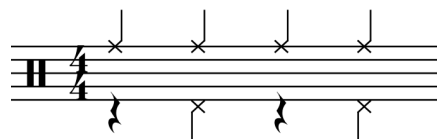
In the first set, the student plays d twenty-five times, then e twenty-five times, and so on for f and g . A hundred repetitions have been played in total, twenty-five for each of the four patterns. The same process is repeated for the second, third, and fourth sets, with the order of the four patterns changed each time. By the end of the fourth set, all four patterns will have been repeated one-hundred times, but not consecutively.

The above sets have their orders randomised. The student should not be concerned with the order, but with the act of *transition*. It has been shown through many studies of this nature that the act of transitioning between a small selection of material during repetition is far more beneficial than spending longer periods on the same pattern. In both cases, each exercise will be repeated one hundred times, but in the method given here, the act of randomising the order and transitioning every twenty-five repetitions has been shown to increase recall and speed up the process of retention. In short, each act of transition forces the brain and nervous system to relearn the solution to the problem posed by each pattern.

Finally, the student should aim to run through an entire set, both in order, and in a random order, transitioning between patterns without pause. This should only be attempted once the individual patterns have been thoroughly learned and practised in the aforementioned manner. The goal at this stage changes from learning the patterns' execution, to learning and listening to the vocabulary created by combining the patterns in various orders. Once each pattern can be executed confidently, the priority becomes the learning and incorporation of new vocabulary.

Set 1.0

The patterns in this set are based on a sustained quarter note pattern on the ride cymbal. For the first four subsets, the foot-operated hi-hat maintains a steady pulse on beats 2 and 4 of the bar:



From the fifth subset onwards, the foot-operated hi-hat becomes involved with the pattern placements, and so its placement on beats 2 and 4 is dropped.

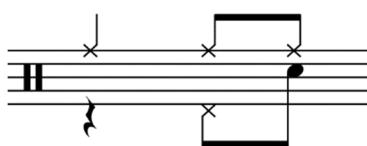
The patterns in this set are based on a triplet subdivision. However, only those patterns which involve the middle note of a triplet are written with triplet brackets. Notes that fall on the beat or swung off-beat are written as 8th notes in line with the standard practice. All 8th notes are to be played as **swung**, even when a triplet bracket is not present.

This set can be considered something of a preliminary one to the rest of the book. All patterns in this book are written against a steady pulse; quarter notes in the case of 2/4 and 4/4, and dotted quarter notes in the case of 6/8 and 12/8. Practising the fundamental coordination patterns against that pulse is recommended, such that the internal phrasing and execution can be strongly felt against the quarter note.

This set is closely related with **Set 1.1** that follows. The sole difference is the presence of the swung 8th note on the ride cymbal's second beat in **Set 1.1**. Nevertheless, that can create significant coordination challenge when an attempt is made to integrate it against the coordination patterns presented here. Students may wish to tackle the two sets in parallel, such that they practise **Set 1.0 – Snare Drum** in conjunction with **Set 1.1 – Snare Drum** together in order to feel the difference pertaining to the swung ride cymbal note.

All patterns in **Set 1** are shown across two beats in the time signature of 2/4. This allows for the most clarity when presenting bass drum and snare drum placements. Each two-beat pattern, when played twice, creates a pattern in 4/4 in which the second half is a repetition of the first.

If the pattern within the set looks like this:



When repeated, it will form a bar of 4/4 that looks like this:



This approach means that the four-beat combinations as they would appear in the time signature of 4/4, of which there are many, can be created by combining the two-beat exercises within each set.

Set 1.0 – Snare Drum

a. 

b. 

c. 

d. 

e. 

f. 

g. 

h. 

i. 

j. 

k. 

l. 

m. 

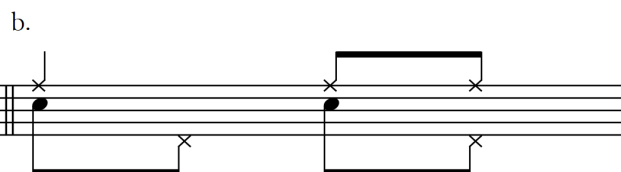
n. 

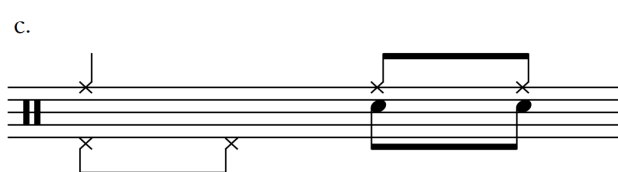
o. 

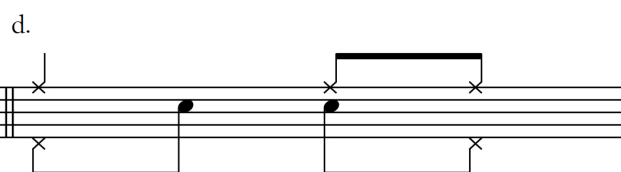
p. 

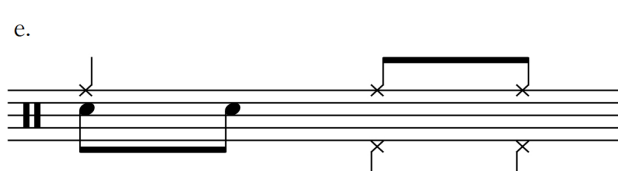
Set 1.1 – Hi-Hat and Snare Drum

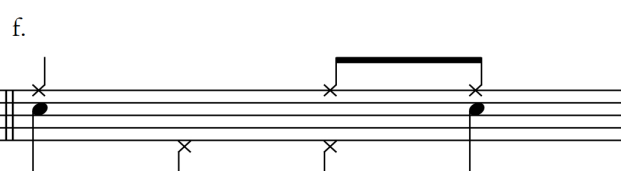
a. 

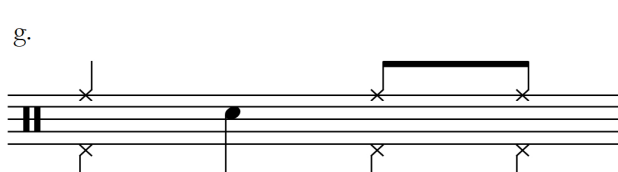
b. 

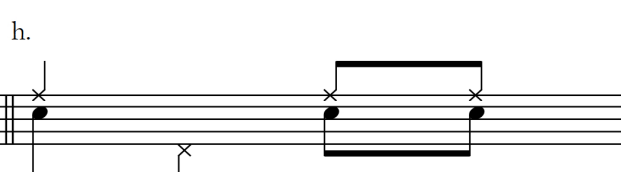
c. 

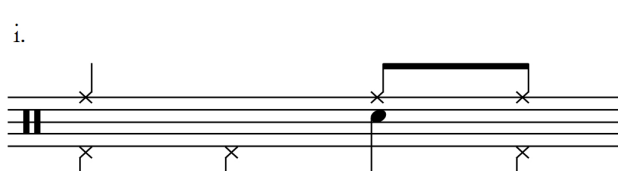
d. 

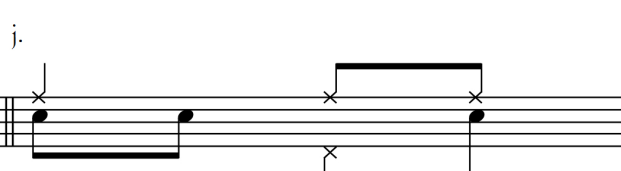
e. 

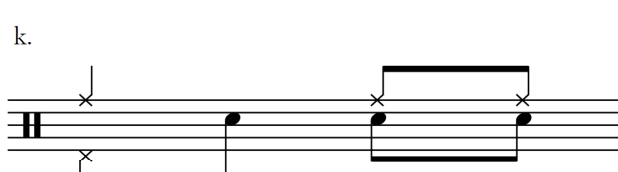
f. 

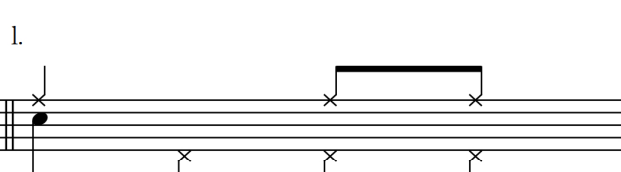
g. 

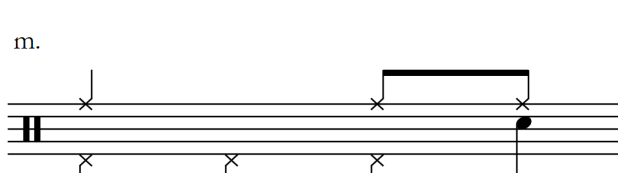
h. 

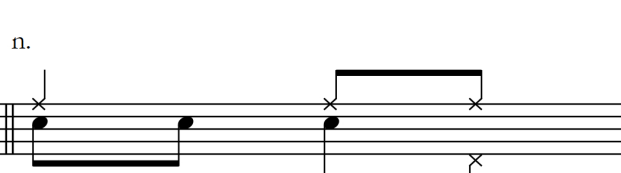
i. 

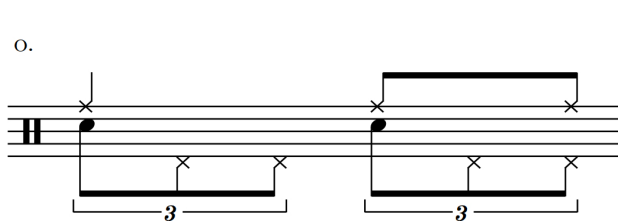
j. 

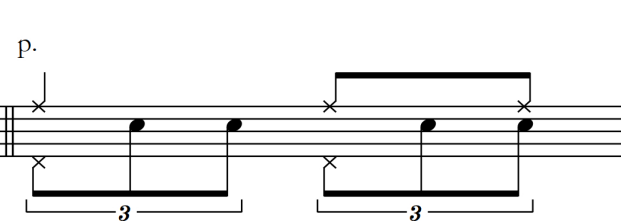
k. 

l. 

m. 

n. 

o. 

p. 

q. r.

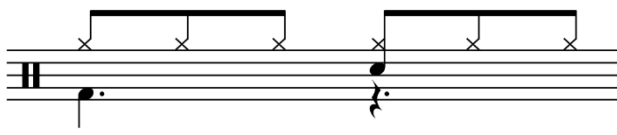
s. t.


u. v.

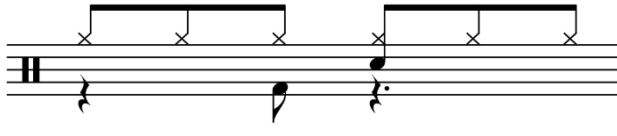
w. x.


y.


Set 3.1 – Bass Drum Expanded


a. 

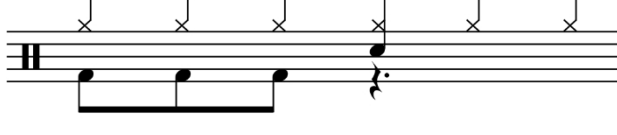
b. 


c. 

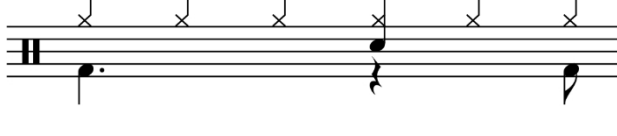
d. 


e. 

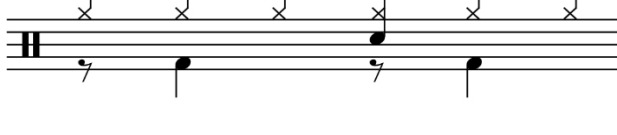
f. 


g. 


h. 


i. 


j. 


k. 

l. 

m. 

n. 

o. 

p. 

Set 3 Combination Matrix

This matrix shows the three patterns from **Set 3.3** to **3.5**. The left-hand column shows the first half of the pattern, and the right-hand shows the second. Combinations can be created by combining any pattern from the left with any from the right. Once memorised sufficiently, the student can take the newly created sticking combination and run through the bass drum placements as they appear in the preceding sets.

a.

R L R L R R

a.

L R L R L L

b.

R L L R L R

b.

L R R L R L

c.

R L R R L R

c.

L R L L R L

Set 4.1

The patterns in this set are based on a half-time shuffle. Though commonly employed using a triplet subdivision in the time signature of 4/4, the patterns are presented here in 12/8 to allay the usage of tuplet brackets on each beat.

This pattern is referred to by many names. Fans of Jeff Porcaro might recognise the basic pattern as it pertains to the *Rosanna Shuffle*, a pattern played on the Toto song that gives it its name.

R L R R L R R L R R L R

The ghost notes should be kept dynamically low in contrast to the downbeat on the third beat of the bar.

Students are encouraged to practise the pattern with the sticking reversed:

L R L L R L L R L L R L