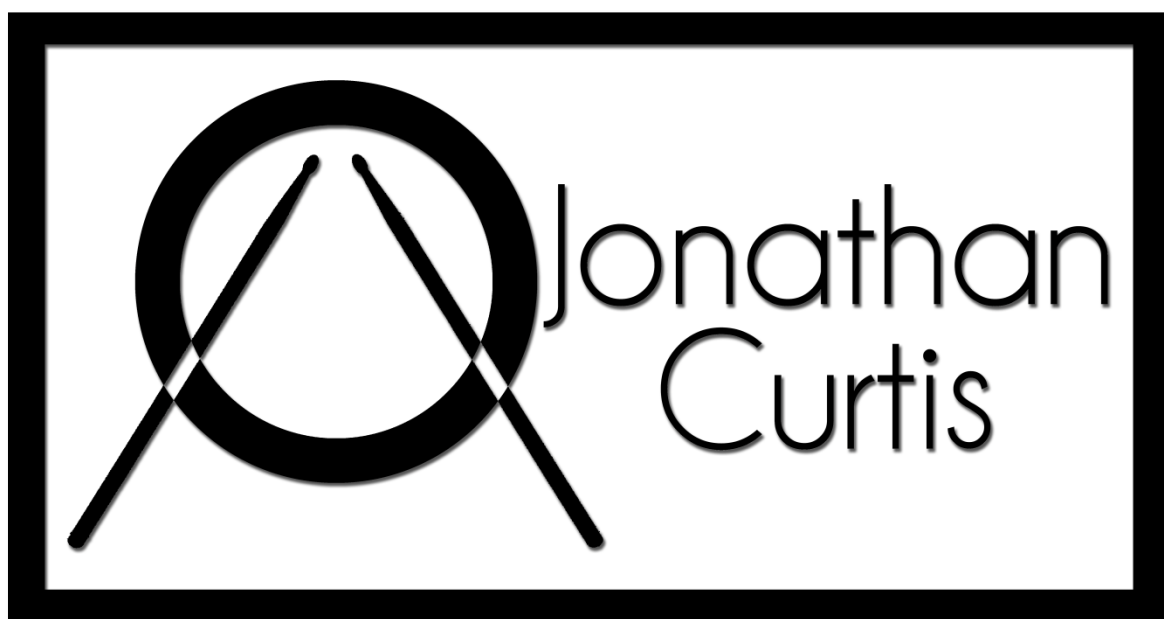


LINEAR FREEDOM

A complete concept for the development of Linear Drumming



www.JonathanCurtis.co.uk

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Acknowledgements

Thank you for buying this book. If you have stolen or pirated it, please buy me a cup of tea when you see me huddled in a cardboard box on the street.

This book would not have been possible without the unceasing support of my family and friends. My parents, from day one, have done everything to help me along my way. My wife has put up with my endless moaning and bouts of self-doubt. My friends have always been ready to pick me up and push me forward.

Thanks to the following, in no particular order:

Katherine Curtis - Linda Bell - Richard Curtis - Paul Hose
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Kyle Comerie - Mike Davis - Dan Dodson - Dave Buckley
Massimo Russo - Glenn Hallam



Dedicated to my dad, who single-handedly built me a drum studio.

Linear Freedom

Preface

When studying linear playing, I found that there was a lot of material; so much in fact that I ground to a halt simply because there was too much to do at once. There seemed to be so many combinations to somehow try to learn and memorise, and no clear path by which to navigate through it. As I trekked on in vain, I started to realise that only a small number of patterns and phrases were ever practically going to be used. Just because one drummer in one certain lick used a particular sticking does not mean that that sticking should be added to the ever-growing list of patterns to learn. There are countless reasons why that otherwise unintuitive or previously unconsidered sticking was used; anything could have caused the phrase to have been played in that particular way.

When realising this, I set about inspecting which phrases were actually going to be useful to me, and indeed usable, and why. Furthermore, I wanted to create a path through this material for myself that was intuitive and rational. I don't work well when there is no end in sight. I like to have something very particular to work on, and a way of judging my progress. As I did this, I began to develop my own approach, relying on a core of basic phrases, and applying a concept to use those phrases in combination. This book is an attempt to outline this approach. The aim of this project is to provide a systematic and comprehensive approach to various aspects of linear drumming. There are various books and pieces of educational material out there about this topic, and most are worthy of your consideration. This work is not meant to be better than those, or instead of those; rather, this presents my own approach which worked for me.

To motivate you for all of the hard work to come, here is a picture of me relaxing on set during a ZOO video shoot.

- Jonathan Curtis, 2017



Table of Contents

Single Kick Substitutions in a Binary Note Grouping	8
Consecutive Kick Substitutions in a Binary Note Grouping	30
Single and Consecutive Kick Substitutions in a Binary Note Grouping	41
Single Kick Substitutions in a Ternary Note Grouping	50
Consecutive Kick Substitutions in a Ternary Note Grouping	58
Ternary Combinations	62
Quinary Phrases	69
Septenary Phrases	73
Solos	79
Miscellanea	92
Glossary	97

How to Use This Book

This book is designed to be logical and intuitive. The opening chapters present the concept which you will use to link together the material in the later chapters. The concept is presented using simple binary phrases as an example. Once the concept has been learned and understood, you can advance on to the rest of the material in the proceeding chapters.

The concept is based around identifying the basic phrases for any given note value on the rhythmic scale between 3 (triplets) and 8 (32nd notes). The latter part of this book presents those basic phrases, with the understanding that you apply the same concept from the earlier chapters.

It is entirely possible to work through this book in order - indeed, to those new to the topic, it is encouraged. However, for those wishing to pursue a particular note value (you may have always dreamed of soloing in quintuplets!), you can follow a simple procedure. Firstly, ensure you have a strong grasp of the concept. Secondly, turn to the relevant collection of material. From there, simply apply the concept to that material.

The aim of this book is to identify the foundation material, combine the foundation material into larger phrases, and then work that material into a comprehensive, improvisational vocabulary. The process can be broadly outlined as follows:

For any given note value:

- Identify the basic phrases
 - Internalise the basic phrases
- Combine the basic phrases
 - Internalise the combinations
- Explore the possible vocabulary via the accent studies
 - Internalise the vocabulary

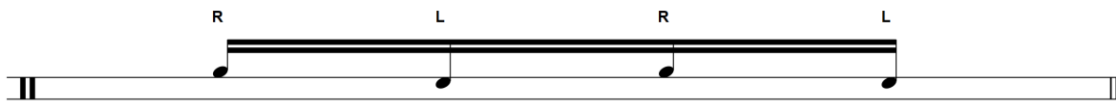
This list simplifies and drastically shortens the actual process, but it is nevertheless accurate. This book is built on the concept of working with a core set of phrases, and then applying those phrases in the accent studies. The above process is applied to every chapter in this book.

The overall goal is to be able to phrase freely in a linear fashion within any given noted grouping. Four note groupings - 16th notes - have different basic phrases to five-note groupings. However, all of the basic phrases are linked by a simple concept, which we shall see.

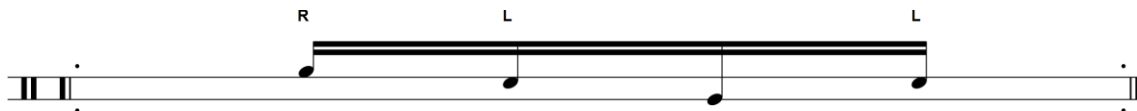
The Concept

I have repeatedly mentioned applying a concept to the basic phrases in order to use them in combination. I first applied this concept to *identify* the basic phrases, and then to work out the combinations using the same concept. Finally, this concept allows you to freely combine the basic phrases and combinations without the need to memorise them individually.

This concept relies on working with a single stroke roll within a given note value. Let us use a four-note grouping as an example. Here is a single stroke roll, phrased as four 16th notes:



As this phrase lasts for one beat in a conventional 4/4 time signature, this forms the basis for what follows. Every phrase in a four-note grouping is built around this. Think of it as a single word. When we substitute one of these strokes for the bass drum, we retain the single stroke sticking:



The bass drum has been substituted for the third stroke, which was originally played on the right hand. As this is now a bass drum, we have the sticking for this phrase: R L K L, where 'K' is the bass drum stroke. By retaining the single stroke sticking, we never get lost or confused. The first set of basic phrases work around substituting one bass drum stroke at a time. This gives us the following rule:

The hand that plays immediately before the bass drum also plays immediately after the bass drum.

By recognising this, you will have something to aim for when inserting bass drum strokes at will. When attempting to improvise with this material, so long as you remember to resume your single stroke roll after the bass drum stroke with the same hand that played before the bass drum stroke, you will be using the basic phrases automatically, without having to consciously pick and choose different combinations.

There are points of note here, as well as certain caveats. This rule does not apply to phrases which contain two consecutive bass drum strokes; as we shall see, they have their own set of slightly different rules. There are also sticking peculiarities when working with odd noted groupings. Therefore, be sure to carefully check the concept introduction at the start of each chapter.

Finally, once the basic phrases and combinations of a chapter are understood, proceed to the accent studies. These accent studies form the backbone of the process for learning and incorporating vocabulary, and simulate how you are most likely to use this material.

A Note on Engravings

Throughout this book, various staff styles are employed for the sake of simplicity. Where we are only interested in which hands are playing, I have reduced the number of lines on the staff. Where we are interested with a particular drum, the standard staff is employed. In some cases, I have borrowed a traditional concept of notation whereby the hands and feet are split, such that the right hand is shown as above the line, and the left hand below the line. This is also the case for the feet in the instance of double-pedal playing: right foot above the line, left foot below the line. This is simply to help you visualise what you are playing.

The image shows three musical staves illustrating different drum notation styles:

- Staff 1:** A single-line staff with two vertical bar lines at each end. It features three notes: one above the line labeled "Right hand", one below the line labeled "Left hand", and one above the line labeled "Bass drum".
- Staff 2:** A single-line staff with two vertical bar lines at each end. It features five notes: "Snare - RH" (above), "Snare - LH" (below), "Hi-hat - RH" (above, marked with an 'x'), "Hi-hat - LH" (below, marked with an 'x'), and "Bass drum" (above).
- Staff 3:** A standard five-line staff with two vertical bar lines at each end. It features ten notes: "Snare drum" (above), "Snare (ghost note)" (below), "Tom 1" (above), "Tom 2" (above), "Tom 3" (above), "Bass drum" (below), "Hi-hat" (above, marked with an 'x'), "Ride" (above, marked with a diamond), "Crash" (above, marked with an 'x'), and "Hi-hat (with foot)" (below, marked with an 'x').



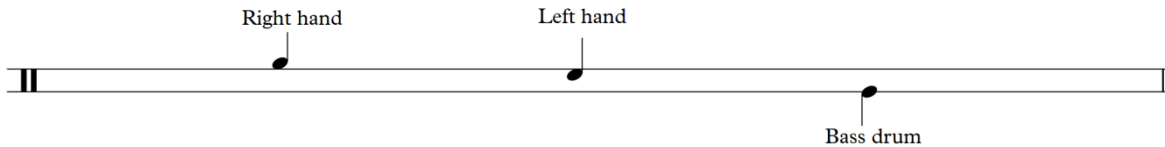
Chapter 1

Single Kick Substitutions in a Binary Note Grouping

"Order and simplification are the first steps toward the mastery of a subject."

Thomas Mann

Key



Introduction

The aim here is to develop complete linear freedom within a single stroke roll. By 'linear freedom', I am referring to the ability to insert a bass drum note freely into the roll without breaking the rhythm. The bass drum effectively substitutes one of the hands within the roll, and the single stroke roll continues either side of the bass drum. The idea is to develop this to such a level that strokes on the hands and the bass drum can be used interchangeably within any given rhythm.

'Single kick substitutions' means that, in this chapter, we are working with phrases that use only one bass drum note at a time. 'Binary note grouping' means we are working with 8th, 16th, and 32nd notes, groups of two, four, or eight, as opposed to triplets or other noted groupings. All of these binary groupings use the same basic phrases, so this chapter can be applied to 8th, 16th, and 32nd notes.

Conceptual Application

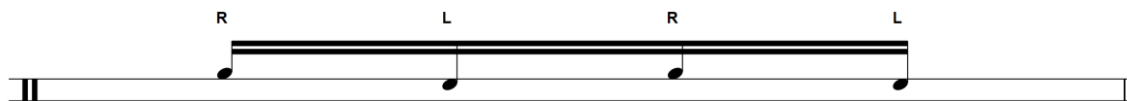
There are six basic phrases for this chapter. In each phrase, the single stroke sticking has been preserved. For this chapter, we have the following rules to remember to preserve the concept:

1. The right hand is always on the beat.
2. In the case of a single bass drum stroke: the hand that plays immediately before the bass drum, plays again immediately after the bass drum.
3. In the case of two consecutive bass drum strokes: the OPPOSITE hand from the one that plays immediately before the bass drum, plays immediately after the bass drum.

These rules make up the concept for this chapter. Keep them in mind while working through the phrases and combinations, as they will allow you to improvise freely once the basic phrases have been learned.

Identify the Basic Phrases

We begin with a single stroke roll:



To identify the basic phrases, we need to find every possible phrase that matches our criterion: one bass drum note at a time within a four-stroke grouping. They are as follows:

1.



2.



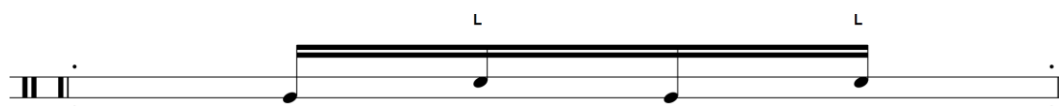
3.



4.



5.



6.



Master the Basic Phrases

Now that we have identified the basic phrases, we can set about learning them. At this stage, we are concerned primarily with the mechanical ability to play them. Mastery is a deep, holistic process. Improving your ability with a phrase in one area will improve your ability with it in all areas. Similarly, improving one phrase in this way, due to the mechanical similarity, will improve your ability with all of the other phrases.

Start with a single phrase, and work on a single surface. A snare and kick pad work, or simply the bass drum and snare drum. Ensure your dynamics and timing are even. Strive for a good balance and posture. When you speed up, your movements should not move your torso too much, so a good balance and seating position are important.

What follows are the six basic phrases, presented in various binary applications. These binary phrases work equally well for both 16th notes and 32nd notes, so both rhythms are combined in these etudes. It is helpful to treat these etudes the same way you would the exercises from Stick Control. Pick a phrase, and repeat the etudes for that phrase regularly, conditioning the correct technique.

Once you are familiar with these processes, be sure to apply them to the basic phrases from subsequent chapters.



Etudes

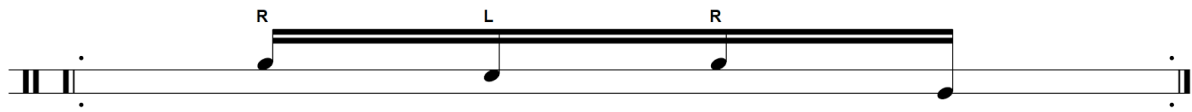
Below are some example etudes with which to practise the basic phrases. The examples all use the first phrase. Substitute in the phrase you are currently working on. Phrase 2 is given as an example at the bottom of the list. As the process of learning phrases can be open ended, consider setting a tempo target for each set of etudes per phrase. Once you can play every etude at the target tempo, move on to the next phrase and repeat the process.



Phrase 2 Substitutions:



Orchestration of the Basic Phrases



This phrase is one of our basic six. It is one of the key building blocks of the vocabulary we are trying to build. When working on this, our goal is two-fold. Firstly, we want to improve our mechanical ability to physically play the phrase. This includes familiar aims such as building speed, accuracy, power, manoeuvrability, and fluidity with it around the drums. Secondly, we want to integrate this phrase into our long-term vocabulary. This is achieved by exploring the various ways in which it can be applied, and building it into our larger framework.

Orchestration describes the act of moving the phrase in various ways around the kit. Playing the hands on different drums, moving the left hand to the hi-hat, or moving the right hand to the ride are all examples of orchestration. Orchestration can make an average phrase sound fresh and interesting, and can unlock some previously unconsidered possibilities. As this is one of our basic phrases, we want to go as deep as we can with it. The sticking should stay the same as in the original phrase, regardless of the orchestration.

If we look at our basic phrase, there are only four strokes. We are somewhat limited in what we can do each time we play it. The right hand plays twice, the left hand once, and the bass drum once. We cannot orchestrate our bass drum. That means we have the two rights and a left to work with for this phrase.

For every time we play this phrase, we can play one, two, or three different surfaces. We can play all three hand strokes on the same surface, split the hands between two surfaces, or play a different surface each stroke.



Single Surface Orchestration

If we decide to play all three strokes on the same surface, we will end up with something like this:



The phrase is moved as a whole entity each beat, with the hands playing all on the same drum each time. This is arguably the easiest version, as the hands simply follow each other, and the shape of your playing stays the same.



As you can see, however, options are limited here. If you have three drums on your drum kit, there are three places you can play this phrase.

Two-Surface Orchestration

This idea involves setting the hands on two different surfaces for the duration of the phrase. In this case, the right hand would stay on one surface, with the left hand on the other.



In beats 1 and 3 of this example, the right hand plays on the high tom, while the left hand stays on the snare. On beats 2 and 4, the right hand plays the floor tom with the left hand on the middle tom.



Orchestrating in this way can provide for interesting cross-over variations. In the above example, only the hi-hat and snare are used, but the hands swap places each beat, almost in an inversion. This can sound very interesting, but also risks getting messy or confused when used randomly. Make sure you really listen to the sounds you are making when you try out these ideas.

Three-Surface Orchestration

This time, the right hand will move to a different surface for the second stroke, allowing you to play three different surfaces per phrase.



This variation provides the most possibilities, but is mechanically a little more difficult to execute. The idea here is to essentially move your hands freely all across the drum set without changing the basic ingredients of the phrase. The sticking and rhythm should stay the same no matter how you orchestrate.

Experimentation

While the three stages of orchestration may seem simple at first glance, each stage can provide an unforeseen or unexpected challenge. The goal is to master each of the foundation phrases, fully incorporating all of their possibilities into your regular vocabulary. Here is an example of two-surface orchestration, changing the surfaces each beat:



The left hand stays on the snare, playing ghost notes throughout. The right hand orchestrates between the hi-hat or ride cymbal, and an accent on the snare drum to create a downbeat. The placement of the bass drum on the last semi-quaver of each beat gives this groove a syncopated, displaced feel.



Orchestration Examples

As a 4-beat fill around the drums as 16th notes, using three-surface orchestration (basic phrase #2):

♩ = 165

As a 4-beat fill around the drums as 32nd notes, using two-surface orchestration (basic phrase #4):

♩ = 96

As a groove as 16th notes in 7/8 (basic phrase #3):

♩ = 144 (♩ = 288)

Within a simple groove as a 32nd note phrase in 3/4 (basic phrase #1):

♩ = 108

Please note that these are to serve as examples. Aim to be able to come up with your own examples. The idea is total integration of these phrases.