

# Straight 8<sup>ths</sup> Groove Project - Part 1

## Playing to music

Jonathan Lewin 2021

The Straight 8<sup>ths</sup> Groove has become very common part of rock and pop music since it was introduced in the 1950's. It works well with many songs across a range of music styles, so many drummers end up playing it a lot. Because of this:

1. It's good to be able to play it at a wide range of speeds.
2. You need to be able to listen to the band and play the groove in time with them.
3. If you can adapt how you play to suit the character of the music, you will help the song to express a particular feeling or tell a story.

Here's a reminder of the basic groove, with the ride pattern played on either Ride Cymbal or Hi Hat:

1 + 2 + 3 + 4 +

Ride Cym

HH

You will have memorised the groove by now. **Please don't keep reading it as you go through these exercises**, focus on backing music and your playing. Some people find that it's easier to listen closely if they close their eyes.

### Activities to extend your skills.

**1. Most students find it best to start at 90 bpm** (beats per minute). This is a leisurely walking pace (classical musicians would call it Andante). Find the songs in the list at about 90 bpm, and play the simple groove along to one of them. Ignore any extra notes and fills that the original drummer played; your job is to listen to the band and keep playing your groove in time.

Stay focused on the music and your playing - the song may seem very long! If you realise that you're out of time, try adjusting your speed until you're back on track. If necessary, stop playing for a moment, listen to the music again and join in on the beat. If 90 bpm is too fast for you at the moment, do start with a slower song.

**2. Who is playing the beat with you?** This time, as you play, listen out for the other instruments that are keeping the beat. Which of their notes happen at the same time as yours?

The first beat - the "1" of every bar - is an important landmark in the music to help you stay in time. Can you identify the "1" in the bass guitar groove?

Very often you will find that you and the bass guitar, and perhaps keyboards and rhythm guitar, are working together to give the music its pulse.

**3. Now try another song from the list**, perhaps one at a slightly different speed. Listen as you go and experiment with ways of playing the groove. Use the questions 1-6 above to guide your investigation of the song.

#### 4. Explore the song list further in other practice sessions.

Try some of the very slow songs, and see if you can keep to the discipline of staying slow. Slower is not always simpler or easier!

**Move on to faster songs.** Bear in mind that faster is not always better or more advanced - you need skills to play all of these songs. But by the time we get towards 140 bpm, playing quavers on the right hand becomes increasingly challenging. And even if you can play them, some fast songs sound too busy with all those quavers! Sometimes songs above about 130 bpm work best with a "straight quarters" groove - the right hand plays crotchets, on 1, 2, 3, 4.

#### 5. Listen to and play to other songs.

Try the same playing and listening exercises with other songs that you know or can find. There is a growing range of "drumless" backing tracks for well known songs available on the internet.

#### 6. Move on to explore different sounds in Part Two (p4).

### List of songs rock and pop songs at a range of metronome speeds

These songs should be available on most music / video streaming services

Some of them have drums playing from the beginning. In others, the drums appear part way through the song, but you can start when you think is the best time.

You may hear the drummer adding fills and extra notes to the groove. There is no need for you to do this until you are ready. If in doubt, keep it simple!

#### About 60 bpm

- Britney Spears - Inside Out
- Depeche Mode - Condemnation
- Stormzy - Blinded by Your Grace Pt. 2 (Glastonbury 2019)
- Black Keys - All You Ever Wanted

#### About 70 bpm

- Aerosmith - What it takes
- Def Leppard - When Love and Hate Collide
- Kelly Clarkson - Because of You
- Bob Dylan - Knocking on Heaven's Door
- Passenger - Let Her Go
- The Beatles - Let It Be
- Nickelback - Rock Star

#### About 80 bpm

- Avril Lavigne - Complicated
- Procol Harem - A Whiter Shade of Pale
- Dido - Thank You
- Janis Joplin - Another Piece of My Heart
- Adele - Chasing Pavements
- Tom Petty - Mary Jane's Last Dance

#### About 90 bpm

- Jamiroquai - Virtual Insanity
- Incubus - Drive
- Wings - Big Barn Bed
- The Chicks - Wide Open Space
- The Who - The Seeker
- Supertramp - Give a Little Bit
- BeeGees - Nights On Broadway

**About 100 bpm**

- Bill Withers - Lovely Day ● Talking Heads - Take Me To The River
- Blue - All Rise ● Lynyrd Skynyrd - Sweet Home Alabama
- Peter Gabriel - Sledgehammer ● Maroon 5 - She Will Be Loved

**About 110bpm**

- Queen - Another One Bites The Dust ● Wilson Pickett - The Midnight Hour
- Sly and the Family Stone - Thank You ● Spice Girls - Wannabe
- Stevie Wonder - I Wish ● Sam & Dave - Soul man

**About 120 bpm**

- The Bangles - Manic Monday ● The Beach Boys - California Dreamin'
- Madness - Our house ● Def Leppard - Animal ● Lady Gaga - Just Dance
- Prince - 1999 ● ABBA - Gimme! Gimme! Gimme! ● Seal - Get It Together

**About 130 bpm**

- The Darkness - I Believe In A Thing Called Love ● Van Halen - Jump
- Duran Duran - Hungry Like The Wolf ● Dire Straits - Money For Nothing
- Robert Cray - Smoking Gun ● Lenny Kravitz - Are You Gonna Go My Way

**About 140 bpm**

- Thin Lizzy - Jailbreak ● Rolling Stones - Jumpin Jack Flash
- Taylor Swift - The Story of Us ● Duran Duran - Rio
- Kinks - You Really Got Me ● Bryan Adams - Summer of '69
- Pigbag - Papa's Got a Brand New Pigbag ● Pink - Trouble

## Straight 8<sup>ths</sup> Groove - Playing & Listening - Part 2

### Variety of Sound

Simply choosing Ride Cymbal or Hi Hat is a useful way to adjust the feel and texture of your Straight 8<sup>th</sup> Groove. And as they say, "It ain't what you do, it's the way that you do it". So now it's time to develop a bigger variety of sounds from your instruments. Some of these ideas are best suited to acoustic kits, others will work with electronic kits.

**These exercises are mostly about listening** to the quality of sound that you can achieve while playing the basic groove. Think about how these ways of playing the groove might work in different songs.

#### 1. Ride Cymbal Surfaces - on an acoustic cymbal

Usually you would play the RC with the tip of your drum stick, striking the cymbal about half way between its middle and its edge. Now listen to the different sounds that you can make by playing different parts of the cymbal.

How does the bell of the cymbal (the raised central dome) compare with the bow (the main surface of the cymbal)?

What happens to the sound as you play further and further from the bell?

At the edge of the RC, what happens if you change from using the tip of your stick to using the shoulder of the stick, as you might for a crash cymbal?

#### 2. Hi-hat Surfaces - on acoustic cymbals

Usually you play the HH with the tip of your stick striking the top cymbal a little way in from the edge. Hi-Hat cymbals have bell, bow and edge, just as the Ride does. Again, experiment with playing these different parts, and using your stick in different ways.

Try changing these sounds further by using your left foot - as described below.

#### 3. Controlling Hi-Hat sound with foot pressure

Normally you keep the HH closed, pushing down on the pedal with your left foot. The aim is to get a short, crisp sound, which we call the closed HH sound.

A) Make sure that you can keep a consistent quality of HH sound as you play a row of quavers. Now play the complete groove, adding in BD and SD. Listen to the HH sound, and ensure that it stays crisp. It may take some time to develop control of your left foot. To help with this, you may need to experiment with set up and position of the HH stand. B) Now experiment with varying the pressure you apply with your left foot. How does this influence the HH sound? On an **acoustic** kit, keep the two cymbals in contact with each other, but allow them to fizz and rattle together. This is the open or trashy HH sound. On an acoustic kit, see how many different levels between very crisp and very ratty you can achieve and get back to. On an **electronic** kit, you will probably have fewer levels to play with, but should have distinctly open and closed sounds, and you need to be able to make them reliably.

#### 4. Adjusting Cymbal Voices - electronic kits

If you have an electronic kit, you won't have access instantly to many different sound qualities from different parts of the same cymbal pad. Some kits have dual zone pads, or change sound quality depending how hard you strike the pad.

Most electronic kits offer a range of pre-programmed kits, and these will include different cymbal sounds. Explore the different preset kits, and any "custom" for cymbal sounds.

Experiment with this if you can. It allows you to experiemnt with sound without having to buy new instruments!

## 5. Bass Drum Sound

On and **acoustic** kit, experiment with these two ways of playing the bass drum, listening for the sounds they produce.

A) Let the BD beater bounce straight back off the drum, by lifting off the pedal quickly.

B) Push the BD beater into the drum, leaving it there for a moment before releasing it.

How do these sounds compare?

Experiment with the damping cushion inside your BD. How can you use that to adjust its sound?

On an **electronic** kit, explore the BD sounds on the various pre-programmed kits. You might also be able to adjust tuning, damping or other settings of individual BD sounds.

## 6. Adjusting Snare Drum Sound

On and **acoustic** kit, you would normally play the snare drum near the middle, allowing the stick to bounce back off the drum, to give a single, crisp note. Experiment using different parts of the drum head, listening for the sounds that result. Also experiment with damping on the edge of the snare drum head. This reduces the ringing sound from the edge of the drum, to give you a shorter SD sound.

On an **electronic** kit, explore the SD sounds on the various pre-programmed kits. You might also be able to adjust tuning, damping or other settings of individual SD sounds.

## 7. Balance between cymbals and drums

Listen to yourself playing the standard straight 8<sup>th</sup> groove, and focus your attention on the volume of each instrument. Can you hear them all clearly? Does one dominate the sound? Does one hide behind the others? Adjust the volume of each instrument to get a range effects:

A) Evenly balanced volumes, so that no one instrument is louder than the others.

B) Play this “balanced” groove with the overall kit sound Forte (play loudly).

C) Play the “balanced” groove with the overall kit sound Piano (play quietly).

D) A full sound from your drums, with cymbals quieter in the background.

E) A full cymbals sound, with drums quieter in the background.

F) Imagine you are playing to music that needs each of the kit sounds in turn. Keep a groove going, and move through the effects at B), C), D), and E).

## 8. Accenting the ride pattern

You can add shape to the ride pattern by making some notes stand out, as accented (louder) notes. Try this on HH first, and then on RC. Notice how different these accent patterns feel.

A) Accent the notes on the beat, and play all the “and”s quieter.

B) Play notes on the beat quietly and accent all the “and”s.

C) Try moving smoothly between these accent patterns, playing in turn a few bars of “normal” groove, then A), then “normal”, then B).

**9. When you listen to music, pay attention to the drum kit.** What choices is the drummer making about the quality of sound being created, and how is this contributing to the music?

To get you started - compare the drum kit sounds in these songs:

## Straight 8<sup>ths</sup> Groove - Playing & Listening - Part 3

### Matching Your Grooves to the Music

Now that you can play in time with the band, and can vary the way you play, the next stage is to understand a song even better and adjust your playing to work with it.

Pick a song at a speed that you can play comfortably. Have another listen to it, and explore further how you are going to play along to it. **Be confident in trying your own ideas out - this an excercise in creating your own drums part, not trying to replicate what the original drummer played.**

1. **How will you play the ride pattern?** Would it work best with the long silvery notes of the ride cymbal, or the short crisp sound of the hi hat? Does this song sound like it needs a big, full, loud ride pattern, or a quiet one?
2. **How will you play the drum pattern?** Does this song need a big, energetic drum sound, or a calmer, quieter sound? Or something in between?
3. **What mood or emotion does the music have?** Does it seem to be an invitation to: Dance? Sit quietly? Be joyful? Be thoughtful? Be proud? Speak up for yourself? Say sorry? Relax? Smile? Party? Something else? ... How will you play your drums so that you help the music to create the right mood?
4. **Does the song have the same feel all the way through,** or does it change? For example, are there changes in loudness or energy level as the song progresses? How might you serve the song by varying how you play?
5. Listen through the song again. **Draw yourself a “map” of the song**, listing the different parts of it, and how you’re going to play. Here’s an example of what I mean; my map of Lovely Day by Bill Withers.

Lovely Day - Bill Withers 100bpm

Intro - HTT only. mp (8 bars)

Verse 1 - full straight 8<sup>th</sup> groove HTT mf (16 bars) “When I Wake up...”  
 Chorus to Ride Cym (8 bars) “It’s gonna be .. a lovely DAY” Start on DAY

Verse 2 - HTT (16 bars) “When the day that lies ahead of me”  
 Chorus - RC (8 bars) “It’s gonna be .. a lovely DAY”

Verse 3 - HTT (16 bars) as verse 2  
 Chorus (lovely day) RC (8 bars) Repeat x 3  
 Repeat to fade.

## Straight 8<sup>ths</sup> Groove - Playing & Listening - Part 4

### More Advanced Ride Patterns

Here's the classic Straight 8<sup>ths</sup> groove, which works for a big range of mid-tempo music. Throughout this worksheet, please work first with the basic back beat BD/SD pattern. When you can play this confidently, move on to the more interesting BD/SD pattern on the right hand side of the page.

1.

RC or HH

Remember that each instrument is capable of a huge range of sounds, especially if you are playing an acoustic kit. Now we create a bigger variety of sounds, helpful when accompanying a range of music.

Two common variations on the straight 8<sup>th</sup> groove are: adding backbeat with the left foot, and moving the right hand onto different instruments:

2. RC (HH with foot on back beat)

3. RH on Tomtom / Cowbell / Tambourine / other...

**Hi Hat Open/Close** - You can shape the Hi-hat with open and close notes. Two classic patterns are:

Close the HH on the back beats (2, 4), which means it's open on the "+" of 1 and the "+" of 3".

4.

5. For exercise 5, close the HH on every crotchet beat (the 1,2,3,4) which means it's open on all the off-beats (all the "+s"). This is really common in dance / disco songs.

A less common version is to open the HH on every beat and close it on the off beats, like this:

6.

It's challenging because you have to lift the toe of your L foot at the same time as playing the bass drum and at the same time as playing the snare drum.

**Missing out notes** - You can get a more open "reggae-ish" feel by playing just on "+" of every beat, instead of every quaver.

7. RC or HH

You can get a similar feel with straight 8<sup>ths</sup> on the Ride cymbal and off-beat hats, like this:

8.

### For Faster Music

If you want to keep the straight 8<sup>ths</sup> feel, but the tempo is too quick to play a stream of quavers with one hand, you could play them hand-to-hand, with R hand moving onto snare drum for the back beat, like this:

9.

### For Slower Music

At slower tempos, you can play quavers / 8<sup>ths</sup> with your left foot on HH. It leaves your right hand free to play other instruments / hold a mug of tea / turn over the music / whatever else. Take care to maintain a short "chick" sound every time.

10. Quavers / 8ths on HH with foot

A more challenging version is to alternate short “chicks” with an open splash/sizzle sound, like this:

**11.**

Taking the “off-beat” ride pattern, (from exercise 7. above) and adding L foot on the beat, you get the next groove, passing quavers back and forth between L foot and R hand like this:

**14.** RC, and HH with foot

Or swap around, so R hand is on the beat and L foot is off the beat:

**15.** RC, and HH with foot

**16... Advanced students – remember that quaver-based grooves need to be practiced both “Straight” and with “Swing” timing.**