

Stickings as Creative Springboards: Ten-Note Ideas

By David Whitman

Using sticking combinations as a basis for rhythmic and metric variations is not a new concept. Even on a single surface, variations in stickings provide a means of dynamic emphasis, which can be used to shape the musical flow in any situation. Some common stickings used in this fashion are RLL, RLRR or LRL, RLLRR or LRLL, and RLLRR.

Stickings are a great vehicle for creative exploration on the drumset because they facilitate (1) the manipulation of beat groupings through the total number of notes in the sticking combination, (2) rhythm through each hand creating its own unique rhythmic interest, and (3) timbre through orchestration around the drumset. Recently, I experimented with a ten-note sticking pattern and was amazed with the results. The sticking can be used to inspire creative fills, interesting solos, time shifts, and metric deception.

After experimenting with several sticking combinations, I finally settled on RLLRLRRLRL. I wanted something that was not going to be immediately perceived as simply 5 + 5 (RLLRR LRLL), 4 + 6 (RLRR LRLRR), or some other combination of smaller beat groupings. Admittedly, the sticking I settled on certainly *can* be broken up in such ways (especially if begun in the middle of the pattern), but this sticking had a natural tendency to surprise the brain. Before applying the pattern in a practical context, let's use the base sticking to develop an array of vocabulary. Example 1 illustrates how accents can add some extra spice to the sticking, and how the sticking can steer accents in a particular direction.

Example 1: Accent Variations

While accents are useful, orchestration can play an even larger role in how the listener perceives the sticking. One can take many approaches to the process of orchestrating a sticking. Example 2 presents four different scenarios. The first involves simply playing the right hand on the ride cymbal and the left hand on the snare drum. The second applies the accents from Example 1B to the high tom. The third also uses the accent pattern from 1B, but varies these accents between a ride cymbal-bass drum combination and the snare drum. Finally, the fourth combination (my favorite of the four) uses bass drum, hi-hat, and the accent pattern from example 1D to emulate a jazz ride pattern. In this instance, the bass drum opens and closes the cycle (a technique used extensively by Tony Williams).

Example 2: Orchestration Variations

Now that a bit of vocabulary has been developed through emphasis and orchestration, let's develop some context. In funk or rock music, the sticking lends itself to a great short fill or lead-in. The really interesting aspect of a ten-note sequence (my underlying motivation for experimentation) comes from repetition of the idea. But to do this fluently and with good time, we need to solidify an understanding of how the sticking will overlap with the musical phrase.

Example 3 provides some suggestions for use in two-bar phrases using triplets and sixteenths. Note that in Example 3C the sticking begins on the downbeat, leaving space at the end of the phrase. This space can be used to bring the listener back to a strong downbeat.

Example 3: Two-Measure Phrases

The pattern disguises the barlines even more as the phrases are extended to four bars, as shown in Example 4.

Example 4: Four-Measure Phrases

A

RLLRLRRL RLRLRLRL RLRLRLRL LRRRLR

B

RLRLRLRLRLRL LRLRLRLRLRLR

LRRRLRLRLRLRL RLRL

Here, the challenge is to be able to play the sticking in these phrases and hear the 4/4 meter. If you think you've got it, test yourself by counting "one two three four" out loud while you play.

The last step is to apply the orchestrations and accents from Examples 1 and 2 in musical and idiomatic ways to these phrases. In Example 5, I have fully composed some musical options that can work on the gig. Example 5A combines 2A with hi-hat on 2 and 4 and adds bass drum at the beginning of each note grouping. Example 5B combines 2B, 2C, and 2D in the same phrase. Swing them both on medium or up-tempo tunes while trading fours.

Example 5: Musical Application

A

RLRLRLRLRLRL RLRLRLRLRLRL

B

RLRLRLRLRLRL LRLRLRLRLRLR

LRRRLRLRLRLRL RLRL

These examples represent a fraction of the many ideas that can be inspired by this single sticking. Here are some suggestions for further exploration:

- Vary the phrase length. Try phrases three, five, six, eight, ten, twelve, and sixteen measures long.
 - Keep the number of measures in the phrase the same, but change the meter.
 - Use other subdivisions, such as sextuplets, thirty-seconds, and dotted values.
 - Improvise variation in orchestration and accents within a single phrase.
 - Develop dynamic variations within each orchestration of the sticking.
 - Finally, don't forget the obvious: vary the sticking!
- Endless as the possibilities may be, don't forget that context is supreme. Whatever you develop must be applicable in a real musical situation. Be careful not to use metric variations on the bandstand that your fellow musicians cannot follow, as these phrases can get very complicated. Put yourself in the position of an audience member and judge whether you are hindering the music or enabling it. Most importantly, if you pull it out on the gig, make sure you can play it in time and with complete control.

David Whitman holds a B.A. in Music from the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, an M.M. in Percussion Performance and Pedagogy from Kansas State University, and is a D.M.A. candidate at the University of Southern Mississippi where he assisted in directing athletic bands and instructing the drum line. He has directed jazz ensembles at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire and the University of Wisconsin-Stout. **PN**

Los Angeles Percussion Rentals

Servicing players at all live venues and recording studios

...4-octaves of tuned gongs, C2-C6?

...Got It

Well maintained, high quality instruments set L.A. Percussion Rentals on its own tier.

- *Drumsets
- *Mallet instruments (5-octave marimbas, chimes, vibes, songbells...)
- *World percussion (spanning 6 continents including taiko drums)
- *Hard-to-find specialty instruments (almglocken, boo-bams, bell plates...)
- *Sound effects (wind machine, air-raid sirens, taxi horns...)
- *Timpani
- *Backline (guitar/bass amps, keyboards, Rhodes...)

www.lapercussionrentals.com 310.666.8152