

sounding exactly like the drums. You simply want to be able to accurately vocalize the melodic and rhythmic shape of what you want to play.

Also, the ability to hear harmonic changes (chord progressions) is essential for every drummer, regardless of style. The form of every tune—excluding those involving only a one-chord vamp—contains harmonic transitions. A drummer who can't hear the chord changes in different sections of a tune will have a hard time relating to the rest of the ensemble.

**4. Develop ideas.** The reason why a lot of drum solos sound haphazard and suffer from a lack of cohesion is the fact that the player isn't relating to the things he or she is playing in a convincing and meaningful manner. The best way to overcome this is to listen to yourself and truly relate to what you're playing. I often practice using call and response to get myself in touch with my own ideas. Start by playing very simple things in two- or four-measure phrases, with the first part of the phrase being the call and the second part being the response. The point is to have a meaningful rhythmic conversation with yourself rather than to simply string together a series of licks.

The call-and-response method can be practiced away from the kit by vocalizing rhythms in two different pitches, one for the call and another for the response. Or you can tap right-hand rhythms on one knee and then respond with left-hand rhythms on the other. Eventually you'll be able to phrase in longer patterns, carrying on conversations consisting of several different ideas. All of this will add a new level of musical complexity to your drumming.

Practicing in this manner is a lot like composing, painting, acting, or dancing. You begin with an idea and then make a move in a different, but related, direction. As you continue to develop new connections to the previous phrase, coherent and convincing statements emerge—all of which still relate to the initial idea. When musicians make statements that are clear, a sense of expectation is created, which is similar to when someone tells a good story.

You want your listener to be wondering what will happen next. Even at its most complex and rhythmically dense, drumming can be just as rewarding to experience as a well-written book, a successfully choreographed dance, or a beautifully painted portrait.

**5. Play as much as possible (preferably with better musicians than you).** I know it's sometimes easier said than done, but if you're serious about becoming a better musician, you have to find a way to play with others. Music schools are the best environments, as everyone is playing and sharing ideas all the time. If you're not in school, do what you can to meet as many musicians as possible and start playing.

In my martial arts experience, I made the most progress by sparring with people who were better and more experienced than I was. Even though I made a lot of mistakes (sometimes very painful ones), the hurt quickly give way to invaluable experience. People who fail to learn from their mistakes are bound to repeat them; people who learn from their mistakes will be much better prepared to avoid making them again. This builds true confidence, without which performing at a high level is practically impossible. If you don't believe in your ability to do something well (in our case, making compelling music), chances are you'll be too busy wondering if you're doing it "right" to give it your best effort.

The challenge is great, and dedication and discipline are a must. But once you commit yourself to making meaningful music on the drums, the pursuit becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Your *desire* to craft artistic statements drives you to do all that you can to progress beyond simply hitting the drums and making noise. Your newly honed musical instincts won't stand for it!

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