

Playing Simple Fills

by Robert Coxon

MUSIC KEY

	X	X
H.H.	●	●
T.T.	●	●
S.D.	●	●
F.T.	●	●
B.D.	●	●

c.c.

Many younger, inexperienced drummers make the mistake of playing far too many long, complicated fills. These often end up detracting from the groove rather than embellishing it. Usually the most appropriate fills are short and sweet. Just listen to any Motown hit from the '60s to hear some classic examples.

Long, more complex fills, like Phil Collins' entry into "In The Air Tonight" or Kenny Aronoff's fill in John Mellencamp's "Jack And Diane," are more the exception than the rule. Plus, these fills were the feature of their songs. Also note that they were written into the composition beforehand to attract attention to themselves and set up the next section. They are the only elaborate fills in their respective songs. Playing any more fills in the songs would have lessened their impact.

So instead of taking an entire bar to pummel around the kit, let's practice short, simple fills that are just one beat in length.

Play four bars of steady time (with a click if possible), and place the fill in the fourth bar. Be careful not to speed up or slow down during the fill. Follow it with a strong cymbal and bass drum on the first beat of the next bar.

Here are a few examples of one-beat fills to try:

Also, always use a sticking that works best for you.

Finally, edit your playing and always use the utmost discretion when playing fills. Here are a few more examples of short, simple fills that do not exceed two beats in length and would not detract from the song's groove.

See the November 2000 Modern Drummer for the complete lesson.