



RHYTHM MASTERY

A Manual for Improving Rhythm
Book 1

By Malcolm Lim

Including

S. Indian Vocalizations & Compositions

Stepping Exercises

Metronome Games

Rhythm Traps

Scales in Odd Meters

Polyrhythms

Time Feel Exercises

And

Original Etudes

I would like to dedicate this work to

My teachers: Sangita Kalanidhi Dr. Trichy Sankaran, Glen Velez,
and Pierre Beluse (in memoriam),

My parents: Christopher, Beatrice (in memoriam),

And

My wife: Barbara

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Finally, thank you to all the students who have taken the rhythm classes over the years; all of you have inspired and continue to inspire me.

Preface

This book has taken too long to write. Over the years many people have asked me how to improve their rhythm: mostly students and amateur musicians but occasionally semi-professional and professional musicians. As I was always conscious of my rhythmic defects, I kept and keep working at improving my rhythm. Over time, I have built up my own exercises for improving rhythm. This book is largely based on what I have learned teaching rhythm classes at the Academy and Advanced Performance Program, Mount Royal Conservatory of Music. It's an unusual book in that the material mostly came from beyond the framework of traditional Western conservatory and university music training.

We will be exploring rhythm training approaches from Dr. Trichy Sankaran (South Indian Karnatak drumming); from Glen Velez, frame drum master; from drum set players – Mark Kelso and John Riley; from teachers of Afro-Cuban and Afro-Brazilian music – Michael Spiro, and Boca Rum. In addition, we will explore insights I gleaned while playing in *escola de samba* drum ensembles in Rio de Janeiro, preparing for orchestral auditions, and performing at the Calgary Philharmonic Orchestra.

This book is meant for all instrumentalists and singers. The exercises require only a basic understanding of quarter notes, eighth notes, and 16th notes. In some cases I have notated the material in a system developed by Trichy Sankaran as well as in Western notation. There are six chapters covering these topics: metronome games, strengthening beat and subdivision using South Indian training, “rhythm traps”, scales in odd meters, polyrhythms, and “time feel” (a term I borrowed from Mark Kelso).

I hope you have fun discovering these many facets of rhythm and rhythmic training.

Malcolm Lim
August 2020

Forward

I first met Malcolm in the Calgary Philharmonic Orchestra. I was the third horn and he would come and play extra in our percussion section. It was always enjoyable watching him and the other percussionists - wishing that I could join them because they always seemed to have so much fun! I mean who hasn't wanted to play percussion.

I remember well sitting in on one of Malcolm's first rhythm classes that he was giving in our Academy Program. I was both amazed and inspired. Here was someone who was living and breathing rhythm. It was in his blood. We clapped, we sang, we played, we did exercises on drums, and tambourines, and other percussion instruments he brought with him. The students loved the class, and always looked forward to the next one! It also reminded me of how much more I could learn and needed to learn; and how important rhythm is not only in our profession as musicians and educators, but in our daily lives. It's everywhere!

I hope this book inspires you, as Malcolm's classes inspired me. Read it, play the games and feel it! But above all, have fun!

*Laurie Matiation
Artistic Director,
Academy and Advanced Performance Program
Mount Royal University Conservatory
Horn teacher, and freelance musician*

Introduction

I have always struggled with rhythm. Even in university I would rush, and drag; playing with the metronome was tedious and humbling. In the middle of graduate school I got quite disheartened with symphonic music and decided to spend a few weeks in New York City.

New York City exposed me to many styles of drumming that were not part of my curriculum of symphonic music. I fell in love with frame drumming and sought out Glen Velez. Eager to learn where he found sources of inspiration, I sought out his teachers in the New York area: Michel Mirhige (Arabic Riq), Alessandra Belloni (Southern Italian Percussion and Dance). I found Brazilians and spent an afternoon with Jorge Alabe playing the Brazilian tambourine, *pandeiro*.

One city leads to another city; several years later I ended up in Brazil, visiting Rio de Janeiro and Salvador da Bahia. Several more years later, I would visit Dr. Trichy Sankaran in Toronto and spent a week taking *Kanjira* (lizard skin tambourine) and *solkattu* (drum syllables) lessons.

In the end I returned to symphonic music and began to work as a freelance musician with the Calgary Philharmonic; by this time I had a different perspective on rhythm and how to develop it.

In this book, I imagine addressing myself mainly to students in Western style conservatories or Western musicians. Please forgive this approach.

Over the years, some themes regarding rhythm and rhythmic development emerged:

- Don't trust your subjective experience of rhythm – it can deceive you. Record yourself or use apps like Live BPM that monitor your beat.
- A large part of playing in time with other musicians involves listening and in some situations being supple and flexible with the time.
- Use vocalizations (even silently) when learning and performing; many drum traditions around the world use vocalizations as an integral part of rhythmic training.
- Use movement to develop your sense of the beat: pay attention to the choreography of your legs, arms, or upper body.
- Use the metronome in a way that doesn't cause dependency but rather develops confidence.

- There are subtleties in the way people play that are beyond what the metronome can teach you. Learn to listen with more granularity. Not everything is played in even subdivisions.
- Begin to explore music traditions from beyond the “West”; other traditions have incredible richness and depth, especially when it comes to rhythm.
- “*Rhythm is a muscle*”: maintain a *growth* mindset - exercise your rhythm and you will improve!

How to Use This Book

I would recommend learning the basic metronomic strategy in Part I – starting with high density of metronome notes and then reducing the density. You can use this strategy to work on Parts II (Strengthening Beat and Subdivision: Introduction to South Indian Rhythm), III (Rhythm Traps), and IV (Odd Meters). Work on Parts I – IV simultaneously; you don’t have to complete the entire chapter to start on the next chapter. Save Parts V (Polyrhythms) and VI (Time Feel) for later after you have done some work on the Parts I – IV.

Part I – Metronome Games

This chapter introduces you to techniques for using the metronome effectively. Two rhythmic etudes are provided to explore the techniques.

Part II – Strengthening Beat and Subdivision: An Introduction to South Indian Rhythm

This chapter introduces you to South-Indian drum syllables called *solkattu*. You will learn four different *talas* (meters), cadential (closing) formulas called *moras*, and short compositions.

Part III – Rhythm Traps

You will learn about “rhythm traps” – transitions that can cause you to speed up or slow down. Seven kinds of traps are discussed (density, dynamics, articulation, register, upbeat, multimeter, rests) and exercises using scales are provided. The idea is to regularly incorporate these rhythm traps in your warm up so that you can master them. A couple of etudes are provided summarizing the traps.

Part IV – Odd Meters

Odd meters are less known and should be practiced. Here are some ways to practice odd meters using scales. Again the idea is to incorporate odd meters in your warm up in order to be more familiar with them. Etudes are provided.

Part V – Polyrhythms

Polyrhythms are relationships between two groups of notes that can be expressed as a ratio. A breakdown is provided as well as two etudes.

Part VI – Time Feel

This is a more advanced topic; don't start until you have done some work on the previous chapters. You need to strengthen your beat and subdivision before you can start to play around with subtle shifts. Two topics are discussed: "time feel" and "dialing" exercises. These exercises will help you to play in a non-"quantized" (even like the metronome) way and help you to express subtleties that may be found in non-Western rhythms.

PART I – METRONOME GAMES

Metronome Games

People say, “Use the metronome!” However you won’t improve your rhythm if you keep the metronome clicking the beat away all the time. What happens is that you begin to rely on it like a crutch and you will not have confidence when the crutch is not there. In this chapter I will show you the practices that percussionists use when they prepare for auditions and that some drum set players use in order to better internalize the beat and build confidence.

1.0 Basic Progression of High to Low Density

In order to build confidence and accuracy it is important to use this procedure:

- 1) Start at 50 % of your target speed.
- 2) Use a high density of notes (e.g. 16th notes) and make sure you are playing exactly with the subdivisions given by the metronome.
- 3) Progressively reduce notes (e.g. 8ths, quarters, half notes, whole notes, etc.)
- 4) Only if you can comfortably play with the click coming every bar or every other bar should you increase the metronome speed by 3-5 clicks.
- 5) Start the process over again.

This procedure will help your accuracy and at the same time help you to build your own internal metronome since you are slowly taking away metronome notes that could be a crutch for you. I learned this process from Kevin Bobo at Jacobs School of Music, Indiana University, Bloomington.

2.0 Exploring Different Parts of the Beat

Normally we play with the click on the beat and we get to know the beat well, but it doesn’t help us get to know the other parts of the beat. Here is a way to explore the different parts of the beat, say the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th sixteenth notes. I learned this from Mark Kelso, head of the percussion department at Humber College.

- 1) Put the metronome on the Upbeat (the “and”) – the midway point between two beats. This will encourage you to feel the music in a different way – perhaps more buoyantly - as well as encourage you to create your own downbeat, instead of letting the metronome do it for you.
- 2) Put the metronome on the 4th 16th.
- 3) Put the metronome on the 2nd 16th.

Use the Rhythm Etude in 4/4 at the end of the chapter to explore moving the click around. This may be quite frustrating at first; this is because you are accustomed to

hearing the metronome on the beat. Stay with it; start slowly and try to feel all the subdivisions. After some time, you will start to expect to hear the metronome on these other parts of the beat, like an “old friend”.

Do the same thing for the 6/8 section (2.1), moving the click to the 3rd eighth note and the 2nd eighth note. Use the Rhythm Etude in 6/8 at the end of this chapter to practice.

3.0 A Different Framework

For a further challenge, put the click in a completely different meter or time signature. The click will then move around as you play your piece of music. This will also ensure that you develop your own internal sense of time.

4.0 Metronome as Musician

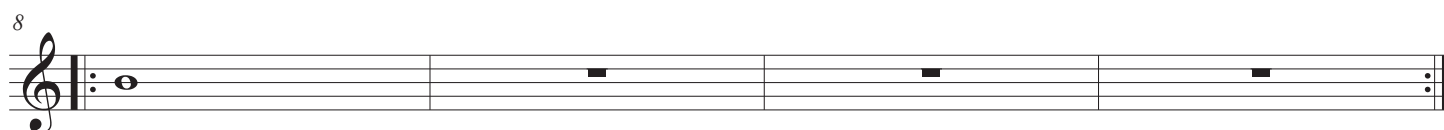
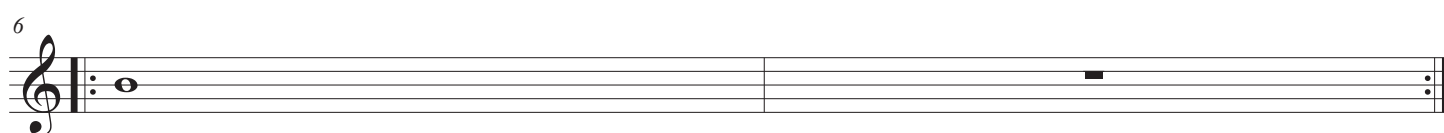
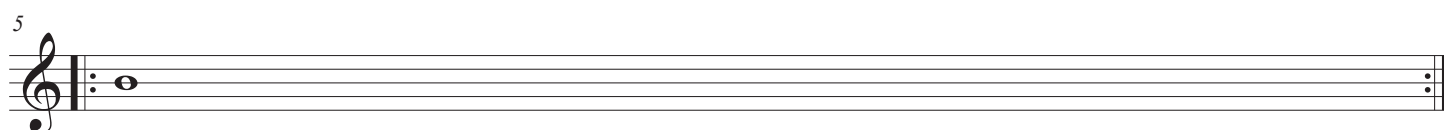
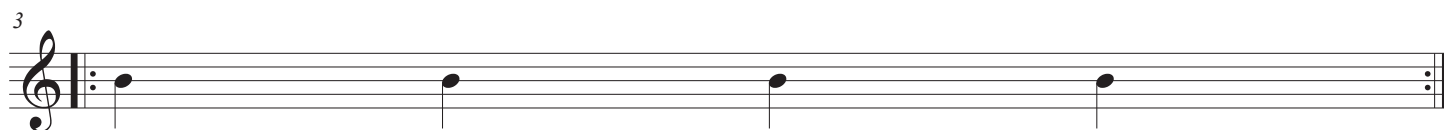
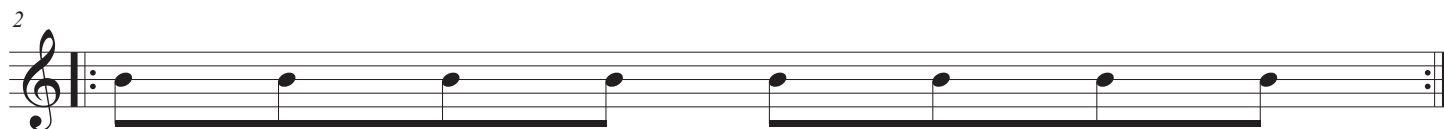
If your metronome allows it, program and play along to some rhythms instead of just playing with the single click. This will give you a different sense of the music; there is more to play against. It's almost like playing with another musician. Ideas are given for 4/4 as well as 6/8.



The author with Prof. Kevin Bobo at Jacobs School of Music, Indiana University Bloomington (2009).

Metronome Games

1.0 Basic Progression of High to Low Density

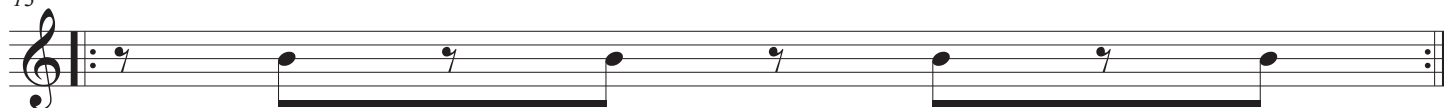


2.0 Exploring Different Parts of the Beat

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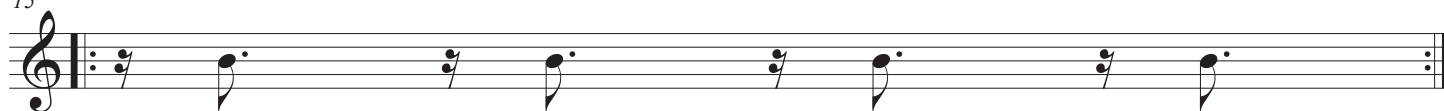
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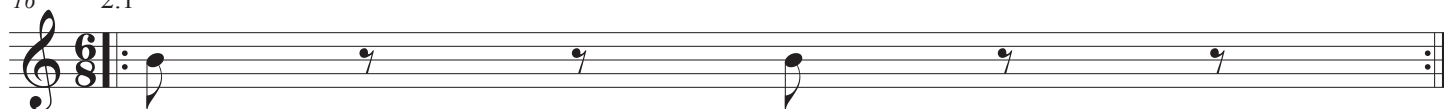


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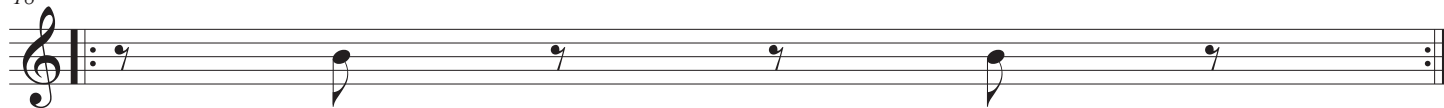
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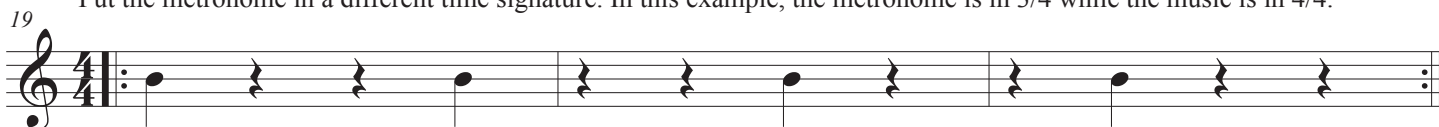


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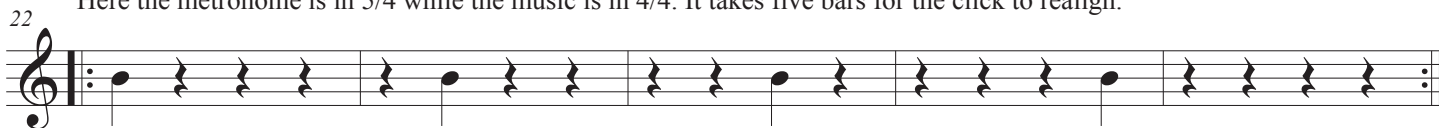


3.0 A Different Framework

Put the metronome in a different time signature. In this example, the metronome is in 3/4 while the music is in 4/4.



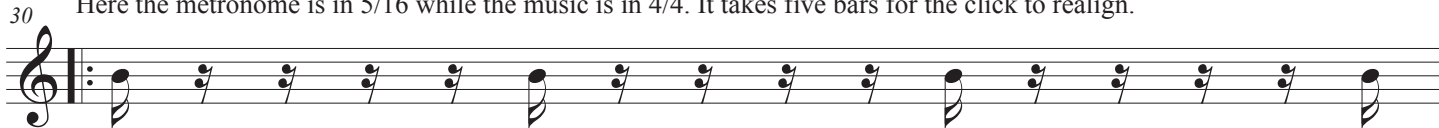
Here the metronome is in 5/4 while the music is in 4/4. It takes five bars for the click to realign.



Here the metronome is in 3/8 while the music is in 4/4.



Here the metronome is in 5/16 while the music is in 4/4. It takes five bars for the click to realign.



4.0 Metronome as Musician

35



36



37



38



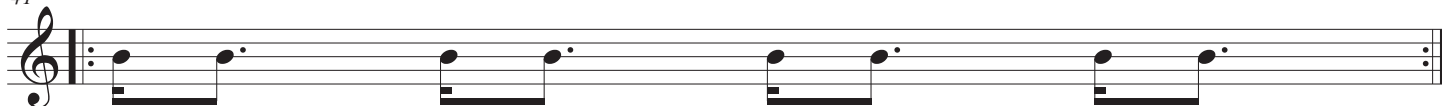
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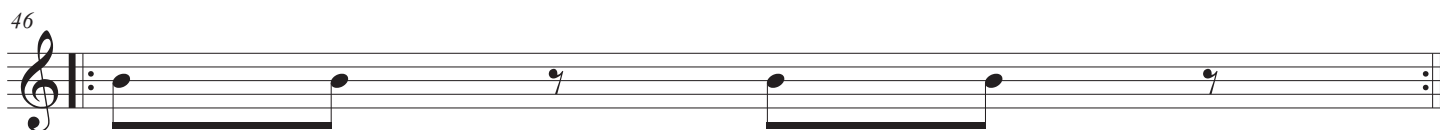
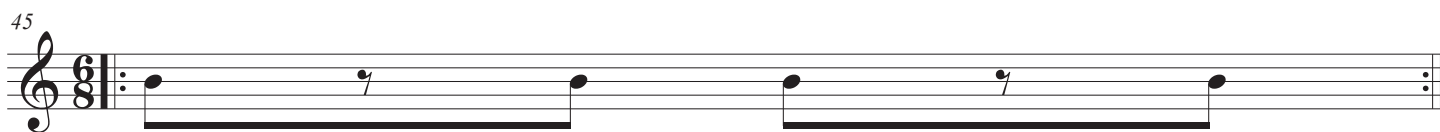


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PART II – STRENGTHENING BEAT AND
SUBDIVISION: INTRODUCTION TO SOUTH INDIAN
RHYTHM

Strengthening Beat and Subdivision: Introduction to South Indian Rhythm

To me strengthening your sense of the beat and subdivision are the foundation for a good sense of rhythm. The other aspects of rhythm covered by this course – rhythm traps, odd numbers, time feel – will be layered onto this foundation.

To this end, I will introduce you to South Indian (S. Indian) Classical rhythmic training that I learned from my teacher Trichy Sankaran. We will use our voice and clapping for most of the exercises. You will learn about S. Indian *talas* (meters), drum syllables (called “solkattu”), and some short compositions. Another teacher that helped me tremendously was Glen Velez. He was a big proponent of stepping, vocalizing, and playing the drum simultaneously, trying to bring more facets of our being into the music making. We will also be doing some stepping, vocalizing, and clapping simultaneously!

Since rhythm is a central and highly developed element of Karnatak music, I have taken it as the most appropriate and valuable area on which to concentrate one’s studies. A general lack in this area in many institutions in the West has also made educators and musicians re-evaluate the situation.... By attempting to come to grips with some of the fundamental concepts and practice of Karnatak rhythm, through the study of *solkattu* or the art of drumming, one is immediately thrust into the foundation of this rich tradition.

Trichy Sankaran
(Sankaran, 1994, P. vi)



Dr. Trichy Sankaran



Glen Velez

Really, the introduction was through South Indian Drumming, because when I started to play with Steve Reich, one of the other players was a very famous percussionist named Russ Hartenberger, who plays with the percussion group called "Nexus". He was studying South Indian drums at Wesleyan, which had a big music department... it still does. He told me that his teacher was living in New York and I could contact him and take some drum lessons. I had always wanted to study Indian drumming. I had always been interested in it. That's really how I got started with hand drumming. I called up this teacher ... we made some lessons... and I started to study the South Indian hand drums. Everything led from there, in terms of my interest in hand drumming.

Glen Velez
(MusicGuy247, 2016)

By using the everyday activities of speaking and walking, one can begin to learn about drumming from a position of confidence and mastery.

Glen Velez
(Velez, 1999)

Adi Tala (cycle of 8)

Exercise 1.0 Basic *Adi Tala* Three-Speed Exercise

Here are the clapping symbols:

X = clap

O = wave (back of the hand)

I = finger (starting with the pinkie, then ring, then middle, then index)

Put the metronome on at 60 – 80 bpm. Keep one hand palm facing up; use the other hand to clap *Adi tala* along with the metronome. I find what helps is to treat the clapping like choreography. Use *continuous motion* to keep *tala*; that is, keep the hand moving for the entire length of the beat. Try to keep a consistent height and hand speed; this will help you maintain a consistent beat.

Practice the three speeds separately: slow, medium, and fast (quarters, eighths, and 16ths). Next, practice transitioning from slow to medium to fast after one cycle of the *tala*. Try it backwards, from fast to slow. Try skipping the medium speed, so from slow to fast, or fast to slow. This exercise was learned from Sankaran (Sankaran, 1994, P. 48)

Pay attention to your transitions – you might want to speed up when there is a higher note density, or slow down with a lower note density. I call this a *density rhythm trap* (more about it later) and many people fall into the trap. I find what can help is to try to feel the 16th notes at all the speeds. You need to ground yourself on something before, during, and after the transition; use your clapping or sense of subdivision to do this.

A couple of variations are given. The periods mean a space of equivalent value.

Exercise 2.0 Glen Velez Inspired Stepping Exercise

Glen Velez inspired this exercise to help feel what the different subdivisions within a beat feels like. He is a big proponent of stepping and using the lower limbs to help us feel grounded with the beat (Velez, 1999). Step with the metronome, vocalize, and clap on the different syllables/subdivisions.

TA – This syllable coincides with the step and should feel very grounded. You are clapping at a point of stability or rest; some people call this the “downbeat”.

DI – This syllable coincides with the mid point between the beats. It lines up with the midpoint in your shifting of weight and should feel light, almost weightless. It

can feel very unstable and fraught with potential energy. Some people call this the “upbeat”.

MI – This syllable leads to the downbeat and has the feeling of being pulled into the gravity field of the downbeat. It can feel also like a tap to the back of the head, pushing you forward.

KA – This syllable erupts immediately after the downbeat and can feel very abrupt, like a tap to the forehead, knocking you back. I think it requires the most energy to perform; it’s like you’re helping to lift yourself or a bouncing ball into the air.

3.0 Sankaran Displacement Exercise

This exercise also features hearing the accents on different parts of the beat (Sankaran, 1994, P. 49). You can vocalize while keeping *tala* with the hands. Or you can try the Glen Velez method: step on the beat, vocalize the syllables, and clap on the accents. Some variations are given where you “drop” syllables – don’t vocalize them. Alternatively you can continue to say all the syllables and clap on the mentioned syllables.

4.0 Glen Velez Inspired Stepping Exercise in Triplets

This exercise will familiarize us with subdivisions of triplets. Step, vocalize, and clap. The pronunciation of “TA KI TA” is more like “TAH KEE TUH”.

TA – This note again coincides with the beat and should feel grounded.

TA (3rd syllable) – This note is very common in Western culture; it is the third note of the triplet and is given lots of emphasis in jazz music.

KI (2nd syllable) – This second triplet note is the least familiar of the three for Westerners. It is more common in West African based music. Practice feeling this one a lot. In terms of location, it occurs before the “upbeat” and can feel slightly abrupt and strange. We don’t have many references in Western music.

The variation accenting or vocalizing “ta . ta” will be familiar to most Westerners; drummers call it the “shuffle ride”.

The variation accenting or vocalizing “ta ki .” will be least familiar to Westerners; you would hear it more in West African based music.

5.0 Displacement Exercise in Triplets

This exercise takes the Sankaran displacement exercise above (3.0) and applies it to triplets. Perform this one vocalizing and clapping the *tala*, or stepping vocalizing and clapping on the accents. Variations are given.

Adi Tala (cycle of 8)

1.0 BASIC ADI TALA THREE SPEED EXERCISE

(slow)

ta X ka I di I mi I

2 > ta X ka O jo X nu O

(medium)

ta X ka di I mi ta I ka jo I nu

4 > ta X ka O di mi ta X ka jo O nu

(fast)

ta X ka di I mi ta I ka jo I nu ta I ka di mi ta I ka jo nu

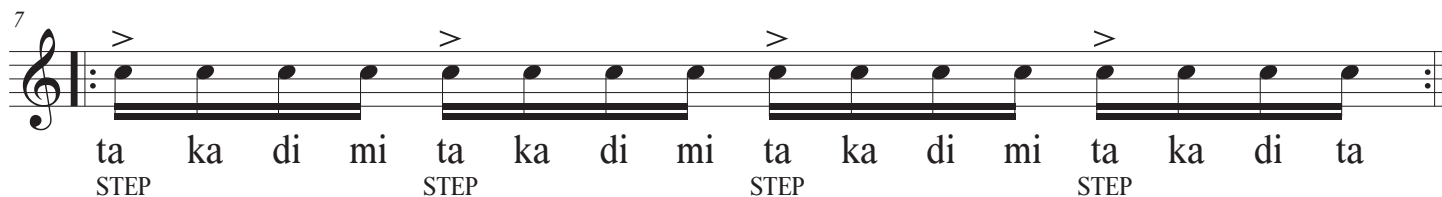
6 > ta X ka O di mi ta O ka jo nu ta X ka di mi ta O ka jo nu

VARIATIONS:

ta ki ta ta di gi na tom (3 + 5)
ta . . ta

2.0 GLEN VELEZ INSPIRED STEPPING EXERCISE - Vocalize and clap the accents while stepping

7



ta ka di mi ta ka di mi ta ka di mi ta ka di ta

STEP STEP STEP STEP

Detailed description: This musical staff for exercise 7 contains four measures of music. Each measure begins with a repeat sign and a double bar line. The notes are quarter notes on a treble clef staff. The first measure has notes on G4, A4, B4, and C5, with an accent (>) over the first note. The second measure has notes on A4, B4, C5, and D5, with an accent over the first note. The third measure has notes on B4, C5, D5, and E5, with an accent over the first note. The fourth measure has notes on C5, D5, E5, and F5, with an accent over the first note. The lyrics 'ta ka di mi' are written below the first three measures, and 'ta ka di ta' is written below the fourth measure. The word 'STEP' is written below the first note of each measure.

8

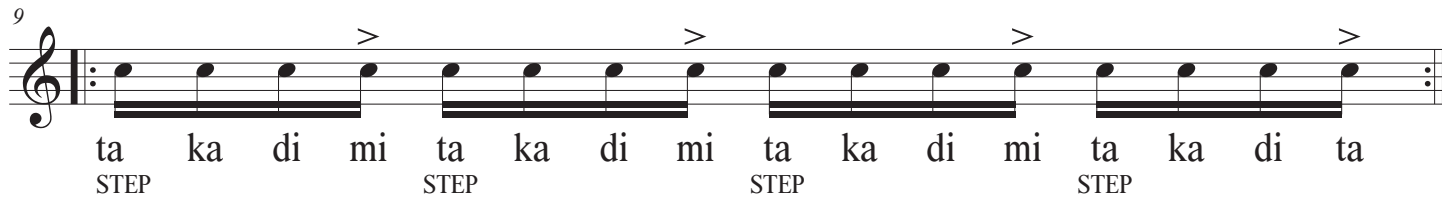


ta ka di mi ta ka di mi ta ka di mi ta ka di ta

STEP STEP STEP STEP

Detailed description: This musical staff for exercise 8 contains four measures of music. Each measure begins with a repeat sign and a double bar line. The notes are quarter notes on a treble clef staff. The first measure has notes on G4, A4, B4, and C5, with an accent (>) over the first note. The second measure has notes on A4, B4, C5, and D5, with an accent over the first note. The third measure has notes on B4, C5, D5, and E5, with an accent over the first note. The fourth measure has notes on C5, D5, E5, and F5, with an accent over the first note. The lyrics 'ta ka di mi' are written below the first three measures, and 'ta ka di ta' is written below the fourth measure. The word 'STEP' is written below the first note of each measure.

9



ta ka di mi ta ka di mi ta ka di mi ta ka di ta

STEP STEP STEP STEP

Detailed description: This musical staff for exercise 9 contains four measures of music. Each measure begins with a repeat sign and a double bar line. The notes are quarter notes on a treble clef staff. The first measure has notes on G4, A4, B4, and C5, with an accent (>) over the first note. The second measure has notes on A4, B4, C5, and D5, with an accent over the first note. The third measure has notes on B4, C5, D5, and E5, with an accent over the first note. The fourth measure has notes on C5, D5, E5, and F5, with an accent over the first note. The lyrics 'ta ka di mi' are written below the first three measures, and 'ta ka di ta' is written below the fourth measure. The word 'STEP' is written below the first note of each measure.

10





ta ka di mi ta ka di mi ta ka di mi ta ka di ta


STEP STEP STEP STEP


Detailed description: This musical staff for exercise 10 contains four measures of music. Each measure begins with a repeat sign and a double bar line. The notes are quarter notes on a treble clef staff. The first measure has notes on G4, A4, B4, and C5, with an accent (>) over the first note. The second measure has notes on A4, B4, C5, and D5, with an accent over the first note. The third measure has notes on B4, C5, D5, and E5, with an accent over the first note. The fourth measure has notes on C5, D5, E5, and F5, with an accent over the first note. The lyrics 'ta ka di mi' are written below the first three measures, and 'ta ka di ta' is written below the fourth measure. The word 'STEP' is written below the first note of each measure.


3.0 SANKARAN DISPLACEMENT EXERCISE


11 
ta ka di mi ta ka di mi ta ka di mi ta ka di mi
0 I I I


12 
ta ka di mi ta ka di mi ta ka di mi TA DI GI NA
X 0 X 0


13 
TOM ta ka di mi ta ka di mi ta ka di mi ta ka di
X I I I

14 
mi ta ka di mi ta ka di mi ta ka di mi TA DI GI
X 0 X 0

15 
NA TOM ta ka di mi ta ka di mi ta ka di mi ta ka
X I I I

16 
di mi ta ka di mi ta ka di mi ta ka di mi TA DI
X 0 X 0

17 
GI NA TOM ta ka di mi ta ka di mi ta ka di mi ta
X I I I

18 
ka di mi ta ka di mi ta ka di mi TA DI GI NA TOM
X 0 X 0

VARIATIONS: ta ka di .
ta ka . .
ta . . .

4.0 GLEN VELEZ INSPIRE STEPPING EXERCISE IN TRIPLETS

19

ta ki ta
STEP

20

ta ki ta
STEP

21

ta ki ta
STEP

VARIATIONS:

ta . ta
ta ki .

5.0 DISPLACEMENT EXERCISE IN TRIPLETS

22

ta ki ta
X

23

ta ki ta
X

24

MI ta ki ta ta ki ta ta ki ta ta ki

X I I I

25

ta ta ki ta ta ki ta ta ki ta TA KA

X O X O

26

DI MI ta ki ta ta ki ta ta ki ta ta

X I I I

27

ki ta ta ki ta ta ki ta TA KA DI MI

X O X O

VARIATIONS:

ta ki .
ta . .

Composition in Adi Tala (Sankaran)

Here is a short composition by Sankaran. Notice that the entire structure is based on *gopuccha yati* and the *final mora* uses *sama yati*. *Chatusra Nadai* means a subdivision of 4 pulses per beat. Here is the composition written in a form developed by Sankaran followed by the composition written in Western notation. Following this is a melodic version that I composed using the same rhythmic structure.

(chatusra nadai: 4 pulses per beat)

(a) dom . ta ki / ta ta ki ta / dom . ta ki / ta ta ki ta /

(b) dom . ta ki / ta ta ki ta / dom . ta . / //

(a) dom . ta ki / ta ta ki ta / dom . ta ki / ta ta ki ta /

(b) dom . ta ki / ta ta ki ta / dom . ta . / //

(b) dom . ta ki / ta ta ki ta / dom . ta . / /

(b) dom . ta ki / ta ta ki ta / dom . ta . / //

dom . ta . / / dom . ta . / /

Mora: dom . ta . / dom . ta . / dom dom . ta / ki ta dom . //

. dom . ta / . dom . ta / . dom dom . / ta ki ta dom /

.. dom . / ta . dom . / ta . dom dom / . ta ki ta // **(dom)**

Composition in Adi Tala

T. Sankaran

♩ = 80

4/4

dom ta ki ta ta ki ta dom ta ki ta ta ki ta dom ta
X I I I I X O X O

3

dom ta ki ta ta ki ta dom ta ki ta ta ki ta dom ta ki ta ta ki ta dom ta
X I I I I X O X O X O

5

dom ta ki ta ta ki ta dom ta dom ta ki ta ta ki ta dom ta
X I I I I X O X O

7 (mora)

dom ta dom ta dom ta dom dom ta ki ta dom
X I I I X O X O

9

dom ta dom ta dom dom ta ki ta dom dom ta dom dom ta ki ta dom
X I I I X O X O X

Composition in Adi Tala (melodic)

T. Sankaran and M. Lim

$\text{♩} = 80$

dom ta ki ta ta ki ta dom ta ki ta ta ki ta
X I I I

2
dom ta ki ta ta ki ta dom ta
X O X O

3
dom ta ki ta ta ki ta dom ta ki ta ta ki ta
X I I I

4
dom ta ki ta ta ki ta dom ta
X O X O

5
dom ta ki ta ta ki ta dom ta
X I I I

PART III - RHYTHM TRAPS

Rhythm Trap (noun) – a rhythm trap is a transition that can cause musicians to speed up or slow down unintentionally. Many of these traps are common to all musicians; some affect certain classes of instrumentalists more than others; some affect the various classes of instrumentalists in *different* ways.

Example of Usage: “My teacher told me to pay attention to the *rhythm trap* but I fell into it anyways.”

Playing a piece of music necessarily involves walking into a field littered with *rhythm traps*. My approach has been to encourage students to incorporate rhythm traps deliberately into their daily warm ups – for that reason I have chosen scales as the basis for these exercises. Everyone has to practice scales! Practicing avoiding rhythm traps consciously and continuously should help everyone be more rhythmically aware and confident. Students can make up their own exercises too.

Seven classes of common rhythm traps (this is not an exhaustive list) will be discussed here:

1. Density Traps
2. Dynamic Traps
3. Articulation Traps
4. Register Traps
5. Upbeat Traps
6. Multimeter Traps
7. Rest Traps

Avoiding Rhythm Traps using “Rhythmic Memory”

My main strategy for avoiding rhythm traps involves developing what I call *rhythmic memory* – your ability to retain and refer to the pre-trap tempo. You need to latch onto a beat or rhythmic framework that remains constant before, during, and after the trap. Let the rhythm *imprint* on you; soak in how fast the beat is, what the groove feels like. Next, you will need to use your *rhythmic memory* to refer to the original imprint as you progress through the trap. I find that if I use my voice in some way (I may vocalize silently or quietly) this tends to activate my memory of original framework throughout the trap. Others tap their feet or sway to the music. Sometimes I tap my foot and vocalize. I always continue to listen to the musicians around me as I progress through the trap. This is important because chances are other musicians might fall into the trap; as a percussionist sometimes my role is to play rigidly, at other times, flexibly and then adapt if I need to. All traps end. At the other side of the trap, I try to check in using my *rhythmic memory* to see if I was faithful or not to the original beat. The exercises in this chapter will help you develop this faculty of your brain, your *rhythmic memory*.

Density Traps in Scales

Transitioning to a higher density of notes can cause you to speed up, and conversely transitioning to a reduced density of notes can cause you to slow down. I believe our brains and bodies probably overcompensate. The way to avoid the trap is to feel the beat strongly before, during, and after the transition. You can also try to feel the 8th note or the 16th note pulse subdivisions throughout the transition.

All of these exercises can be looped (i.e. repeated as many times as you like) or you can repeat them a semitone higher each repetition and go through the 12 major or minor keys. Of course this could take a long time; I believe it is important not to overwhelm yourself, so take it in small chunks at a time.

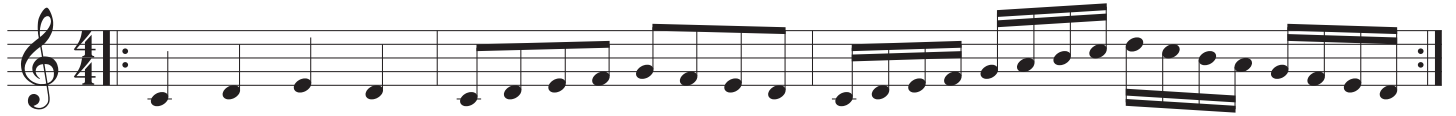
In exercises 2 and 3, there are phrases with reduced notes, which can create another kind of trap related to spaces! Try to feel the subdivisions flowing through the spaces. You can start with a high density of metronome notes and then gradually reduce them (e.g. 16ths, 8ths, quarters, half notes, and so on).

There are no quick or easy fixes when it comes to grooving, but consistent, conscientious work will make a world of difference.

John Riley
(Riley, 2004. P. 13)

Density Traps in Scales

1.0



1.1



2.0



2.1



2.2



2.3







The author with Michael Spiro at the California Brazil Camp, 2009.

But a major difficulty for those of us raised in Western cultures is that in Afro-centric musics the rhythmic distinction between three subdivisions per beat and four subdivisions per beat (triple vs. duple), is frequently blurred. In several cases, the difference does not exist at all - there is a completely “new” kind of subdivision at work. ... I call this “averaging” of rhythm between a four and a six feel, “fix” (**F**our and **S**ix), and it is an essential component of learning to swing in these styles.

Michael Spiro
(Spiro, 2006, P. 38)



My wife, Barbara, who taught me so much about the Brazilian swing and the rhythm of life.

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Malcolm Lim has worked as a freelance percussionist with the Calgary Philharmonic Orchestra, the Red Deer Symphony Orchestra, and the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra. He teaches percussion at the Mount Royal University Conservatory of Music and is the current musical director of the Calysto Steelband. Malcolm has taught courses at the University of Lethbridge and led master classes at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro. He was the musical director for the Calgary Escola de Samba from 2002 to 2012 and has also worked as a creativity facilitator at Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity.

Malcolm holds a Bachelor degree in Percussion Performance from McGill University where he studied with Pierre Beluse and D'Arcy Gray. His graduate studies were at University of Montreal where he worked with Louis Charbonneau of l'Orchestre Symphonique de Montreal. Malcolm has published in *Percussive Notes*, the Percussive Arts Society periodical. He has studied with Trichy Sankaran (S. Indian percussion), Glen Velez (frame drumming), Boca Rum (Afro-Brazilian percussion), and Michel Mirhige (Arabic percussion). He has received Canada Council for the Arts grants to study in Rio de Janeiro and Salvador da Bahia, Brazil.

You can find out more about Malcolm Lim at [**www.rhythm mastery.com**](http://www.rhythm mastery.com)