

# South Indian Vocalizations in Snare Drumming Pedagogy

BY MALCOLM LIM

While teaching snare drum workshops, it became apparent to me that students who vocalize as they drum demonstrate a heightened sense of groove, phrasing, and musicality. These rhythmic vocalizations should be, as they are in many musical cultures, a central focus in an aspiring drummer's education.

This article illustrates one type of rhythmic vocalization and how it can be applied to snare drum pedagogy. In addition to vocalization exercises, this article offers a suggested vocabulary for various rhythmic cells and the 40 PAS International Drum Rudiments. It has been inspired by studies with Glen Velez, Trichy Sankaran, and Jamey Haddad, all of whom use vocalizations extensively in their teaching methods. Although focusing on snare drum pedagogy, these exercises and concepts are applicable to any style of drumming.

Vocalizations are an integral part of drumming pedagogy in many areas of the world, such as West Africa, the Caribbean, the Middle East, and India. In the South Indian Karnatak drumming tradition, a student learns to sing all rhythms before executing them on the mrdangam or kanjira. This drum language, called *solkattu*, has formed the basis for all the vocalizations used here. *Solkattu* is clearly not the only option; however these syllables were selected because of their clarity and potential for being sung rapidly.

Although some students may be self-conscious about using their voices, most eventually realize the benefits of singing rhythms and begin to shed their inhibitions, which in itself is a positive step toward freer self-expression.

## VOCALIZATION BENEFITS

Vocalizations:

- Help students internalize rhythms, generating stronger groove and swing.
- Serve as important memory aids and triggers.
- Help students increase awareness of breath.
- Encourage the discursive mind to concentrate entirely upon the music.
- Direct more mental energy into the music-making; more areas of the brain are simultaneously being exercised, increasing mental flexibility and endurance.
- Synchronize the mind and the body—inner and exterior aspects of the self—culminating in more precise execution.
- Constitute another creative process in itself and may help infuse more vibrancy and musicality into passages that might seem dull or prosaic.
- Help students increase awareness of the vertical dimension of music: various simultaneous rhythmic frameworks (e.g., something fast happening simultaneously with something slow).
- Enable students to improvise with more intricate polyrhythmic patterns and still know precisely where they are in the rhythmic framework.

- May dramatically reduce the amount of time required to learn passages.

## VOCALIZATION PRINCIPLES

Music is produced from the *inside out*: the thought guides the voice; the voice the hands; the hands the sticks. Therefore, learn to sing rhythms first before attempting to make music with the hands.

Vocalizations can be exterior (audible) or interior (mental). Beginners should strive to vocalize out loud as much as possible.

A direct relationship exists between the quality of the vocalization and the quality of music produced. More energetic, intense, and precise vocalizations produce more energetic, intense, and precise executions.

In addition to speaking from the throat, try to vibrate as much of the chest cavity as possible to maximize the physical sensation and impact of the vocalization.

Strive for perfect synchronization between the voice and the sound produced by the drum; the objective is to bridge the gap between the musical thought and the actual production of sound. The voice is that bridge.

## VOCALIZATION EXERCISES

The following exercises are largely inspired by Glen Velez. Vocalize the following while drumming:

1. Every note you play.
2. The subdivisions (e.g., Ta Ka Ta Ka for sixteenth-note subdivisions or Ta Ki Ta for triplet subdivisions).
3. The downbeats (e.g., Ta Ta Ta Ta on every quarter note in 4/4).
4. The upbeats (e.g., Ta Ta Ta Ta on all eighth note upbeats in 4/4).
5. The rhythmic cycle (e.g., Ta Ka Di Mi on the quarter notes in 4/4 time).
6. Portions of rhythms that need clarification (e.g., all weak-handed strokes).
7. Strategically important notes (e.g., accent patterns).
8. Other instrumental parts when playing in an ensemble.
9. Any combination of the above (e.g., a loop consisting of downbeats followed by upbeats).

## VOCALIZATIONS

It is recommended that the student be able to sing everything that is played; however, when the music is too fast, the student may choose to vocalize other options, such as strategically important notes, downbeats, or upbeats.

Pronunciation

Ta Ki Ta is pronounced "Tah Kee Tuh."

Ta Ka Di Mi is pronounced "Tah Kah Dee Mee."

Ta Di Gi Na Tom (the G is hard).

## Simple Cells and Corresponding Traditional Solkattu Syllables

(from Trichy Sankaran)

One note	Ta
Cell of two notes	Ta Ka
Cell of three notes	Ta Ki Ta
Cell of four notes	Ta Ka Ta Ka (2+2) Ta Ka Di Mi Ta Ka Din Na
Cell of five notes	Ta Ka Ta Ki Ta (2+3) Ta Ki Ta Ta Ka (3+2) Ta Di Gi Na Tom
Cell of six notes	Ta Ki Ta Ta Ki Ta (3+3) Ta Ka Ta Ka Ta Ka (2+2+2)
Cell of seven notes	Ta Ki Ta Ta Ka Di Mi (3+4) Ta Ka Di Mi Ta Ki Ta (4+3) Ta Ka Ta Ka Ta Ki Ta (2+2+3)
Cell of eight notes	Ta Ka Ta Ka Ta Ka Ta Ka (2+2+2+2) Ta Ka Di Mi Ta Ka Di Mi (4+4) Ta Ka Di Mi Ta Ka Jo Nu (4+4) Ta Ka Din Na Ta Ka Din Na (4+4)
Cell of nine notes	Ta Ka Di Mi Ta Ka Ta Ki Ta (4+5) Ta Ki Ta Ta Ki Ta Ta Ki Ta (3+3+3)

## 40 PAS INTERNATIONAL DRUM RUDIMENTS AND VOCALIZATIONS

(Tones for flams and drags have been adapted.)

### 1. Single-Stroke Roll



### 2. Single-Stroke Four



### 3. Single-Stroke Seven



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#### 4. Multiple-Bounce Roll



#### 5. Triple-Stroke Roll



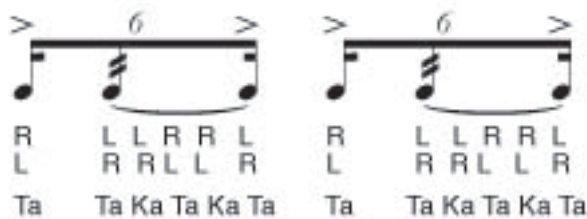
#### 6. Double-Stroke Open Roll



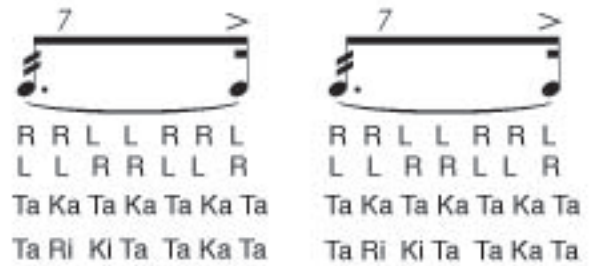
#### 7. Five-Stroke Roll



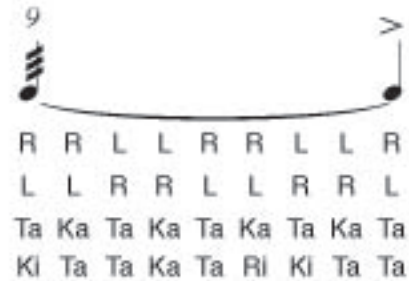
#### 8. Six-Stroke Roll



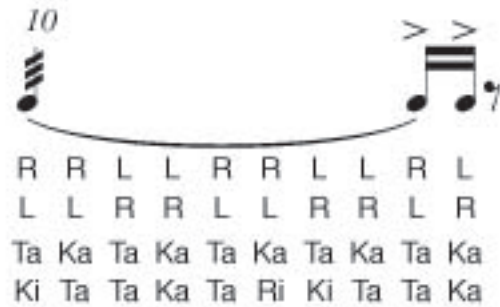
#### 9. Seven-Stroke Roll



#### 10. Nine-Stroke Roll



#### 11. Ten-Stroke Roll



#### 12. Eleven-Stroke Roll





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### 13. Thirteen-Stroke Roll

13

R R L L R R L L R R L L R  
L L R R L L R R L L R R L  
Ta Ka Ta Ka Ta Ka Ta Ka Ta Ka Ta

### 14. Fifteen-Stroke Roll

15

R R L L R R L L R R L L R R L  
L L R R L L R R L L R R L L R  
Ta Ka Ta Ka Ta Ka Ta Ka Ta Ka Ta

### 15. Seventeen-Stroke Roll

17

R R L L R R L L R R L L R R L L R  
L L R R L L R R L L R R L L R R L  
Ta Ka Ta Ka Ta Ka Ta Ka Ta Ka Ta

### 16. Single Paradiddle

R L R R L R L L  
Ta Ka Din Na Ta Ka Din Na  
Ta Ka Ta Ka Ta Ka Ta Ka

### 17. Double Paradiddle

R L R L R R L R L R L L  
Ta Ka Ta Ka Din Na Ta Ka Ta Ka Din Na  
Ta Ka Ta Ka Ta Ka Ta Ka Ta Ka Ta Ka

### 18. Triple Paradiddle

R L R L R L R R L R L R L R L L  
Ta Ka Ta Ka Ta Ka Din Na Ta Ka Ta Ka Ta Ka Din Na  
Ta Ka Ta Ka Ta Ka Ta Ka Ta Ka Ta Ka Ta Ka Ta Ka

### 19. Single Paradiddle-diddle

R L R R L L R L R R L L L L R R  
Ta Ka Din Na Din Na Ta Ka Din Na Din Na  
Ta Ka Ta Ka Ta Ka Ta Ka Ta Ka Ta Ka Ta Ka

### 20. Flams

L R Tra (accent RA)  
Cha Cha (accent A)

### 21. Flam Accent #1

L R L R R L R L  
Tra Ki Ta Tra Ki Ta  
Cha Ki Ta Cha Ki Ta

### 22. Flam Tap

L R R R L L L R R L L L  
Tra Ka Tra Ka Tra Ka Tra Ka  
Cha Ka Cha Ka Cha Ka Cha Ka

### 23. Flamacue



### 24. Flam Paradiddle



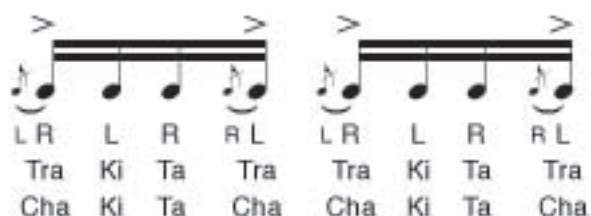

### 25. Single Flammed Mill



### 26. Flam Paradiddle-Diddle



### 27. Pataflafla

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### 28. Swiss Army Triplet

LR R L LR R L  
RL L R RL L R  
Tra Ki Ta Tra Ki Ta  
Cha Ki Ta Cha Ki Ta

### 29. Inverted Flam Tap

LR L RL R LR L RL R  
Tra Ka Tra Ka Tra Ka Tra Ka  
Cha Ka Cha Ka Cha Ka Cha Ka

### 30. Flam Drag

LR L L R RL R R L  
Tra Ta Ka Ta Tra Ta Ka Ta  
Cha Ta Ka Ta Cha Ta Ka Ta

### 31. Drag

(Trra: roll tongue more than for a flam; very soft “tr”; accent the “A” and keep it clipped. Sha: accent the “a” and keep it clipped.)

LLR Trra Sha  
RRL Trra Sha

### 32. Single Drag Tap

LLR L RRL R  
Trra Ta Trra Ta  
Sha Ta Sha Ta

### 33. Double Drag Tap

LLR LLR L RRL RRL R  
Trra Trra Ta Trra Trra Ta  
Sha Sha Ta Sha Sha Ta

### 34. Lesson 25

LLR L R LLR L R  
RRL R L RRL R L  
Trra Ka Ta Trra Ka Ta  
Sha Ka Ta Sha Ka Ta

### 35. Single Dragdiddle

RR L R R LL R L L  
TaKa Ta Din Na TaKa Ta Din Na  
TaKa Ta Ki Ta TaKa Ta Ki Ta

### 36. Drag Paradiddle #1

R LLR L R R L RRL R L L  
Ta Trra Ka Din Na Ta Trra Ka Din Na  
Ta Trra Ka Ta Ka Ta Trra Ka Ta Ka  
Ta Sha Ka Ta Ka Ta Sha Ka Ta Ka

### 37. Drag Paradiddle #2

R LLR LLR L R R L RRL RRL R L L  
Ta Trra Trra Ka Din Na Ta Trra Trra Ka Din Na  
Ta Trra Trra Ka Ta Ka Ta Trra Trra Ka Ta Ka  
Ta Sha Sha Ka Ta Ka Ta Sha Sha Ka Ta Ka

### 38. Single Ratamacue



### 39. Double Ratamacue



### 40. Triple Ratamacue



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**Malcolm Lim**, B. Music (McGill University), has studied with Arland Mangold, Paul Walker, Pierre Beluse, D'Arcy Gray, Louis Charbonneau, Glen Velez, Trichy Sankaran, Jamey Haddad, Marcos Suzanno, and Alessandra Belloni. He has taught at the University of Lethbridge, Augustana University College, and the Red Deer Conservatory of Music. Malcolm lives in Calgary, AB, Canada and has performed with the Calgary Philharmonic Orchestra, the Red Deer Symphony Orchestra, Bow Valley Chorus, and Move to Strike; he is the musical director of the Calgary Escola de Samba. PN

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