# DAVE WECKL

# BACK TO BASICS

TRANSCRIPTIONS BY JOHN RILEY

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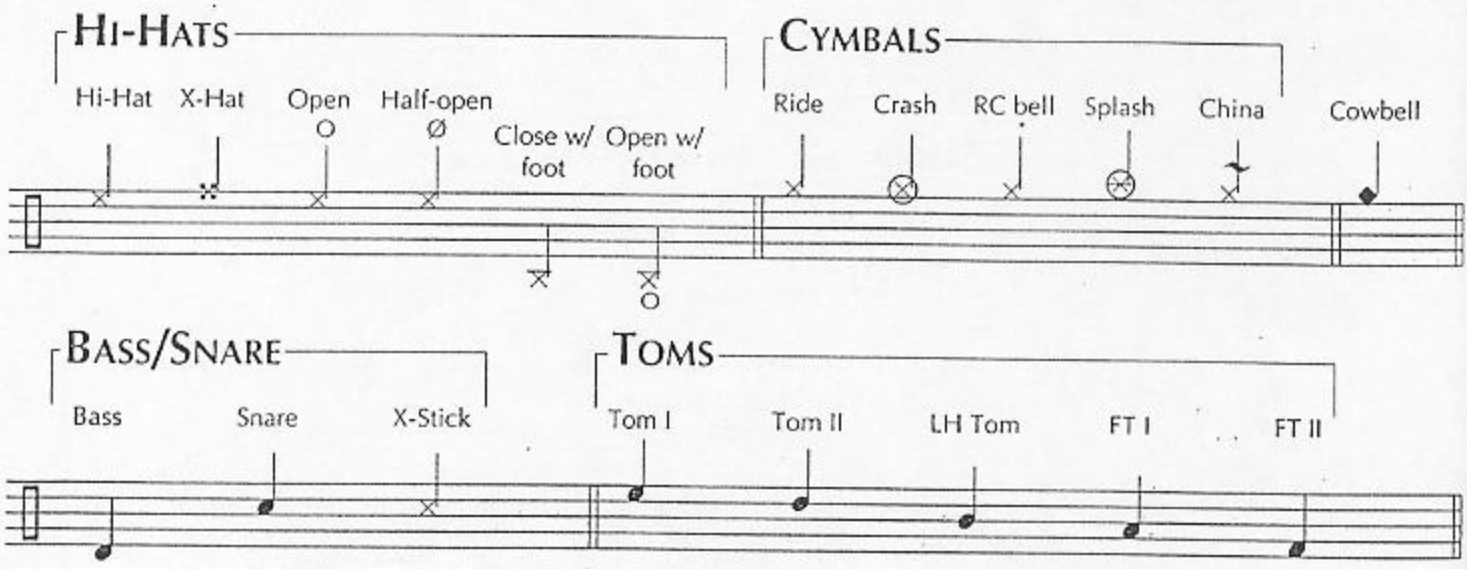
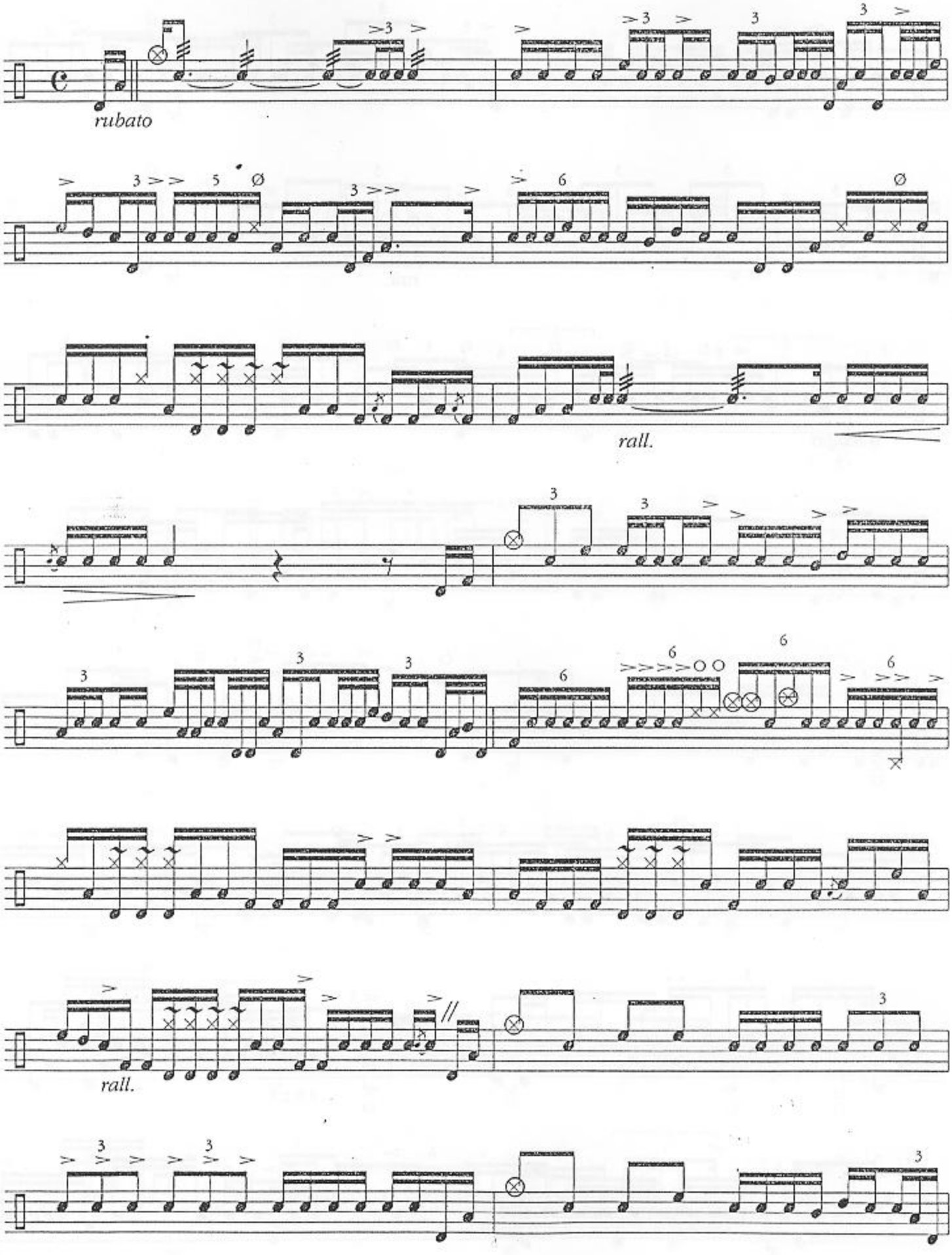
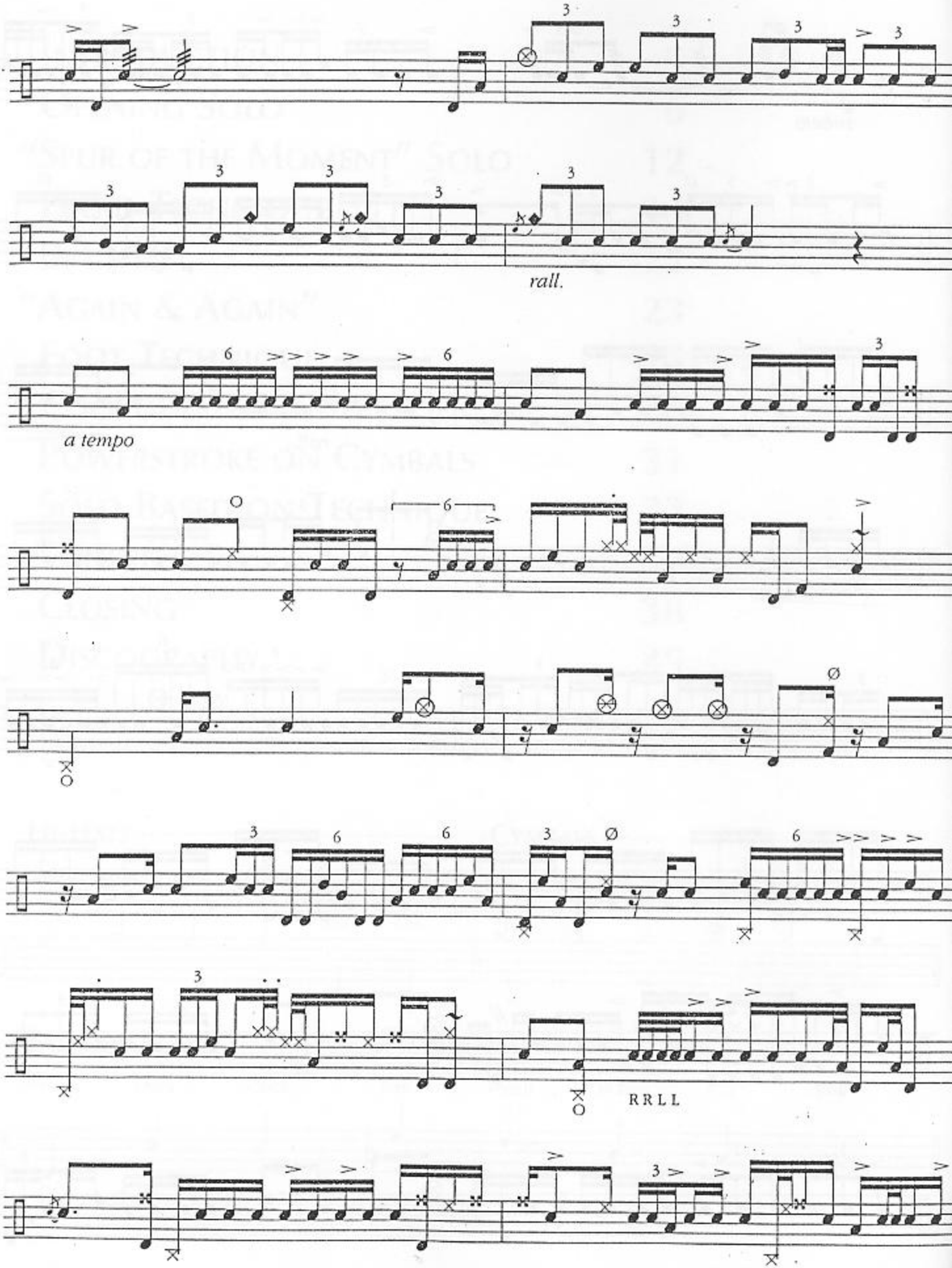
## Key



# Opening Solo

On the video I begin with two solos. The first is unaccompanied and the second is with a track called "Spur of the Moment," from my *Contemporary Drummer + One* package.

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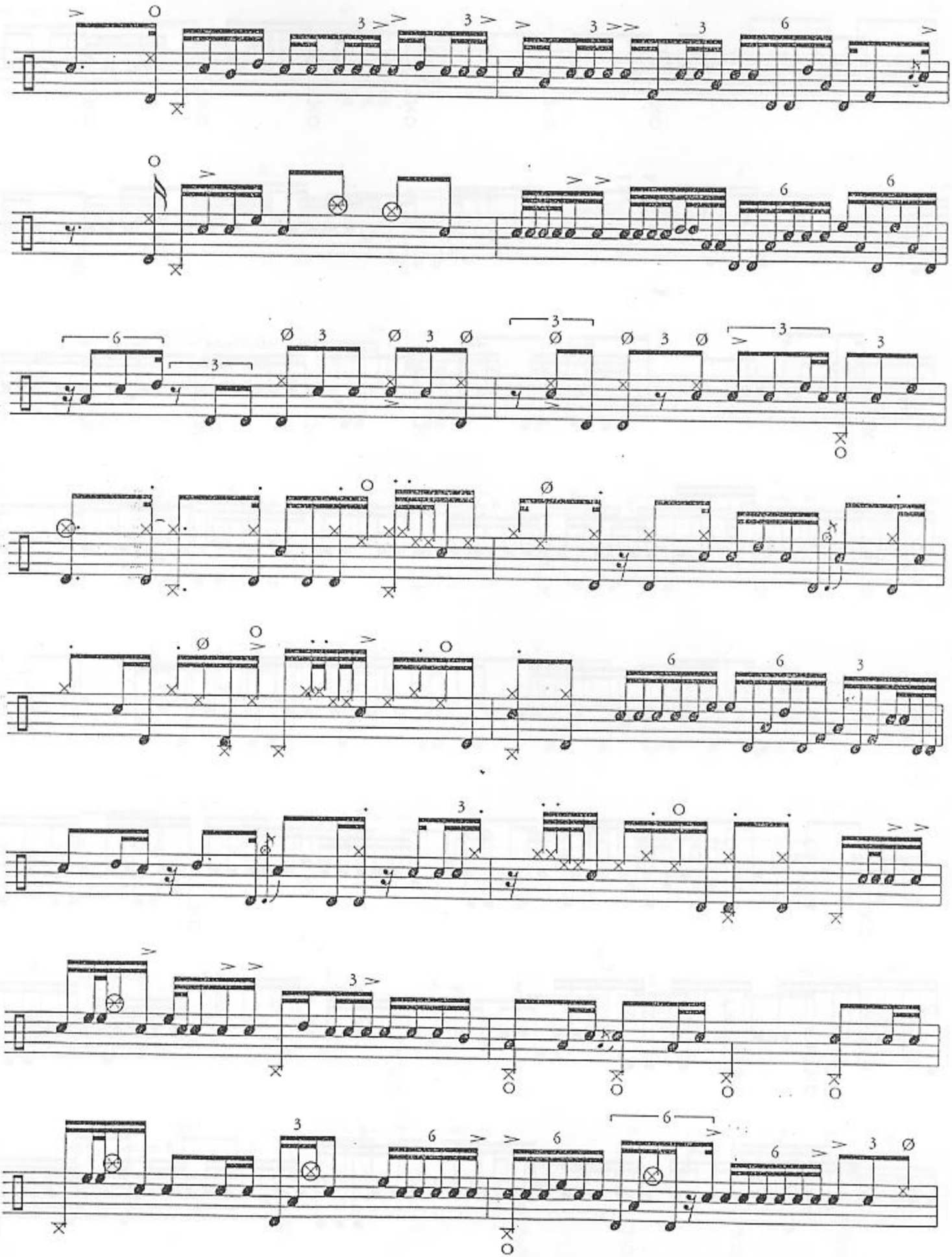

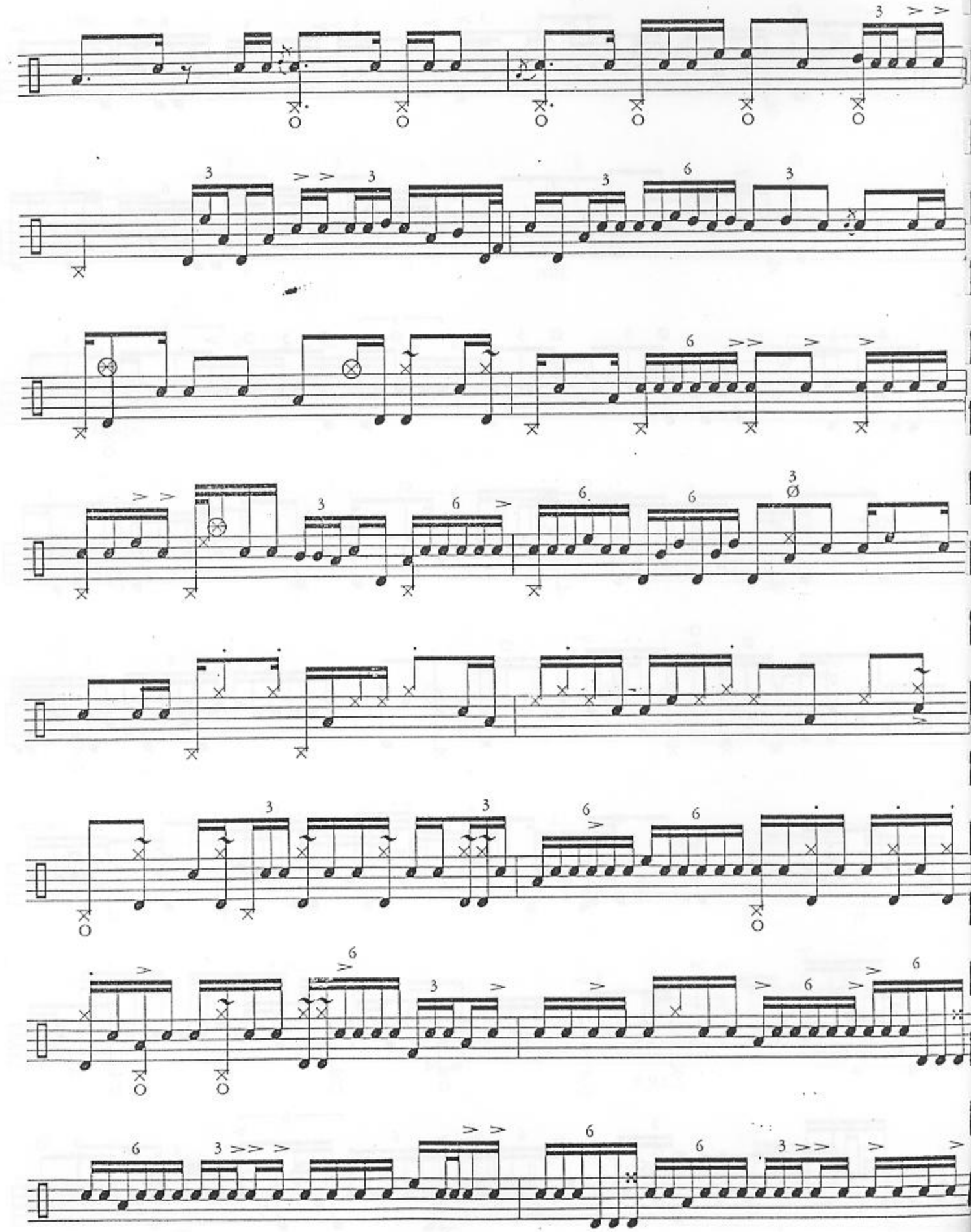

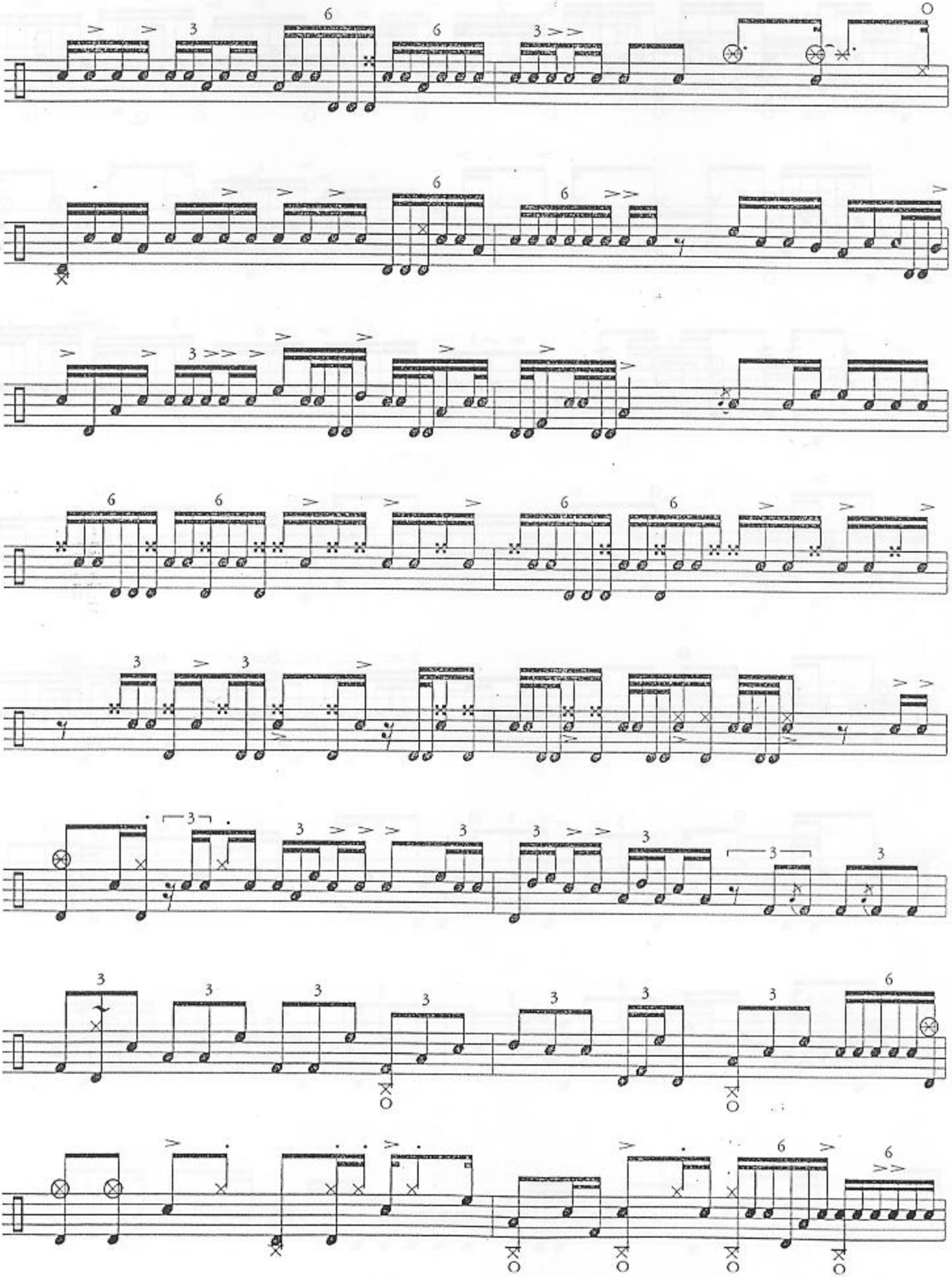

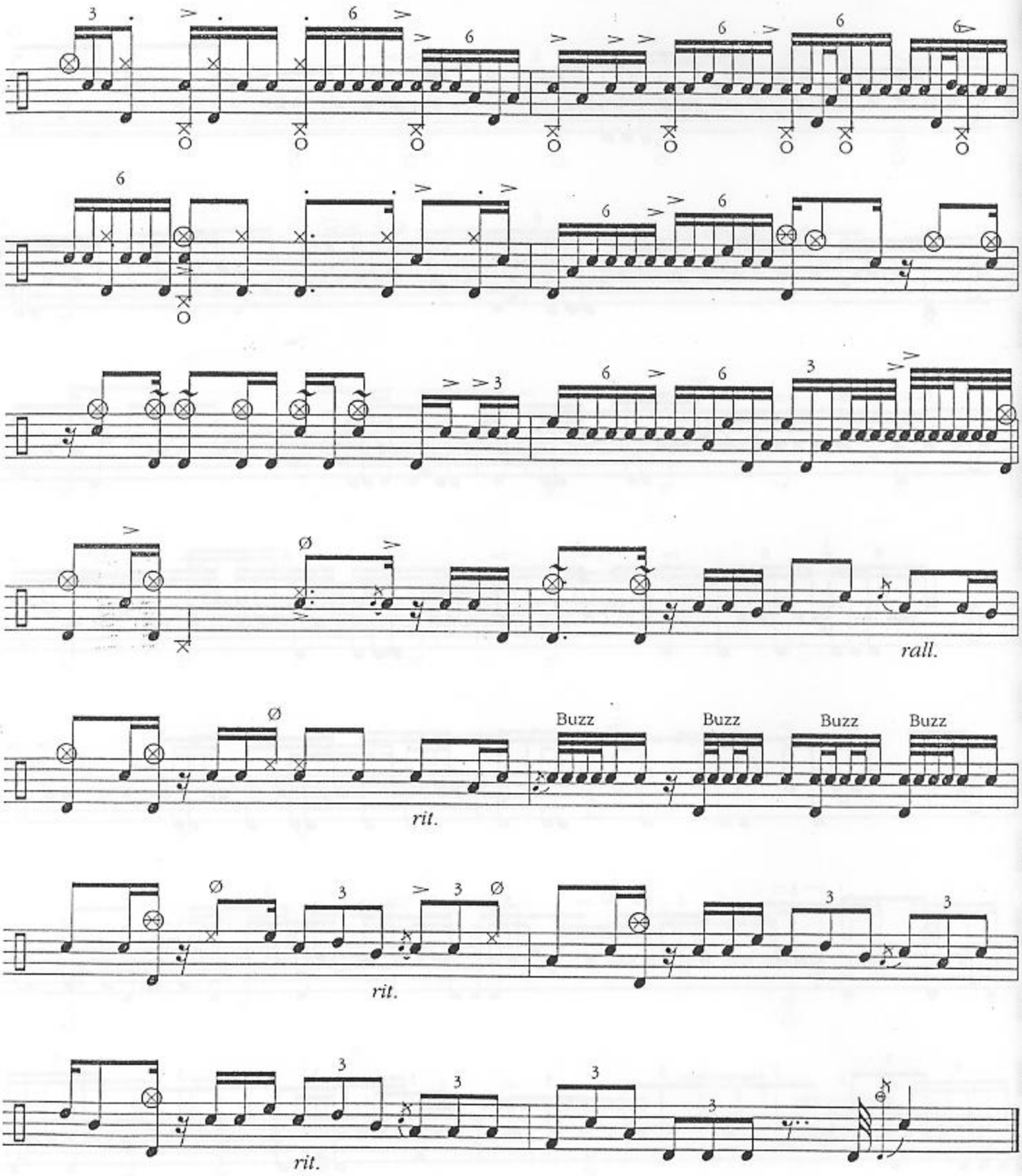
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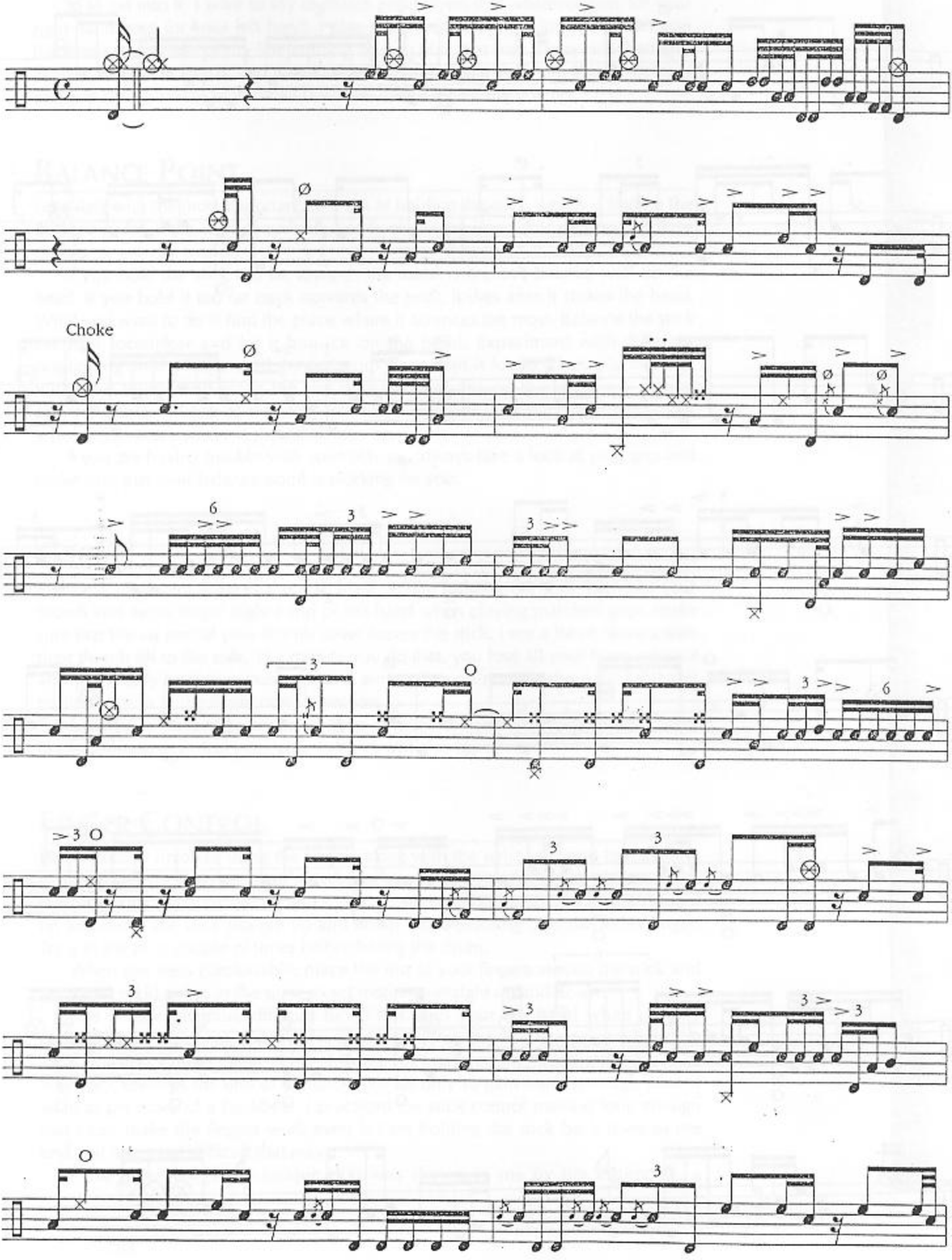
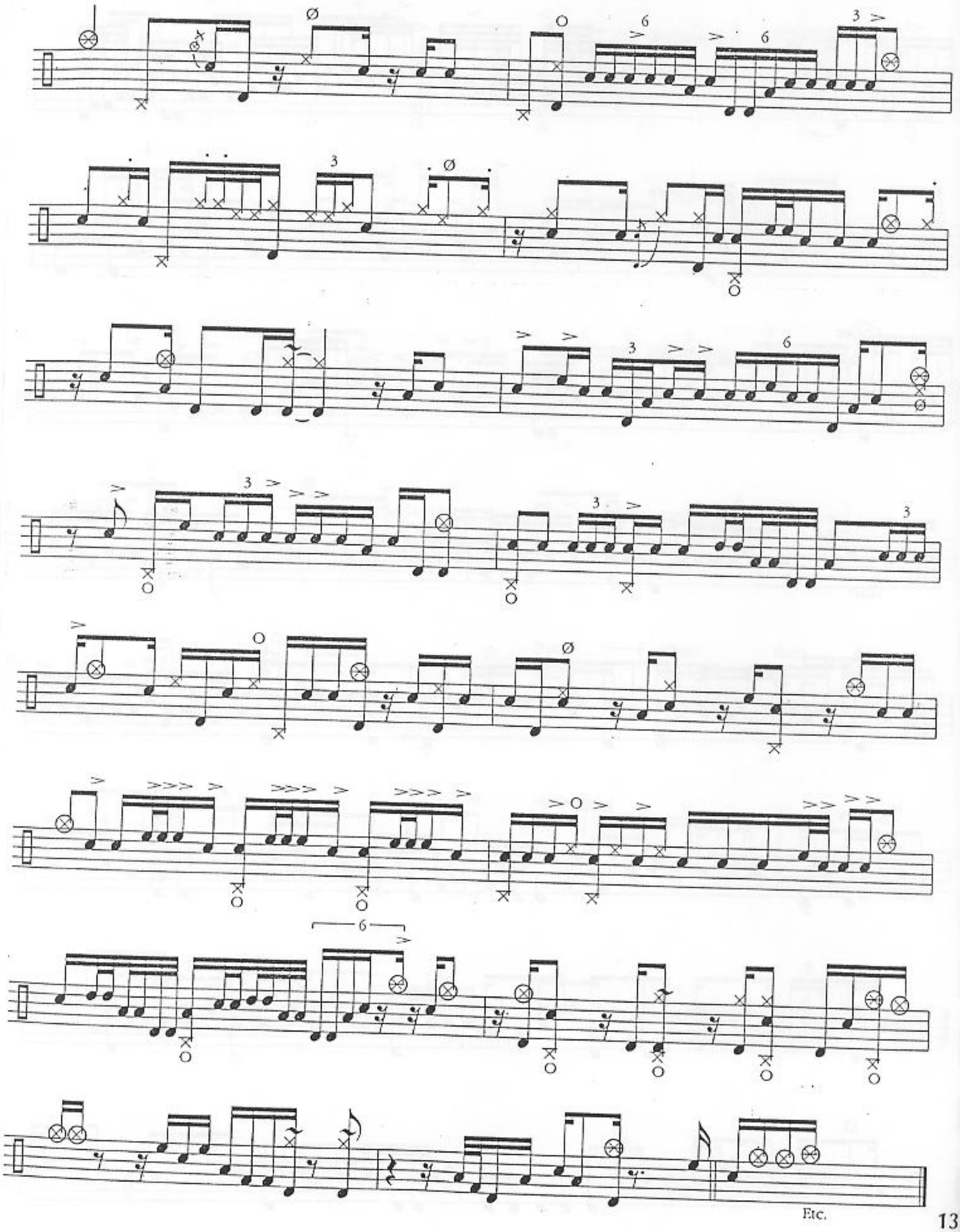
# "Spur of the Moment" Solo

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## Hand Technique

First of all, let me give you my definition of good technique. To me, it means being able to play anything—fast, slow, loud or soft—with a great deal of control and finesse. Having good technique is, to me, the basis of good drum-playing.

So to get into it, I want to say to *match grip* players that whatever goes for your right hand goes for your left hand. I play mostly *conventional* (or *traditional*) grip because I spent most of my life learning how to play that way. I play matched grip as well, but not as much, and when I do it's an emotional decision. I don't feel that one grip is technically better than the other. Don't let it hang you up.

## Balance Point

Let's start with the most important element of holding the stick, which is finding the ***balance point***. If the stick doesn't bounce freely on the drum you are going to have problems, namely *tension*.

If you hold the stick too far towards the middle, it won't bounce well on the head. If you hold it too far back (towards the end), it dies after it strikes the head. What you want to do is find the place where it bounces the most. Balance the stick on your forefinger and let it bounce on the head. Experiment with different positioning on the finger until the optimum placement is found. Then grip the stick with your thumb and place the rest of your hand around the stick in a natural playing position. Look at the stick from both sides of your hand and remember where it is—that's where it should always be.

If you are having trouble with your playing, always take a look at your grip and make sure that your balance point is working for you.

## Grip

The next important thing is the grip itself. While holding the stick between your thumb and index finger (right hand or left hand when playing matched grip), make sure that the fat part of your thumb never leaves the stick. I see a lot of players with their thumb off to the side. The minute you do that, you lose all your finger control and you'll only be using your wrist and arms. I'll explain more about the left hand traditional grip in the finger control section.

Another important factor is to keep a space between the thumb and index finger. If that space closes up, your forearm will also tighten up.

## Finger Control

Finger control involves using the fingers along with the wrist and arms to make the stroke. To get the finger control movement started you should first be able to move the stick with just your thumb and index finger. Position the thumb facing straight up and move the stick straight up and down while pivoting over the index finger. Try it in the air a couple of times before hitting the drum.

When this feels comfortable, place the rest of your fingers around the stick and get it (the stick) going in the same exact motion—straight up and down.

It is a little bit more difficult to do this with your left hand when playing conventional/traditional grip. Again, start by finding the balance point where the stick will bounce the most. A lot of times you may see me holding my left stick way back towards the end of the stick, but it's only to gain more leverage when I want to get more of a backbeat. I practiced the stick control method long enough that I can make the fingers work even if I am holding the stick back towards the end, but it is more difficult that way.

I use a two-finger technique that was shown to me by Jim Petercsak, a

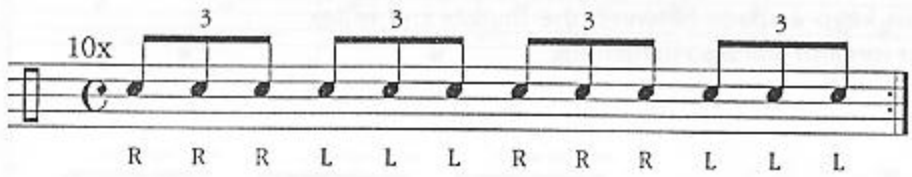
professor at Potsdam College in upstate New York, many years ago. It is based on using the top two fingers of the left hand to control the movement of the stick. Start with your palm down (facing the drum head) and lift and throw the stick down on the head and let it bounce by itself (your two bottom fingers only function to bring the stick back up after the initial stroke, and have nothing else to do with the finger control method). The idea is to continue the bounce with the fingers after the initial stroke. It's important to remember that the stick needs to be parallel to the drum before it can rebound. Master the repetitive rebound in this position (palm down) before you attempt to turn your hand over to the normal hand position.

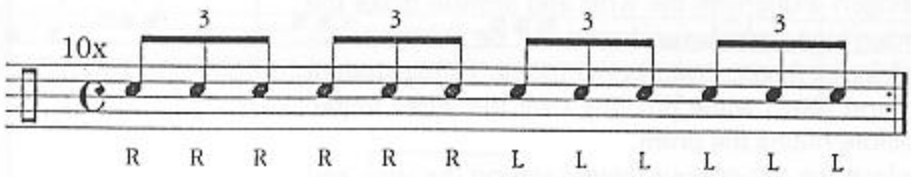
When you do turn your hand over, it should be straight with your arm. There should be a straight line from your elbow to your back of your hand. Be sure to keep an open space between your index finger and your thumb. The stick is fairly loose. *Remember, it's all bounce.* The idea now is to get the sticks to become an extension of your body, and more importantly, of your mind. Before you can expect your hands to work well together, they must work well by themselves, so some single-hand exercises are in order. This particular triplet-based one is very helpful for both finger strengthening and warming up. The idea is to go from one to the next without stopping, repeating each ten times. I usually use this as a fingers-only warmup (no wrist) with no accents. Be careful not to start at too fast a tempo. The idea is to get through the whole exercise—*stamina!*

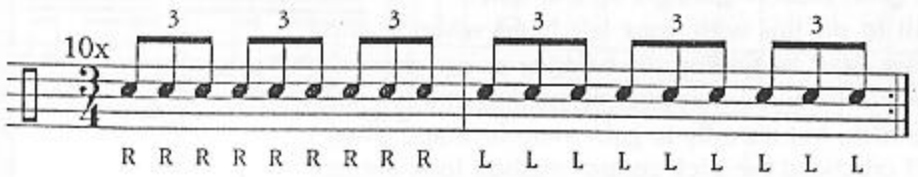
Keep in mind that this is only one example. Be creative and think up your own. Anything you can do to make the hands and fingers work so that the stick moves faster and more efficiently is going to be helpful. Also, you don't have to be on a drum kit for technique practice. Good technique doesn't come instantly. Spend as much time as you can with sticks in your hands and you will see good results!

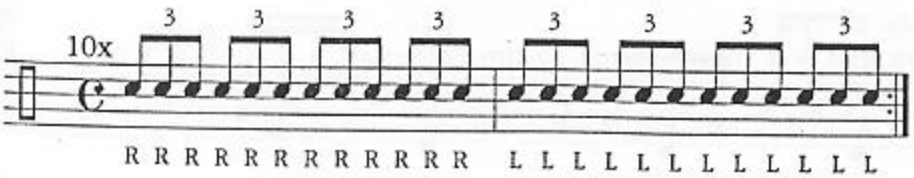
## Finger-Stroke Control Exercise

Now let's get each hand working and build some strength. The next exercise is a good one for this. While using only the fingers, not the wrists, the exercise begins with 3-strokes in each hand, then to 6-strokes, 9-strokes and finally to 12-strokes, while repeating each section ten times. The idea is to get the exercise as fast as you can. Be careful not to start the exercise too fast on the easier groups of three. Try a couple of the 12's to determine how fast you can go. This is a great chops-building exercise that I still use for warming up.



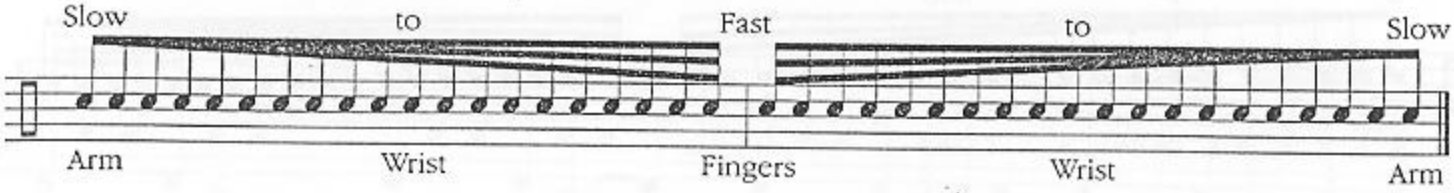



Once your hands are working singly, we want them to work together. I never practiced a lot of rudiments or played in a drum corp. I basically worked on five strokes: ***Single-Strokes, Double-Strokes, Paradiddles, Flams*** *and the* ***Buzz-roll.***

## Single-Stroke Roll

Generally, when we are learning to play a single-stroke roll, we are taught to start slow, get faster and try to keep it even. When I used to practice single-stroke rolls I would usually get tense at a certain point and couldn't go any faster. I wanted to figure out why this was happening. One day when I got to that point, I took one of my hands away and discovered that I could go faster with that hand alone when I used finger control.

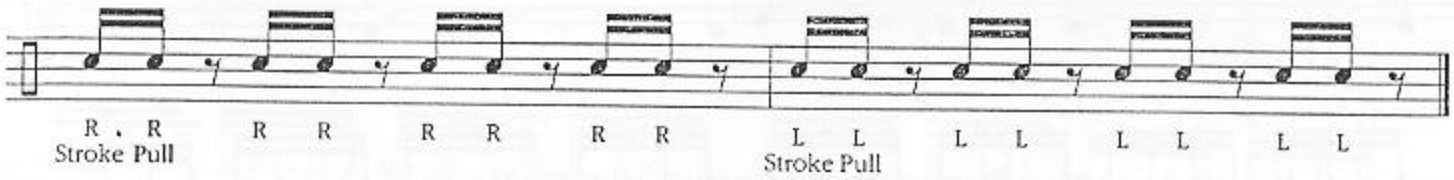
The problem, as it turned out, was that I wasn't converting from wrist to fingers as the tempo increased when I played with both hands. There is a point in the single-stroke roll that you have to tell yourself, "switch to fingers." It enables you to play faster and more easily for longer periods of time because you don't use as much strength—the fingers help the sticks move faster.



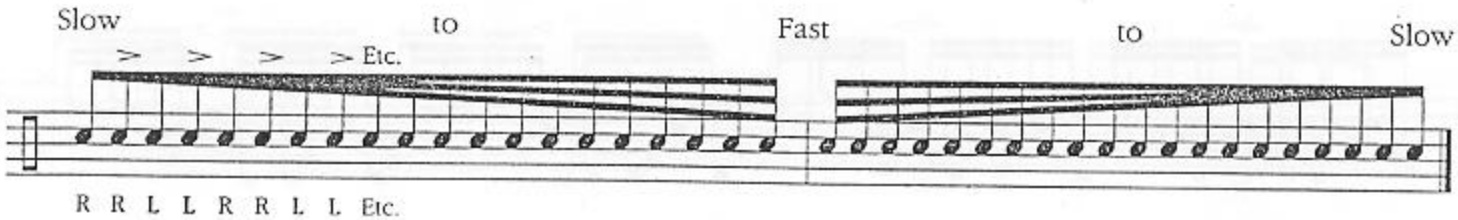

## Double-Stroke Roll

Double-stroke rolls are probably the most mis-played stroke. Again, we are taught to play a double-stroke roll by letting the stick hit once, letting it bounce, then putting both hands together and that's how we get a double-stroke roll. Well, there's more to it than that.

The mistake is that many people don't pay attention to the *second* stroke. What I do is a *stroke and pull* technique—snapping the second stroke back into your hand with your fingers.



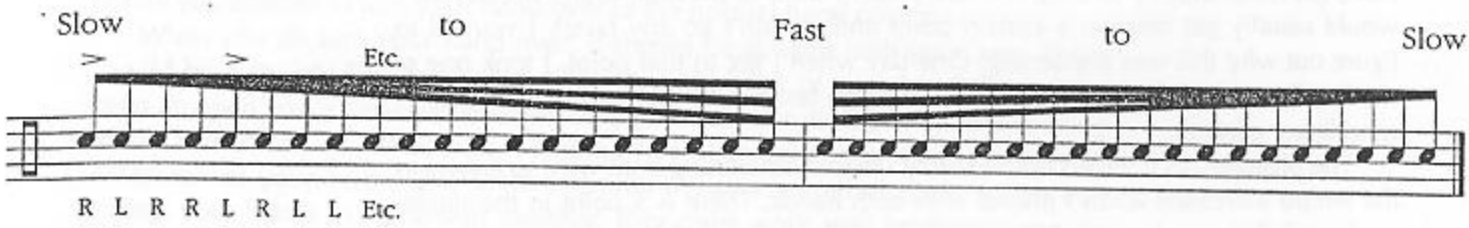

Now take it a step further by accenting the second note of the double so that when you play the roll faster, the two notes will sound even in volume and attack.



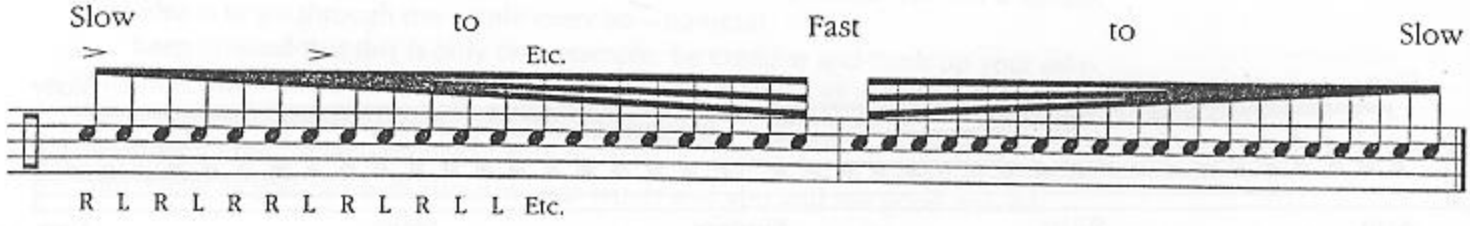

I use a lot of doubles on the drumset. Your double-strokes have to be strong to get all those sharp and precise sounds.

# PARADIDDLES

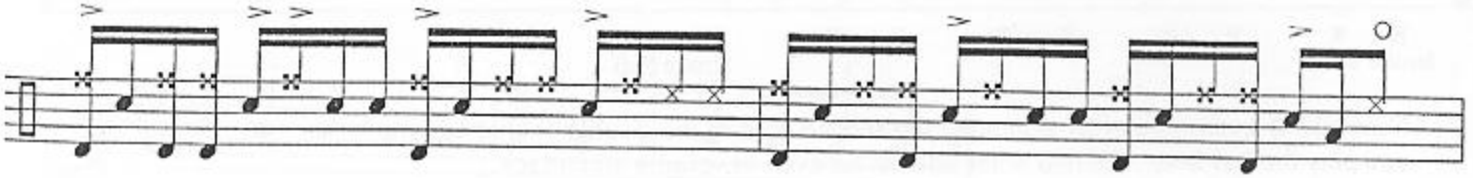
Paradiddles are simply a combination of singles and doubles. This stroke has many possibilities on the drumset. The paradiddle is also the only stroke of this group that uses *internal dynamics*. What I mean by internal dynamics is that I accent the first stroke of each paradiddle, and all the notes in between are the same stick height and volume, and are played much closer to the head.

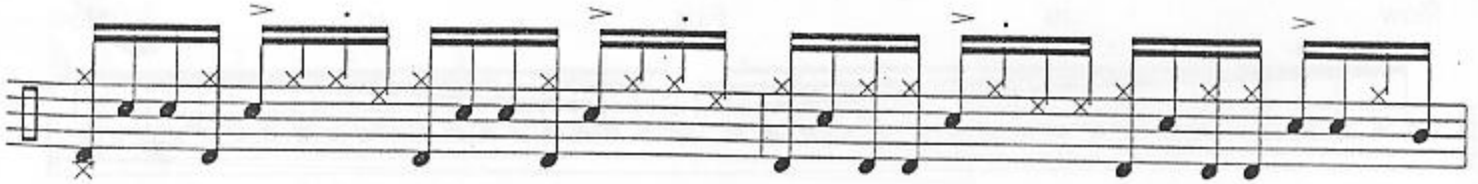



The same stick height principles apply to double paradiddles as well:

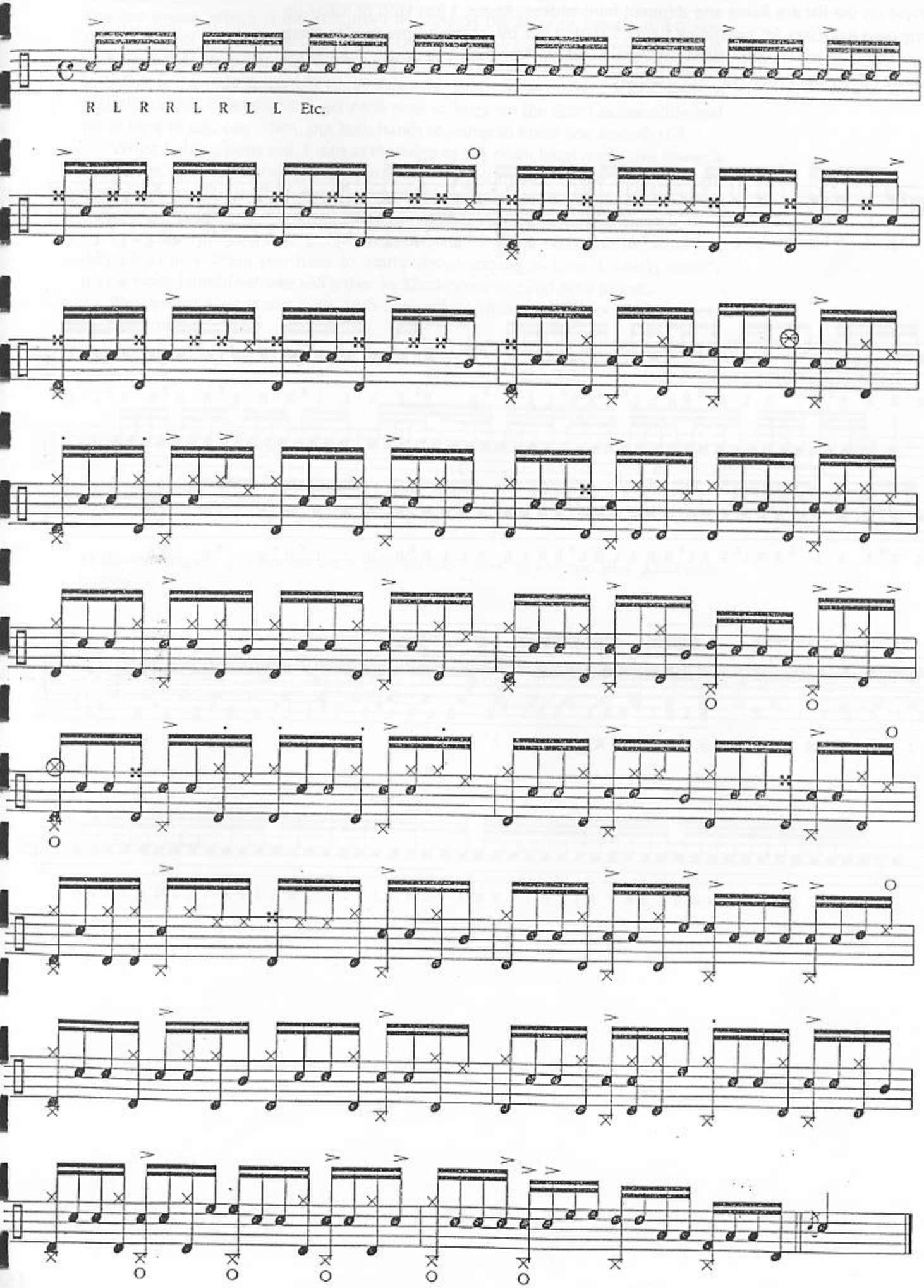



Now I would like to show you how paradiddles can be used on the drumset.



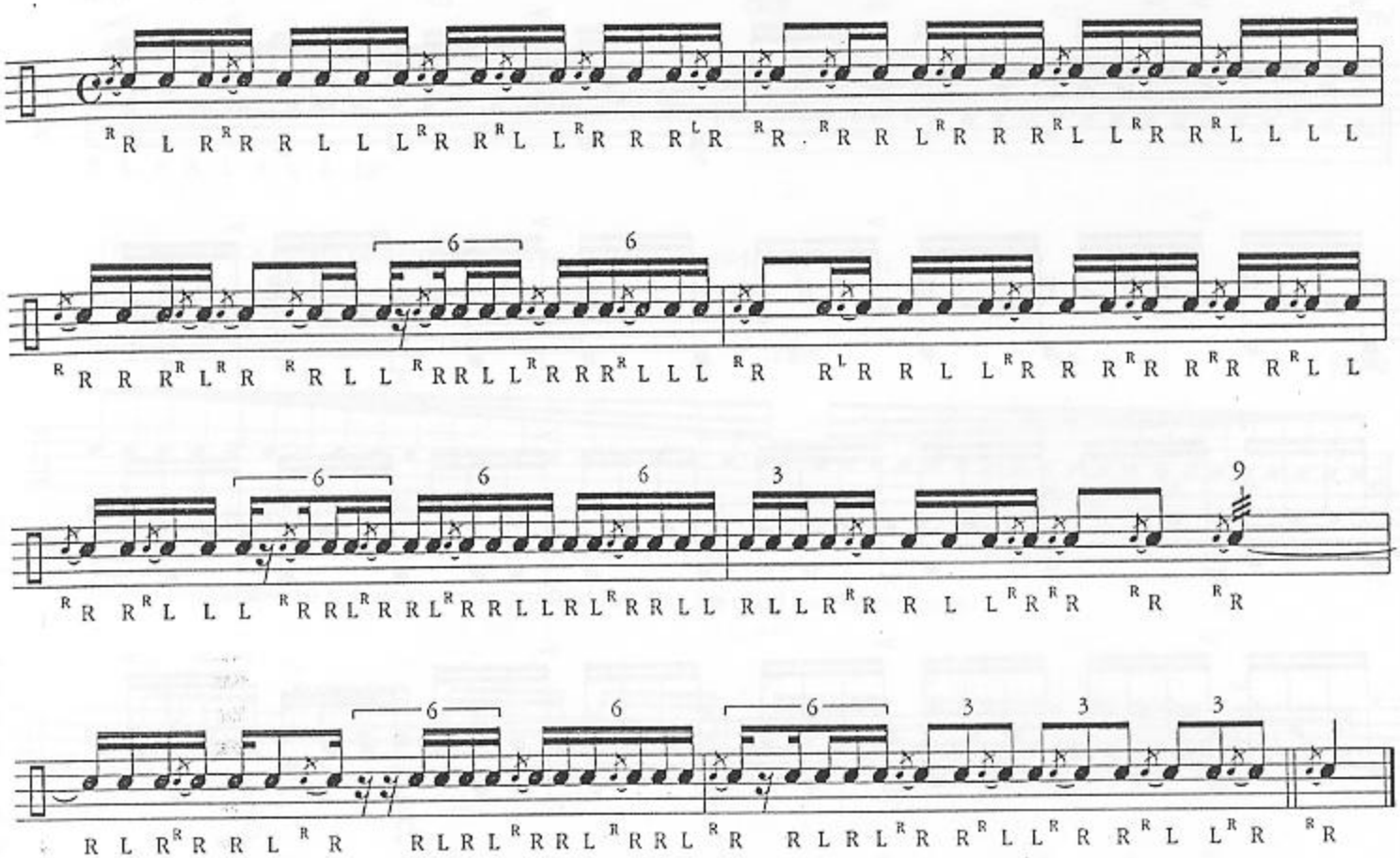


This is what it sounds like a little bit faster:



# FLAMS

Next on the list are flams and different flam strokes. Again, I just kind of made up my own exercises for practicing flams. I started out by learning how to play them correctly, which means starting with one stick lower than the other. Then I just made up my own exercises. For example:



## Buzz Or Press Roll (Closed-Stroke Roll)

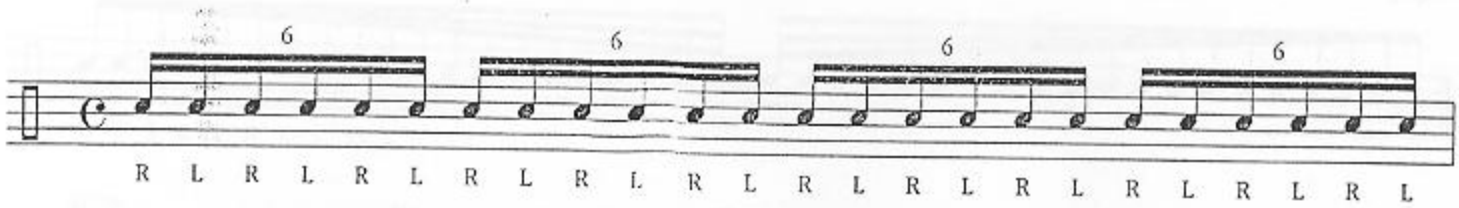
The last stroke, which is different from the rest, is the *buzz* or *press* roll. For this stroke, I use only two fingers (index and middle) of my right hand, and I tighten up and close the space between my thumb and index finger. It is a press or *pressure* roll. This is the only stoke that I play this way. With my left hand I apply pressure with the thumb. The idea is to get each note to buzz on the drum as smoothly and for as long as you can. Then, put both hands together to make one smooth roll.

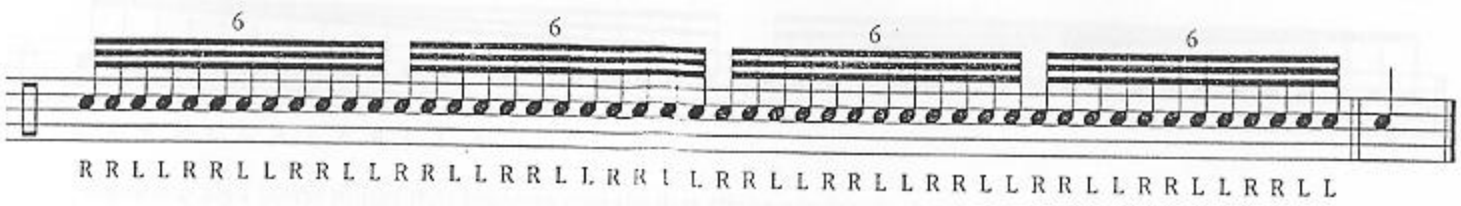
When I play a press roll, I start at the edge of the drum head and move towards the center, the reason being that if you start in the middle of the head, you are more likely to hear the different strokes. If you start toward the edge, you will find that it is easier to blend the strokes together for a smooth, continuous sound.

In a contemporary setting, I wouldn't normally use a buzz roll because it is difficult to play when you have to worry about staying in time. I would usually play a ***closed double-stroke roll*** either as 32nd-notes or 32nd-note triplets.

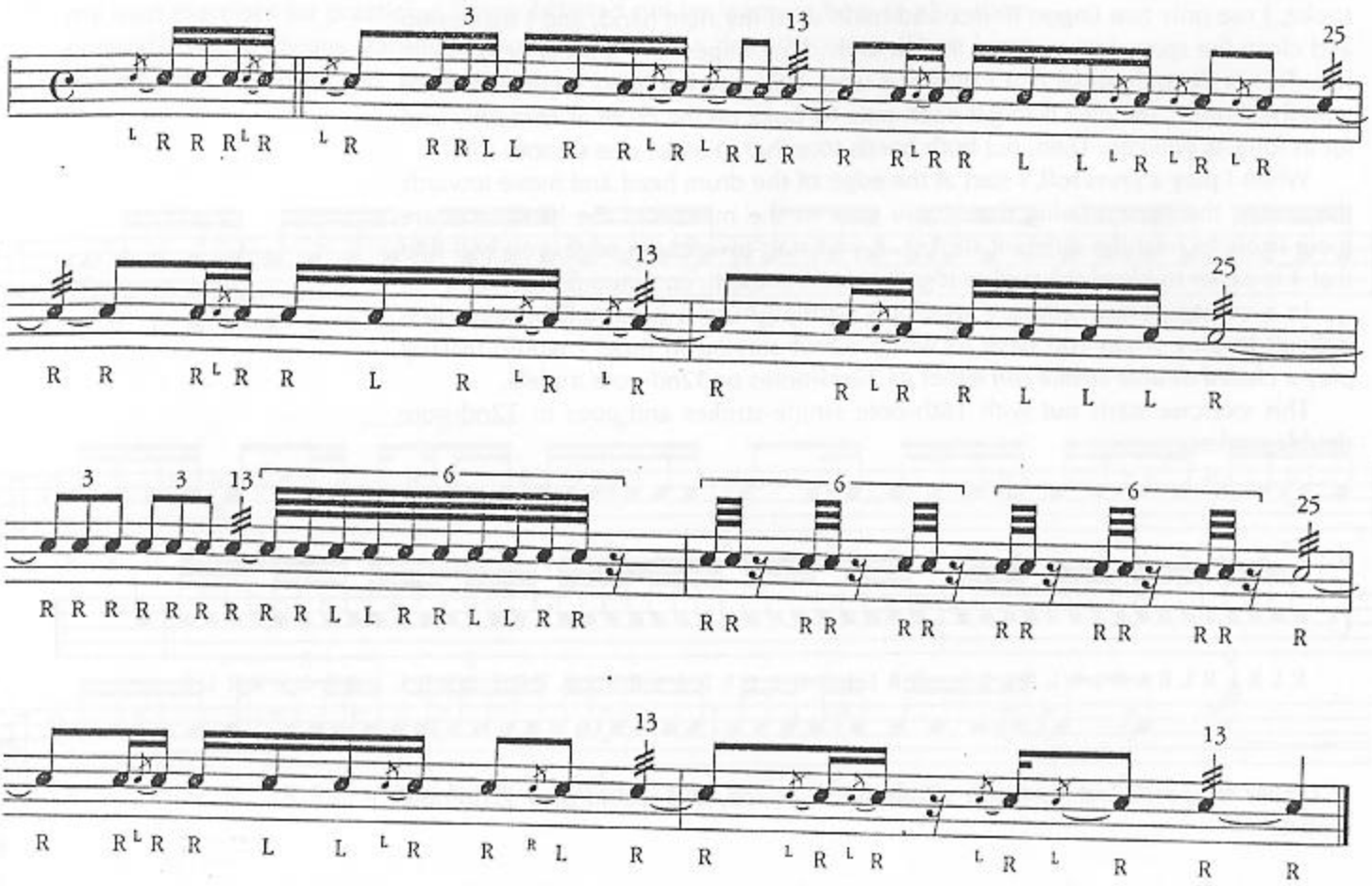
This exercise starts out with 16th-note single-strokes and goes to 32nd-note double strokes.

At slower tempos, 32nd-notes are a little bit too open, so I would play 32nd-note triplets.



Here is an example of how playing closed double-stroke rolls can make it easier to roll in time, but still give you the sound of a buzz roll.

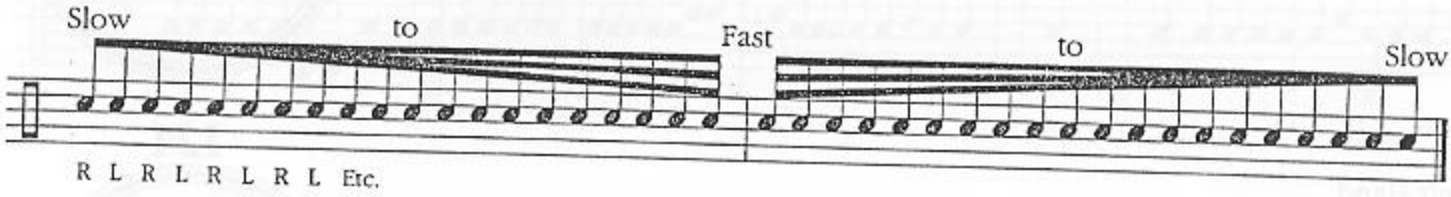


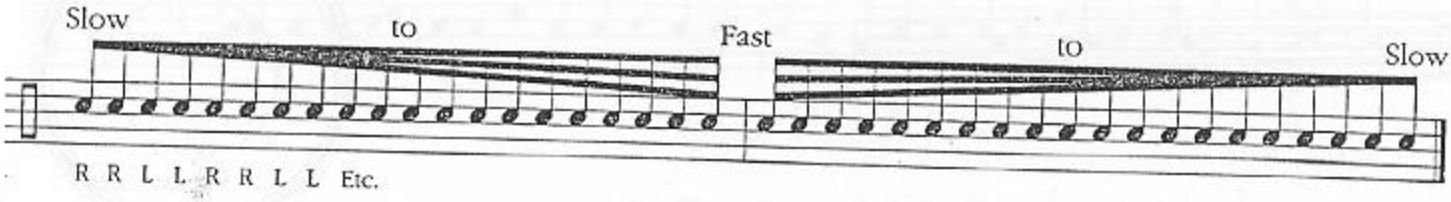
# BRUSHES

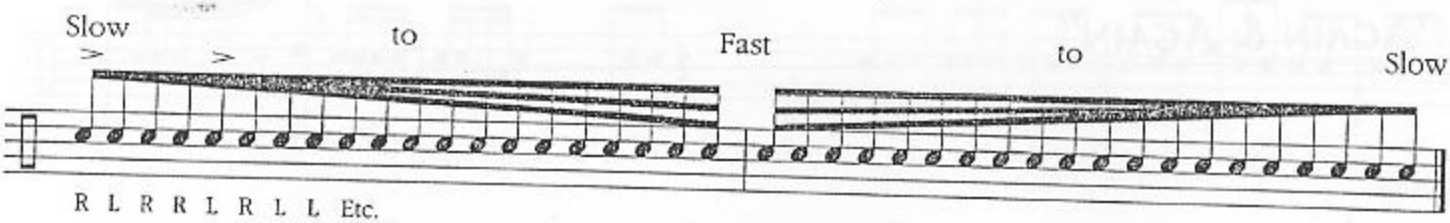
It seems like a lot of young players today are forgetting about brushes, which I feel is a mistake, because brushes can be used in a lot of different ways. Learning how to play the basic jazz patterns with brushes is important but it doesn't have to stop there. For instance, sometimes on a contemporary rock/straight 8th-note date, I will go in and overdub a brush part on top of a basic rock groove. There are many possibilities.

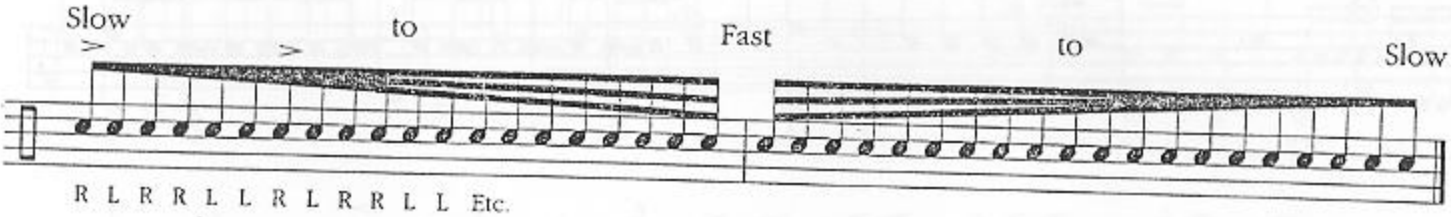
A good way to start is to take the attitude that whatever you can do with sticks, you can also do with brushes.

One thing you should note is that I don't always play with the brushes extended out all the way. It's better for me to keep them in a little bit, so that they feel more like sticks and I can play faster singles.

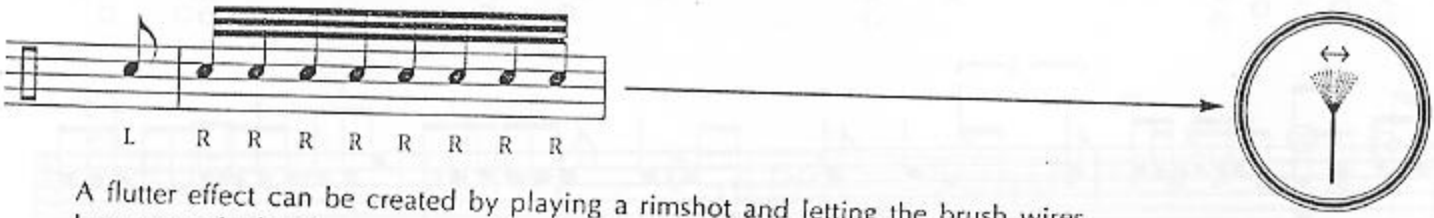


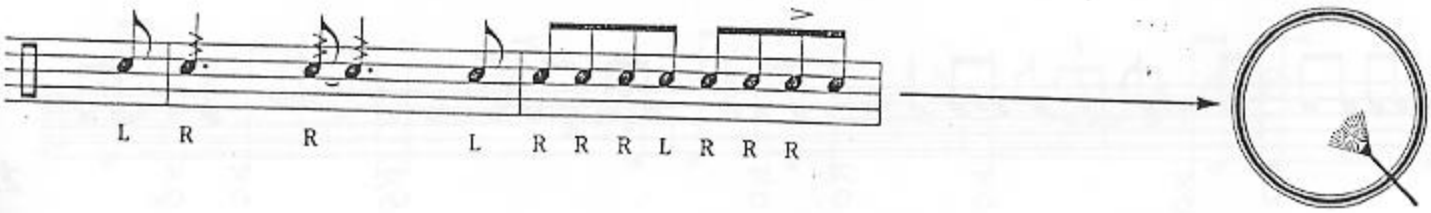




There are also some things that brushes can do that sticks obviously cannot do, like sweeping motions and flutter sounds.

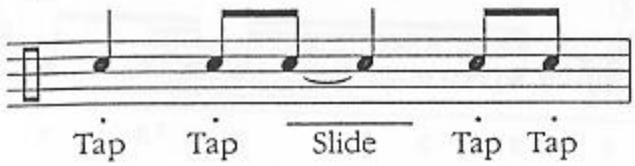


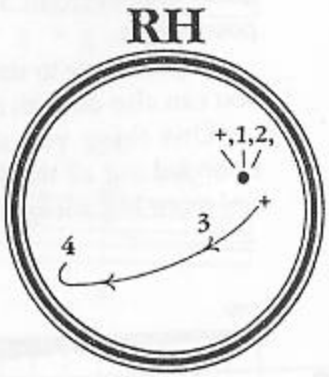

A flutter effect can be created by playing a rimshot and letting the brush wires bounce on the head.



I will incorporate some of these ideas while playing along to "Again and Again," from my *Contemporary Drummer + One* package. My 48-bar brush solo after the bass solo has been transcribed below.

Right Hand

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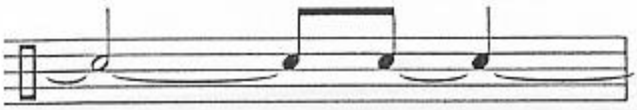
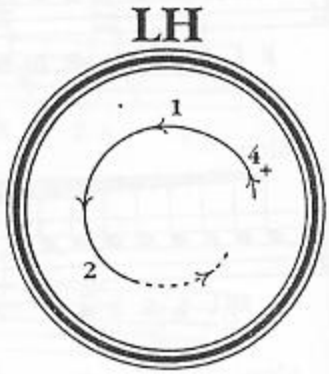
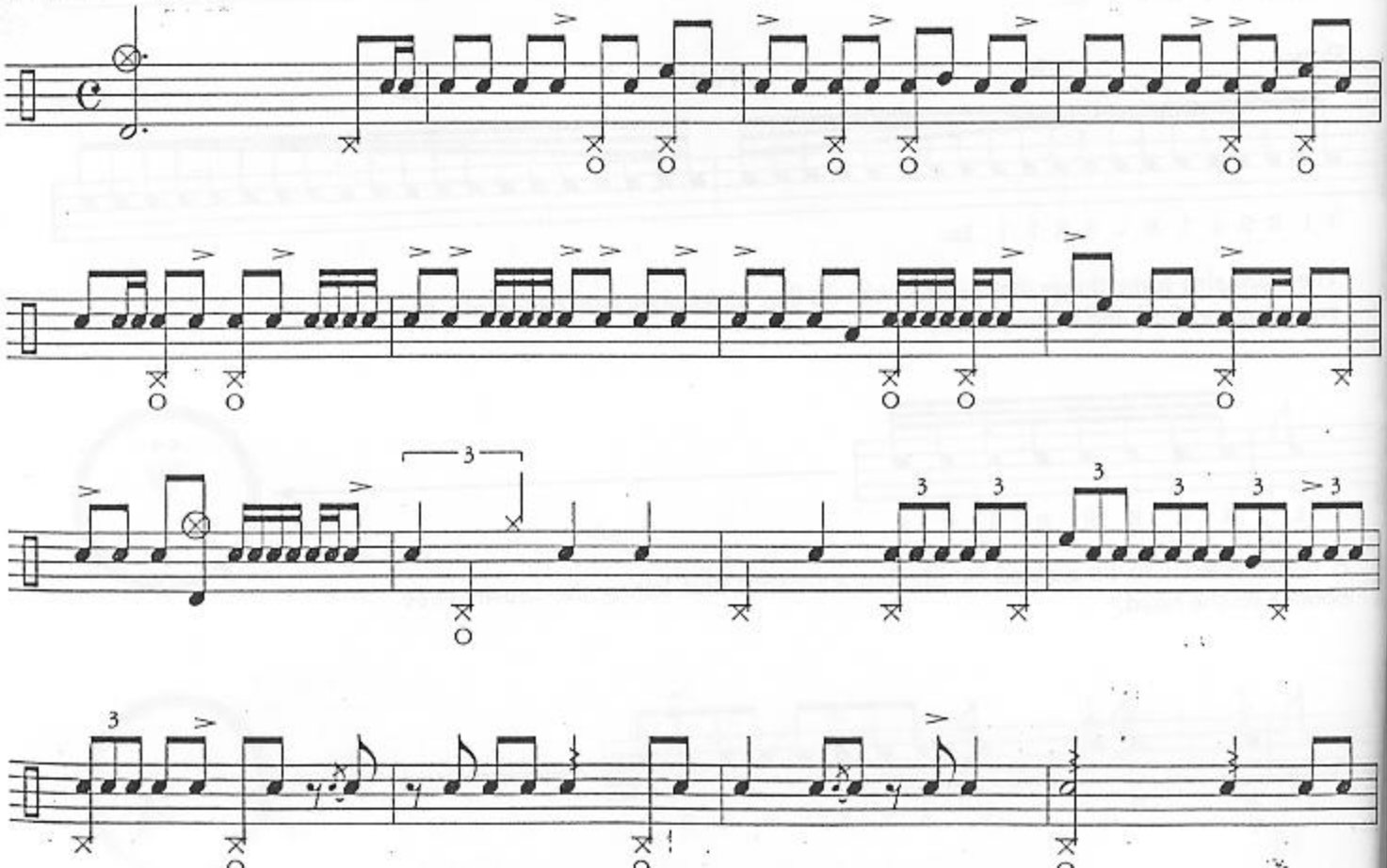
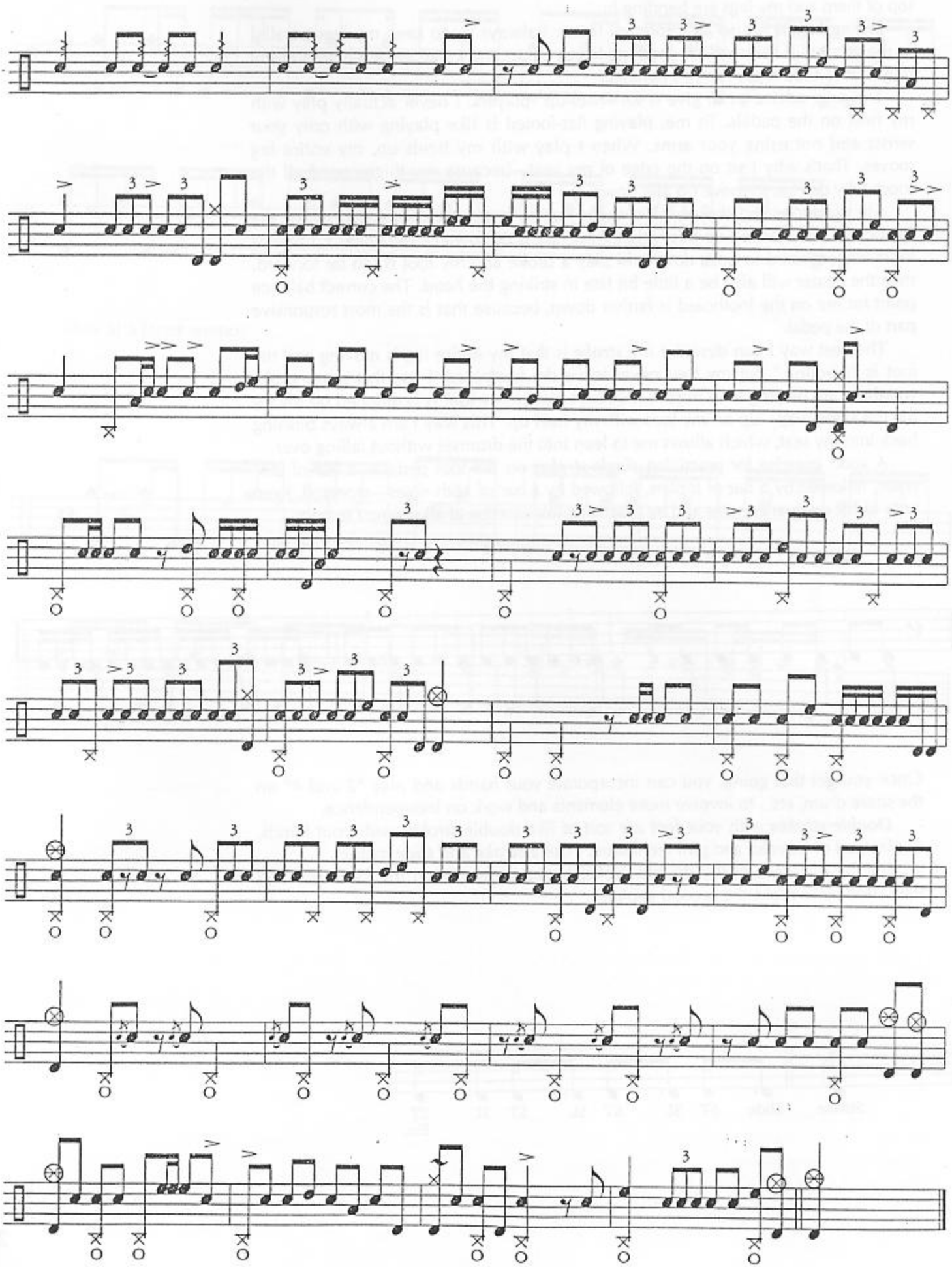





## "Again & Again"

Brushes





# FOOT TECHNIQUE

Our next topic is foot technique.

First, there are a couple of basic things I think about before starting out. Number one is ***sitting position***. I like to sit on the edge of my seat, with my body positioned far enough away from the pedals so that I don't feel like I am right on top of them and my legs are bending in.

***Sitting height*** is also an important factor. I always try to keep my legs parallel to the ground. If I sit too low, then my knees go up and I start getting a pain in my thighs. If I sit too high, I am off balance.

The only advice I can give is for "heel-up" players. I never actually play with my heel on the pedals. To me, playing flat-footed is like playing with only your wrists and not using your arms. When I play with my heels up, my entire leg moves. That's why I sit on the edge of my seat—because my thighs need all the room they can get to move up and down.

My ***placement*** on the pedal is about half to a quarter of the way down the footboard. The reason I do this is that if my foot is up towards the linkage, I have a lot more footboard to push down. If I play a stroke and my foot is too far forward, then the beater will also be a little bit late in striking the head. The correct balance point for me on the footboard is farther down, because that is the most responsive part of the pedal.

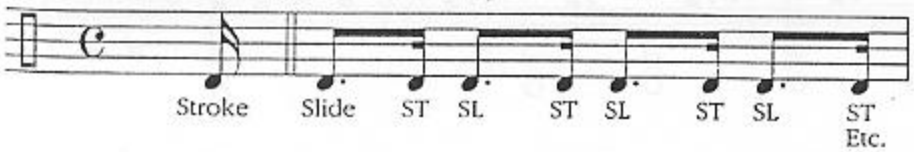
The best way I can describe my ***stroke*** is that my entire leg is moving and my foot is "pivoting," but my toes never leave the footboard. I use this same stroke whether I am playing loud or soft, it doesn't matter. My foot is positioned on my hi-hat the same way—up on my toes with my heel up. This way I am always pushing back into my seat, which allows me to lean into the drumset without falling over.

A good exercise for practicing ***single-strokes*** on the foot pedal is a bar of 8th-notes, followed by a bar of triplets, followed by a bar of 16th-notes—repeated. Keep your hi-hat on quarter-notes and try practicing this exercise at all different tempos.

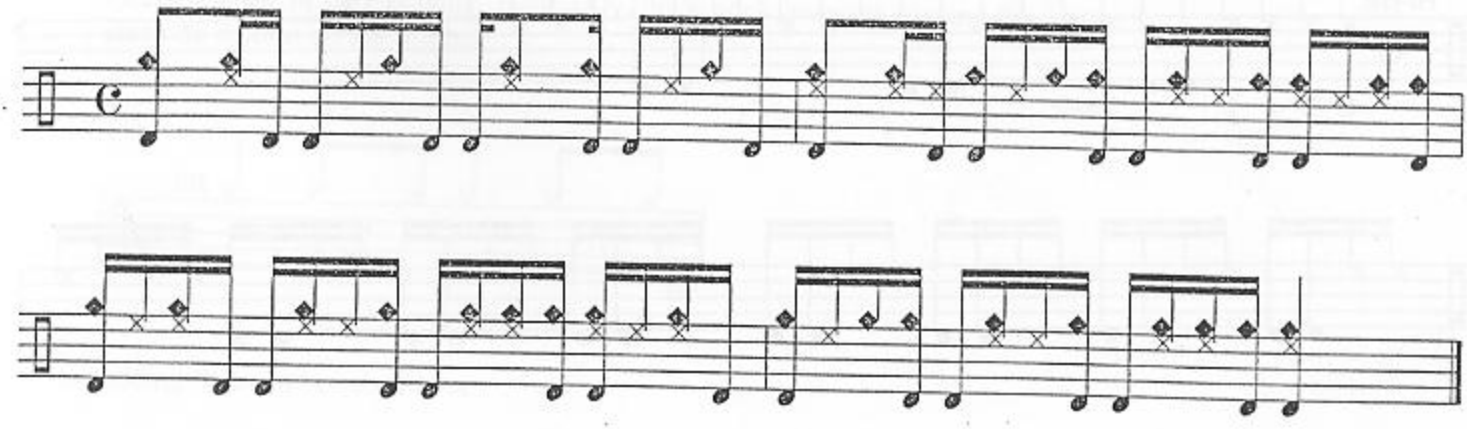
Once you get that going, you can incorporate your hands and play "2 and 4" on the snare drum, etc., to involve more elements and work on independence.

***Double-strokes*** with your feet are sort of like double-strokes with your hands. But instead of a stroke and pull technique, I use a ***stroke*** *and* ***slide*** motion.

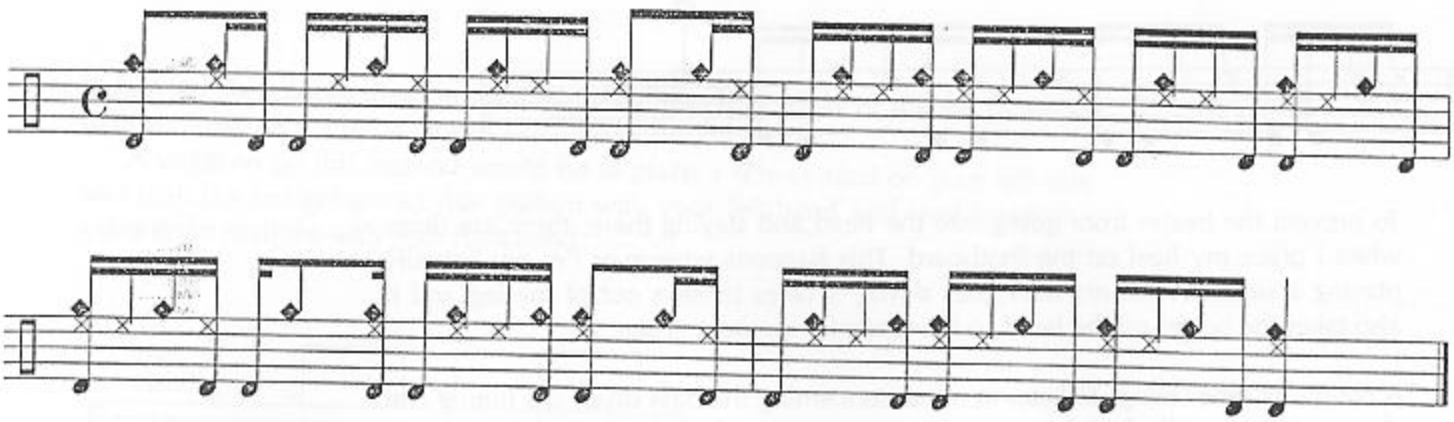
For the first note of the double-stroke, I start farther down the footboard and then slide up to make the second stroke.



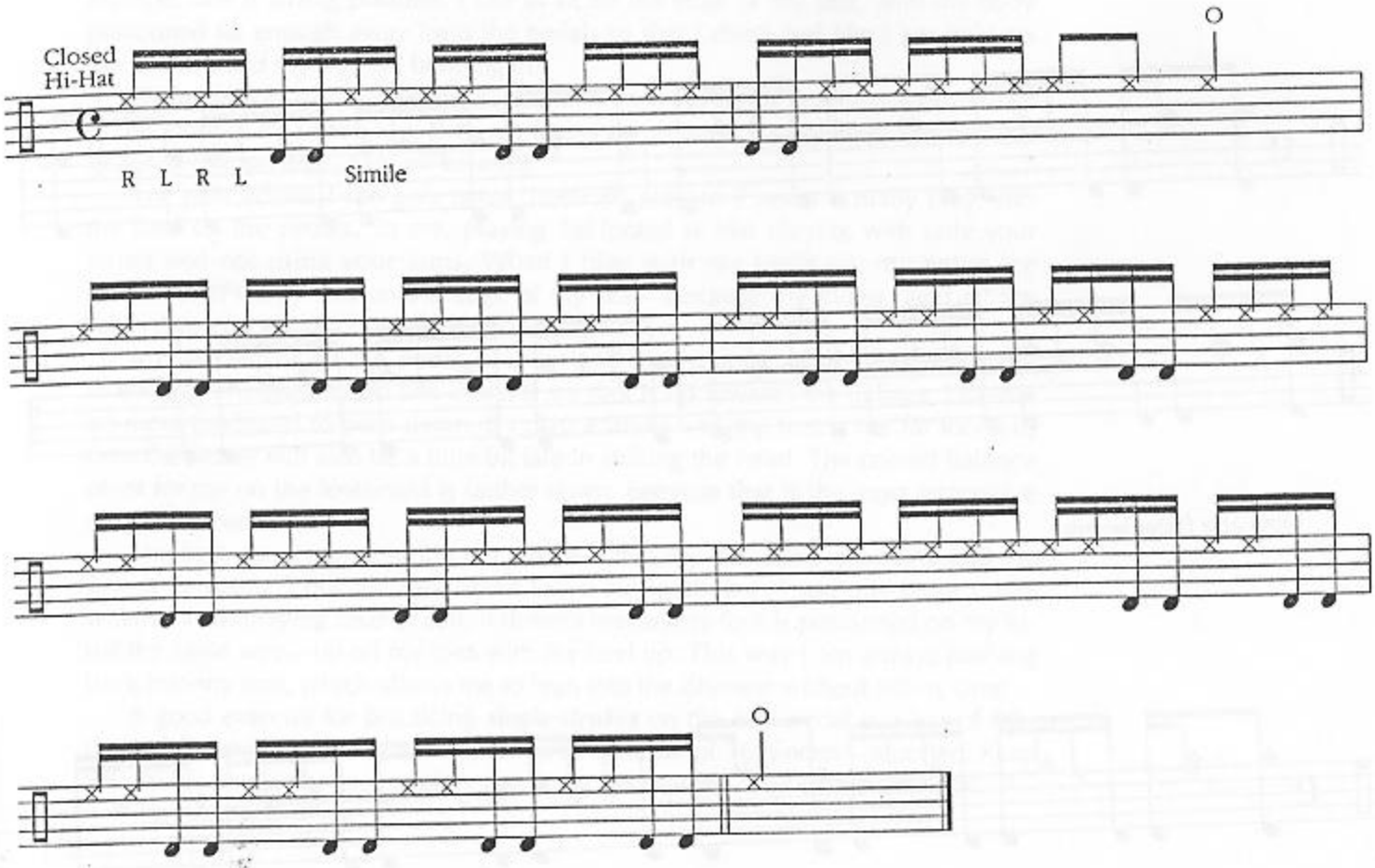
I use this type of stroke when I play a samba:



Now at a faster tempo:



When I play at faster tempos my foot will tend to turn or pivot on the pedal towards my hi-hat:




To prevent the beater from going into the head and staying there, there are times when I place my heel on the footboard. This happens whenever I'm not actually playing a stoke. When my heel goes down, it takes tension out of my leg and it also takes the beater off the head so I'm ready for the next stroke.

A couple of other things to keep in mind concerning the bass drum are ***tuning*** and ***dampening***. I usually find that in a contemporary situation, the drums I use have a hole in the front head, along with a pillow or some sort of padding towards the bottom of the drum. The more padding you have, the more bottom end the drum will have, as well as being more comfortable to play.

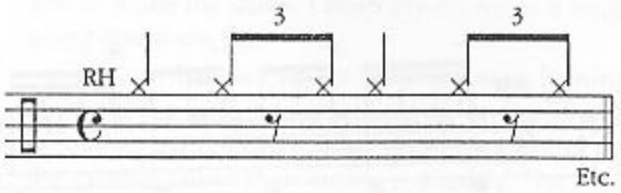
I also keep the front of my bass drum up off the floor. If you let the front of the drum touch the floor, the beater will be hitting at an angle and not making solid contact with the head. If you keep the front of the bass drum off the floor and up a little bit, the beater will make solid contact. You don't want the beater to go farther than it has to.

I have just recently begun using ***double pedals*** so I don't really have any specific demos to show you. What I can tell you is that whatever goes for the right foot goes for the left. I'm trying to get my left foot to do what my right foot can already do. You can't expect both feet to work together if one foot doesn't work as well as the other.

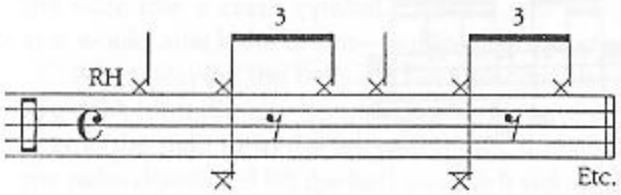
Another thing to think about is the pedal itself, specifically the tension of the spring and the length of the beater. I like to keep my spring tension pretty loose. I want it to be tight enough that it gives me some resistance, so that it doesn't just fall on the head when I put my foot on it, but I also want it to be loose enough that it does not cause tension in my leg muscles. I want it to be easy to push down—I don't want to be fighting it.

# COORDINATED INDEPENDENCE

Now that we have gone through hand and foot technique, the next step is to put them together. I recommend two books: the first, written by Jim Chapin, is called *Advanced Techniques for the Modern Drummer*. This book deals with independence in jazz playing. Essentially, Jim's book involves playing the basic jazz ride rhythm on the cymbal:

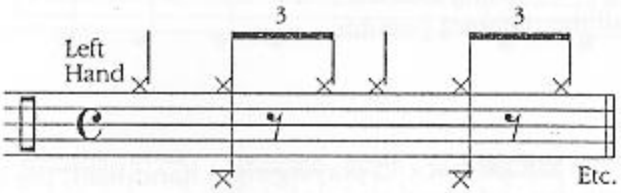



Adding "2 and 4" on the hi-hat:




*Advanced Techniques* then provides different lines and pages of written music to read and play on the snare drum.

A variation on this method would be to place a ride cymbal on your left side and play the straight-ahead ride pattern with your left hand and read (play) the snare drum rhythms with your right hand.

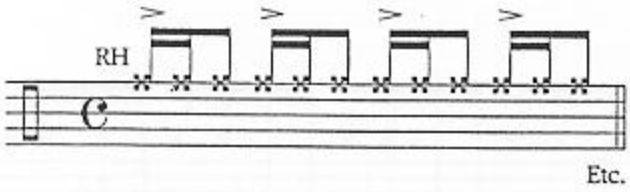



Another variation would be the jazz ride pattern with your right hand, hi-hat on "2 and 4," and play all the written exercises with your foot. Then switch it around and play the ride cymbal with your left hand and the exercises with your foot, and so on.

The other book that I recommend is Gary Chester's *New Breed.* This book is written in a more contemporary setting with more 8th-note and rock-type feels.

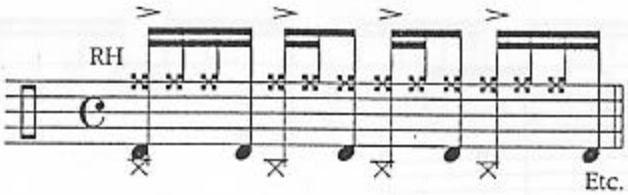
In this exercise, you play a consistent part or ostinato, in this case on the right hi-hat (if you don't have a hi-hat on your right hand side, just use your regular hi-hat).

Right Hand Pattern:




Now add the bass line written for the bass drum:

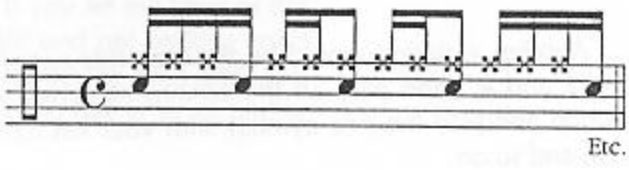
Quarter-notes on the hi-hat with your left foot:




Once you have all that going, then you have different material to read and play with your left hand on the snare drum. Another unique thing about this book is that Gary introduces a *fifth* part to the independence, which is your voice. You use your voice to "sing" the rhythms of each different limb, i.e., the first time through you sing the quarter-notes on the hi-hat, next time through the bass drum part, etc. This is the very beginning of Gary's *systems;* to get into all of them would take another video and book.

Now you can turn all the parts around and lead with the left hand (on the hi-hat), have the bass drum playing the same ostinato, and play the reading exercises with your right hand on the snare drum and so on through all the different possible voicings.

Then we get back to playing right hand lead, the bass ostinato with our left hand.




This leaves us open to play the reading exercise on the bass drum. What this learning method does is allow you to concentrate on each limb, which you may have not been doing before. I know in my case, it really made me focus on each individual limb, because everything is put on automatic pilot, and when you are singing each individual part you can really *hear* what it sounds like—not what you *think* it sounds like.

I suggest that you check out Gary's books—they will really tear you apart, so to speak, and really get you going.

## Drum Set-Up

Now I want to talk about my kit and explain why the drums and cymbals are angled the way they are. My drums are set up at an angle *in* towards me, generally at waist height—no lower. The reason for this is what I call the *powerstroke*. The powerstroke ends when your lower arm (the elbow to the wrist) forms a ninety-degree angle with your upper arm (elbow to your shoulder). If your lower arm drops below a straight line with your elbow, then you are only using part of your arm to make the stoke. I keep my drums at a height that keeps my lower hand from going down too far.

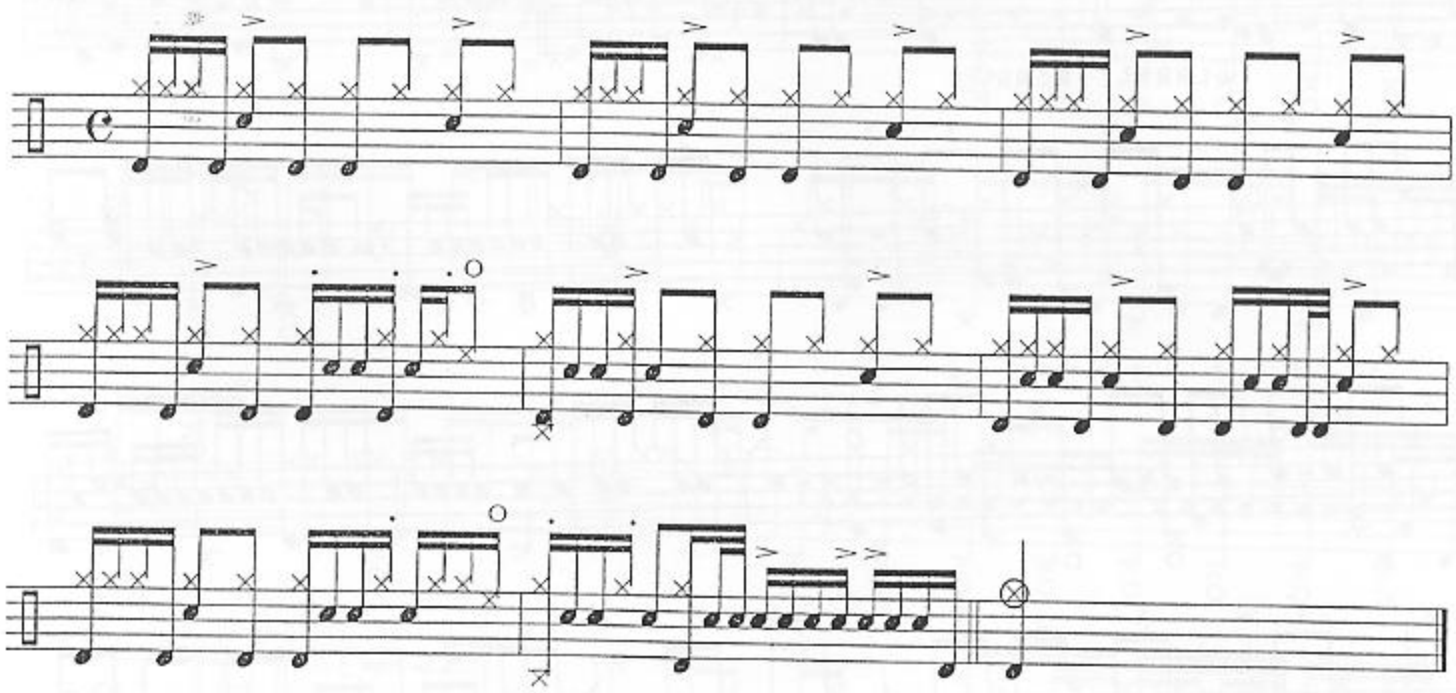
The cymbals are set up the same way, leaning in towards me. When hitting the cymbals, the idea is to *not* think of "laying into" the cymbal. You want to hit it and be pulling away from it. It's a good idea to use a sweeping motion off to the side of the cymbal rather than hitting it directly. The more you can snap and hit it with the shoulder of the stick, the more quickly and sharply the cymbal is going to *respond*.

## Ride Cymbal

The ride cymbal is another story. Generally, you are not going to be hitting it on the edge like a crash cymbal. Instead, you want to attack the ride the same way you would attack the drums—pulling the sound out of the instrument.

When playing the bell, we have to consider which side of the bell to play on. We can't hit it directly because we will hit the wing nut and washers. Whether you play to the right or to the left of the bell, it really doesn't matter. I usually play with my palm down and hit the bell on its left side with the shoulder of the stick.

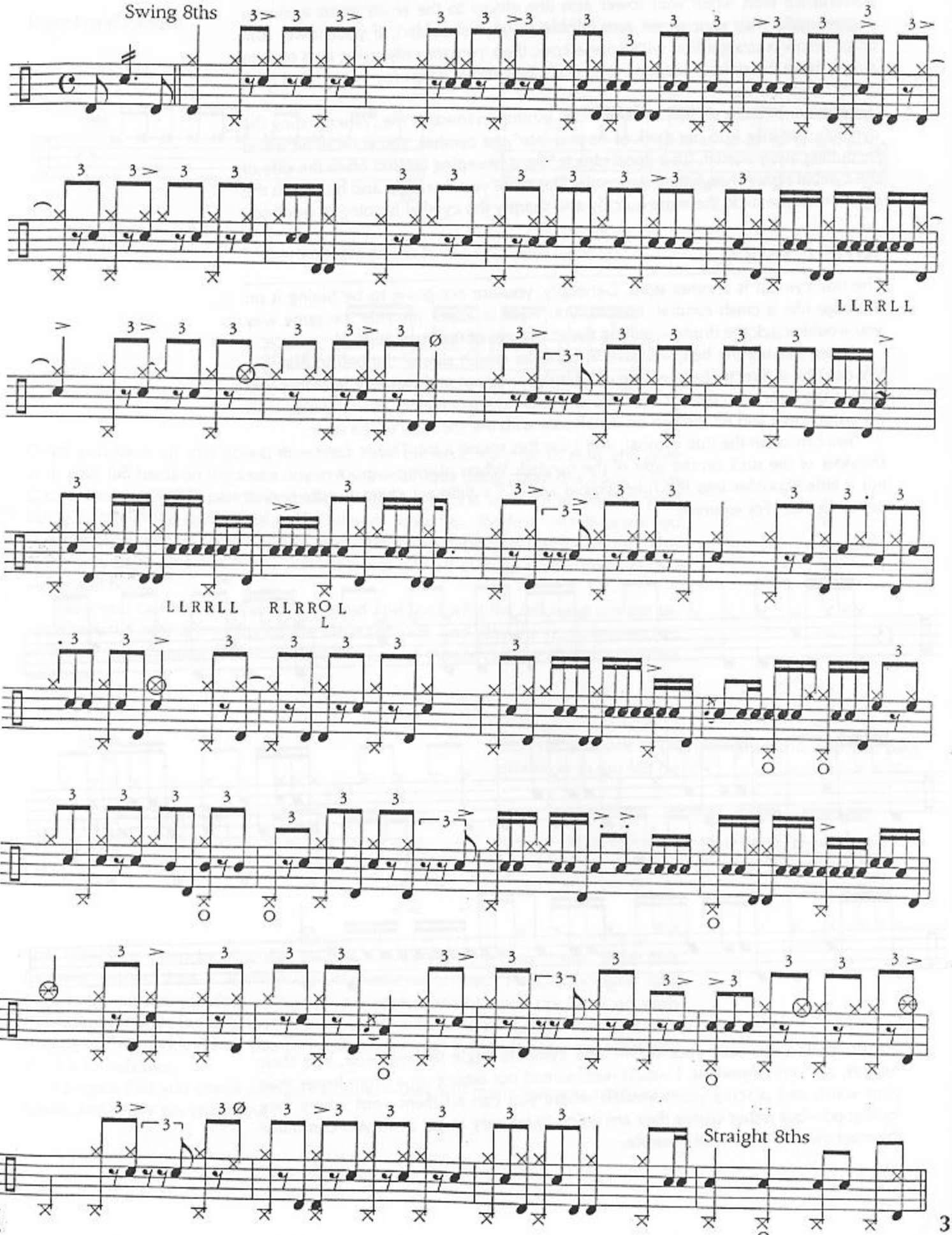
You can *crash* the ride cymbal, and I use this sound a lot. This is done with the shoulder of the stick on the side of the cymbal. When playing a groove, you can put a little shoulder into the ride cymbal and get a different characteristic sound out of the ride. For example:

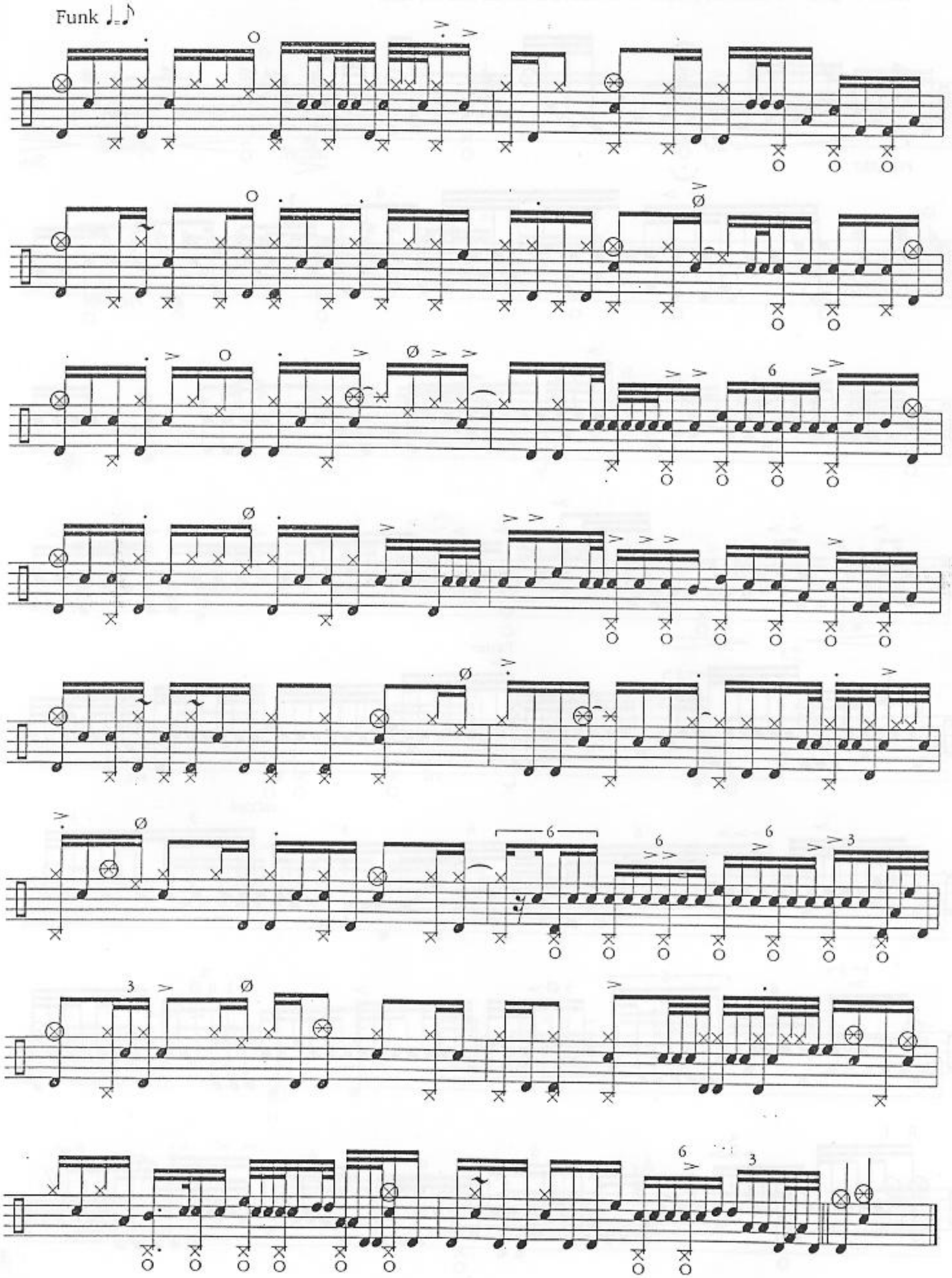


To summarize, the way your drums and cymbals angle towards you, and their heights, are very important. I would recommend not setting up a drum lower than your waist, and placing your cymbals where you can hit them—not where they look good—but rather where they are going to be easy to get at so you can make the most musical statement possible.

# Powerstroke On Cymbals

Now I want to give you an example of how to strike the cymbals correctly and how the powerstroke works. I'll play a few different styles and try to pay attention to how the drums and cymbal are being hit. I'll start with a straight ahead-type feel.

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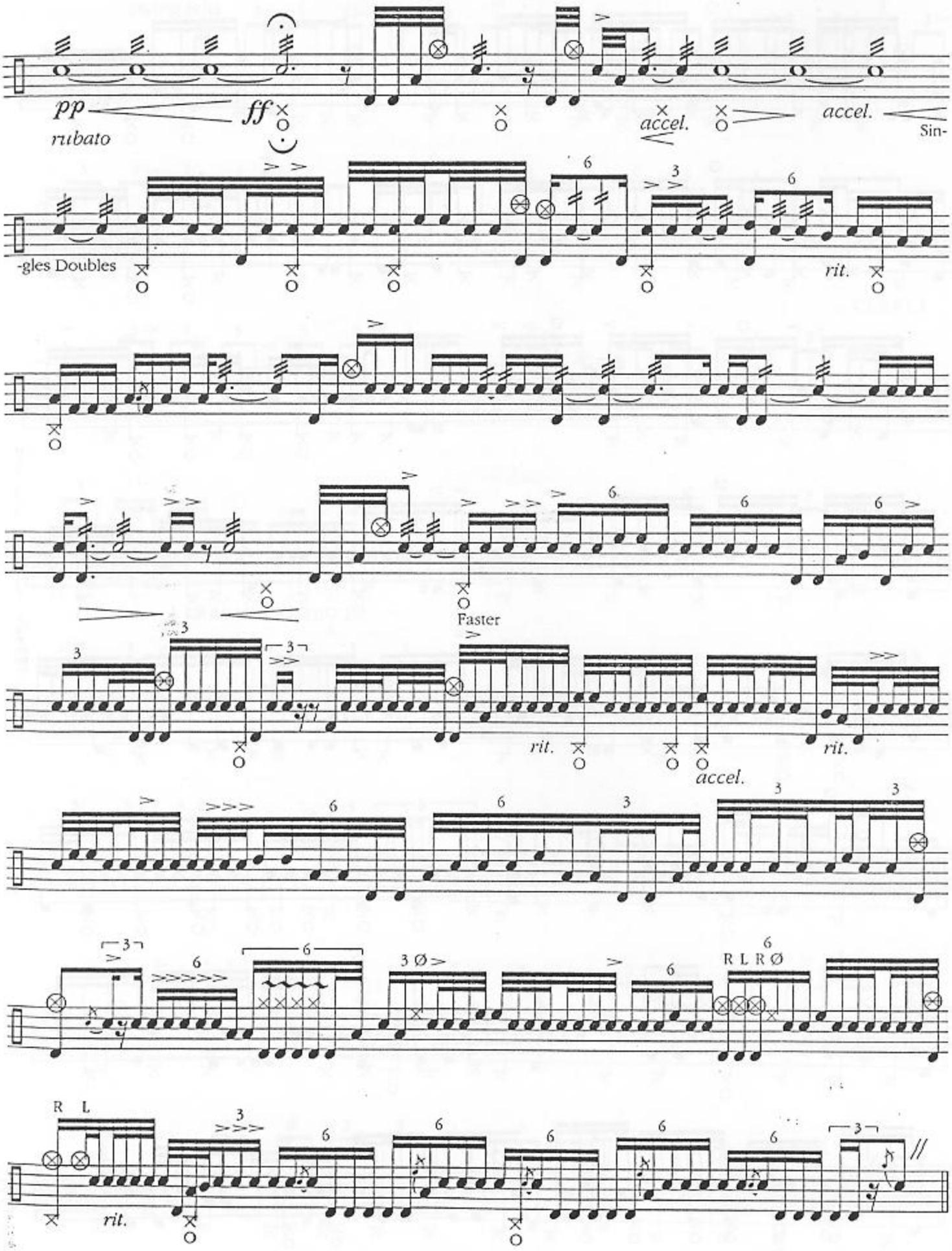
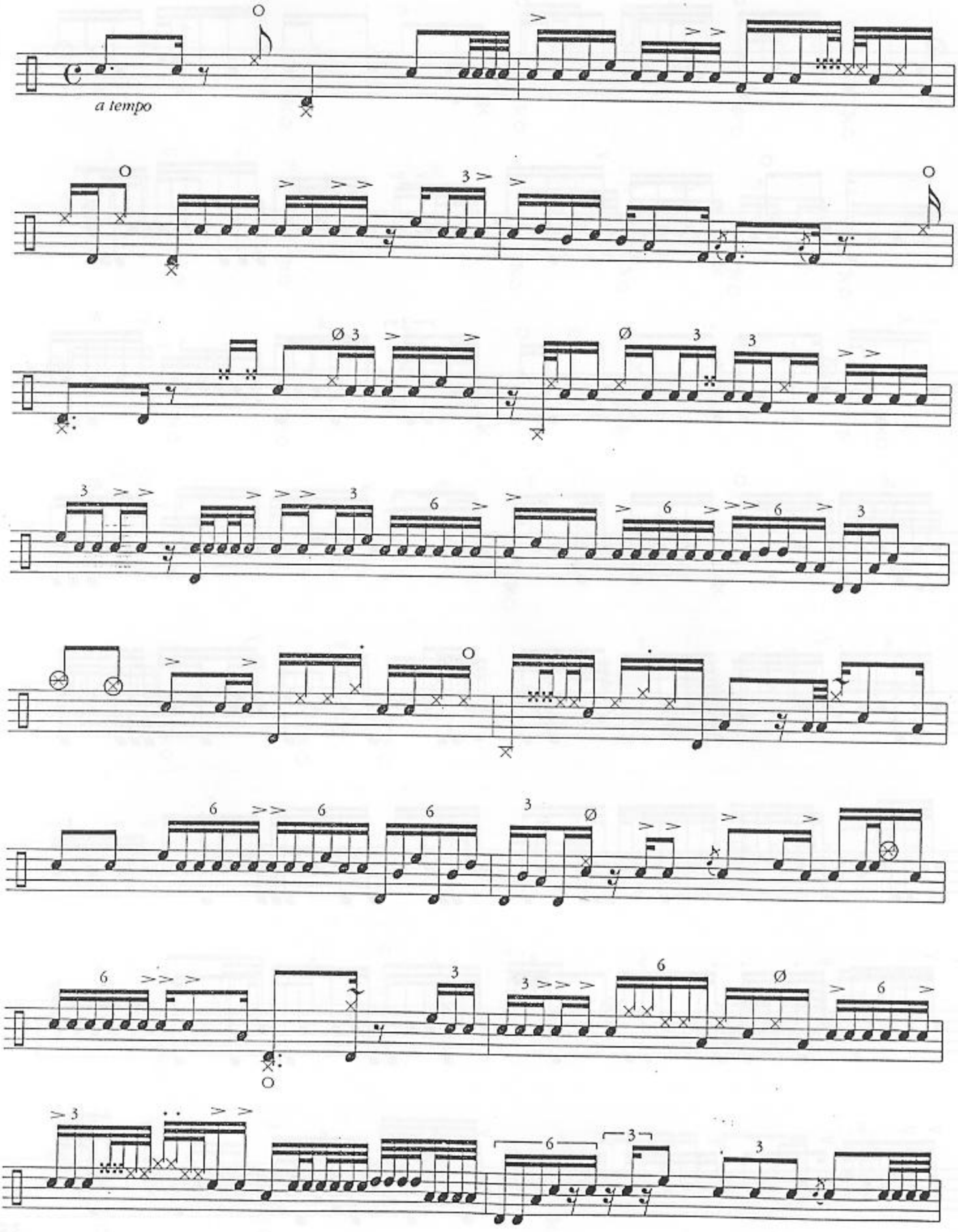
# Solo Based On Technique

Now I would like to do a solo based on technique, to give you an idea of how important it is to practice all the things we have been going over. You will notice a lot of singles and doubles, played with both the hands and the feet.

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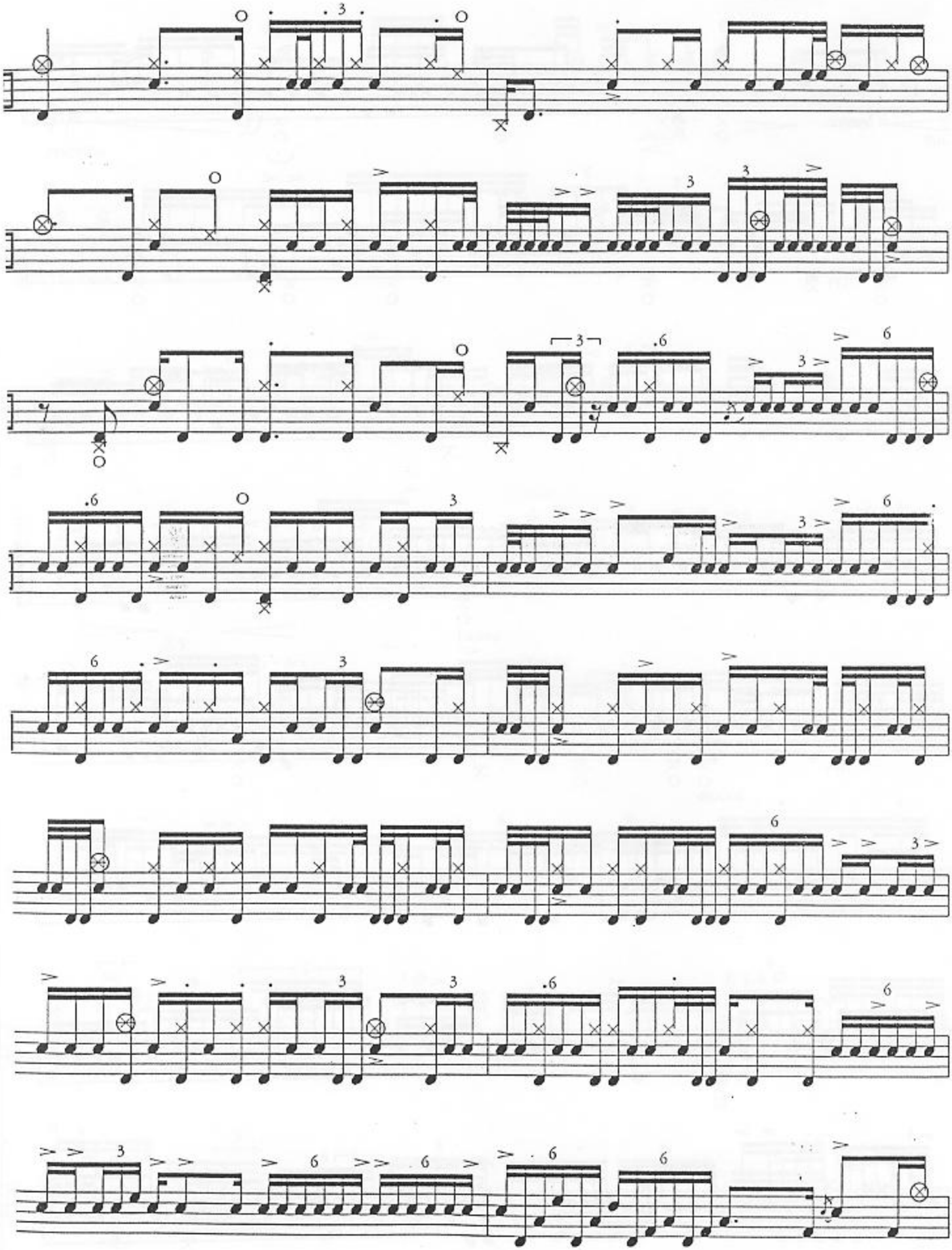

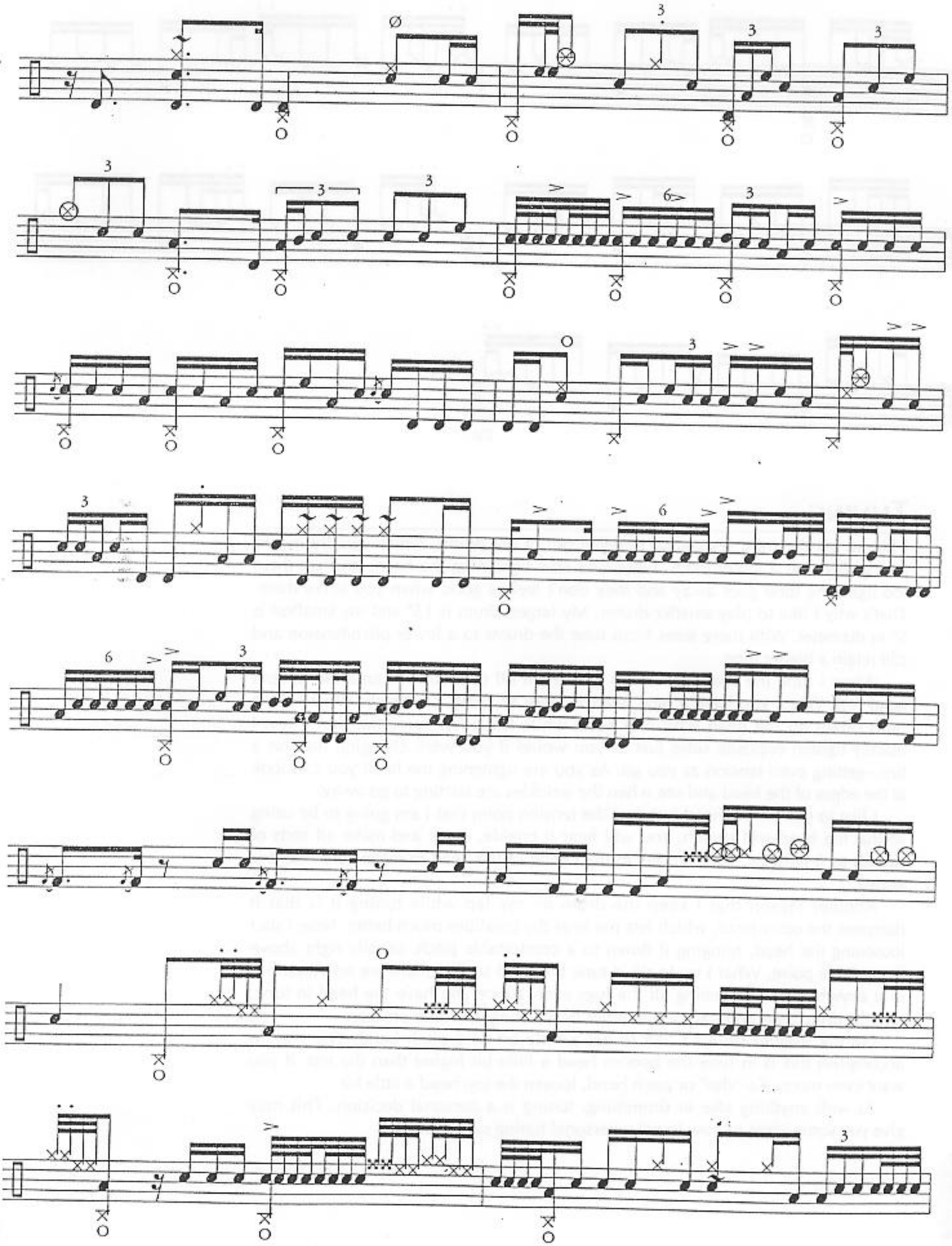

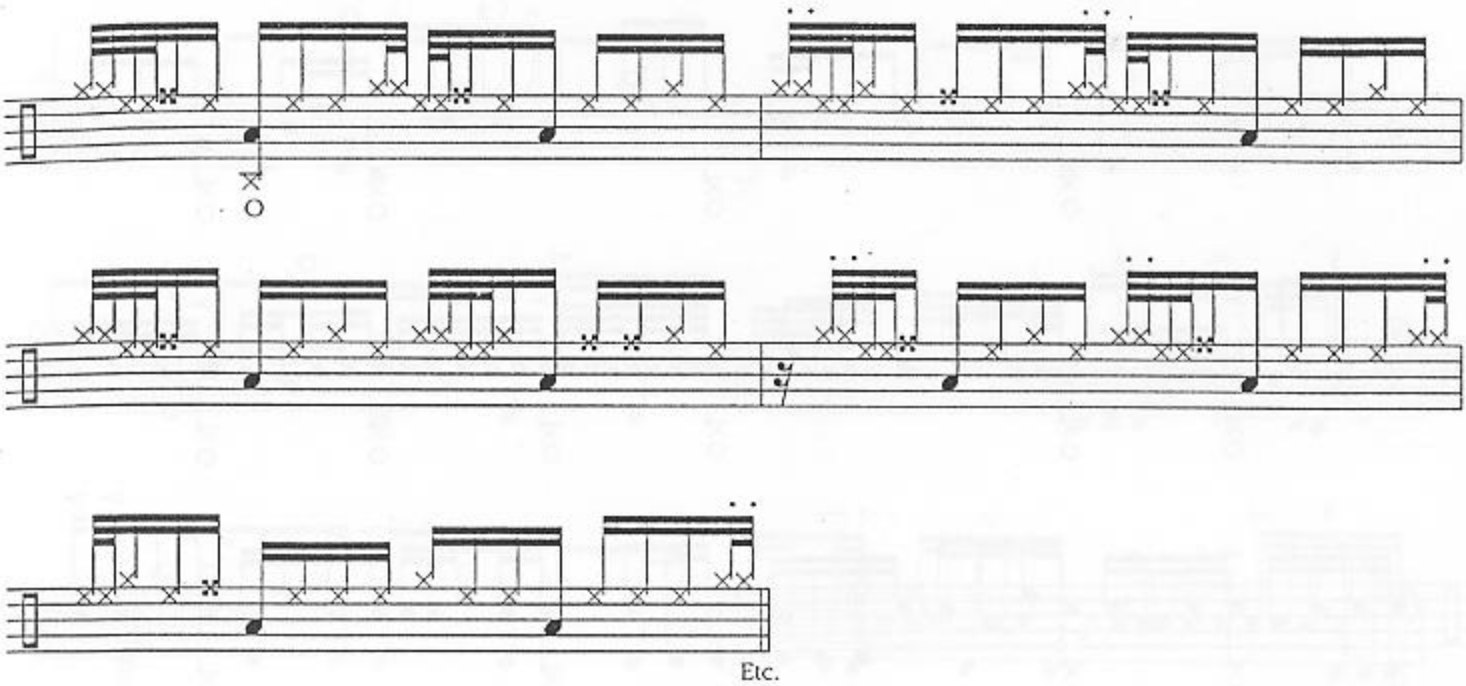


## TUNING

I like to get the most resonance possible out of my drums, which usually means tuning them at a lower pitch. Once you start tightening the heads and get them too tight, the tone goes away and they don't feel as good when you strike them. That's why I like to play smaller drums. My largest drum is 15" and my smallest is 8" in diameter. With these sizes I can tune the drums to a lower pitch/tension and still retain a higher tone.

When I tune the drums, I always take them off the stands. I tune the bottom head first. When you have a new head it needs to "seat" or stretch. What I do is push down on the head with one hand while the other turns the drum key. I usually tighten opposite sides just as you would if you were changing lugs on a tire—getting even tension as you go. As you are tightening the head you can look at the edges of the head and see when the wrinkles are starting to go away.

I like to tighten the head just past the tension point that I am going to be using so that the head will stretch. You will hear it crinkle, crack and make all sorts of sounds as it tightens. Then I press in the center of the head to make sure that it is seated.

Another reason that I keep the drum on my lap while tuning it is that it dampens the other head, which lets me hear the tonalities much better. Now I start loosening the head, bringing it down to a comfortable pitch, usually right above the wrinkle point. What I try to do is tune the head so that there are no vibrations in it anywhere, while getting all the lugs even. Once you have the head in tune, turn the drum over and start on the other head, using the same process.

On my smaller drums I like to get a little bit of a pitch bend. The way to accomplish this is to tune the bottom head a little bit higher than the top. If you want even more of a "dip" or pitch bend, loosen the top head a little bit.

As with anything else in drumming, tuning is a personal decision. This may give you some ideas of how to get a personal tuning system started.