

Linear Starting Points

Simple Patterns That Build To Complex Grooves

by Neal Busby

MUSIC KEY

Open	○	R.C.
H.H.	×	
T.T.	×	
S.D.	●	
F.T.	●	
B.D.	●	
	○	Ghost Note

In drumming terms, “linear” means that none of your limbs strike any part of the kit in unison. Sounds easy, doesn’t it? But when this type of drumming was introduced to me, it was very confusing. I’d already been drumming for several years, and I thought I’d never played this way before. What I realized was that I *had* been playing linear patterns for some time; I just didn’t know it. This may be the case for you, too.

Lately I’ve come to the conclusion that all complex rhythms can be broken down to a common denominator. Once that is understood, building back up to more involved beats is simple. This is especially true for learning linear patterns. Let’s take a very simple pattern and then expand upon it. Start with this:

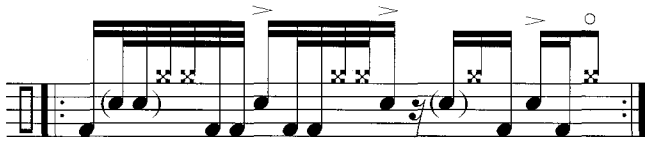
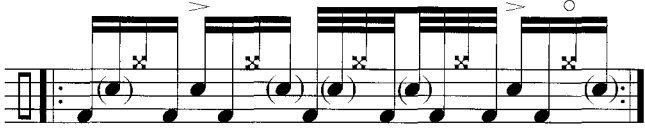
The next step in the process is to examine all of the variations for playing these beats—or at least a *few* of them! To begin, check out the following patterns. Notice how adding tom notes and opening the hi-hat changes the sound and feel of the original pattern. (Using rests increases the variety, too.)

By adding another 16th note on the hi-hat for each kick and snare segment, more patterns pop up:

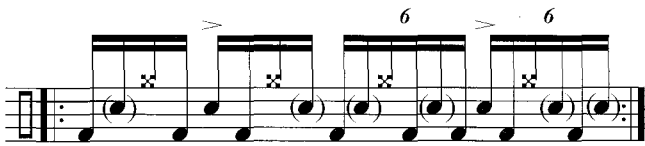
Now the *fun* starts. By adding more kick and snare notes to the remaining 16th-note spaces, some very cool syncopations turn up, patterns that may not come to mind if not for our building process.



A neat way to complicate things further is to “double up” parts of the groove by changing certain 16th notes to 32nd notes:



Or create a 16th-note-triplet section within the existing pattern:



When you add all of the variables into the mix (rests, tom notes, hi-hat openings, use of cowbells or alternate sound sources, doubling to 32nd notes, changing parts to triplets, accents, ghost notes), the possibilities are as limitless as your imagination. And some of the examples may sound good played with a swing feel—you never know. But remember to use these patterns sparingly, and *never* lose sight of the groove.

To finish up, here’s a special “Frankenstein” four-bar pattern that includes a little bit of everything we’ve discussed. Have fun with it, and be sure to experiment with your own linear patterns.



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Vinnie Colaiuta & Ross Garfield (The Drum Doctor) at The Record Plant, Hollywood CA - Photo by Josh Freese

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