

# Essential Grooves

## Part 2: Funk

by Tommy Igoe



**MUSIC KEY**

	H.H.	X
S.D.	●	X
B.D.	●	
	Flm-shot	

Last month, we began our six-part series on essential grooves with a deceptively simple 16th-note rock groove. Of course, I know you downloaded the track at [www.moderndrummer.com](http://www.moderndrummer.com) to play along with, right? And you worked out both groove variations and then made up some of your own? Good! For this month's installment, let's explore the second of our five groove families—funk.

After observing the playing of many of my students, I've learned that the word "funk" often translates into "busy." Busy drumming isn't automatically wrong. In fact, funk music can be quite complicated. But it's important to realize that funk can just as easily involve very simple drumming that leaves room for the other instruments to funk up the groove. For example, here's the funkier groove on the planet.

It doesn't look like much, does it? But when it's put in the hands of a true funk master, like Clyde Stubblefield, Steve Gadd, or Dennis Chambers, this groove becomes something much more than the notes you see on the page. It becomes a platform for bassists, keyboardists, and guitarists to do *their* busy funk thing.

"But," I hear you contesting, "I hear those guys play really busy on a lot of recordings, and it's *super* funky." That's true. Like any other musical genre, funk doesn't live in a vacuum. Good music changes constantly and features different layers of busy and simple patterns from all the instruments in the rhythm section. That's what makes it interesting. Can you imagine how boring funk would be if there was only one beat and only one way to play it?

The thing to observe closely is the *application* of the groove. Ask yourself: Is it the right time to be busy? Or is it the right time to play something simple to leave room for your funky bandmates? What does this song need from *me*? If you ask yourself these questions, you'll be on your way to sounding like a pro.

Let's take a look at a funky groove that's somewhere between simple and busy.

One of the things drummers love about many funk grooves is the syncopation (the shifting of accents) within the pattern. Example 2 uses a common technique called "displaced backbeat." The backbeat in contemporary music is on beats 2 and 4, but here we've displaced the backbeat on beat 2 by moving it one 16th note earlier to the "ah" of beat 1. This displaced backbeat does two very interesting things: It forces the groove out of balance, and it opens up the second half of the bar for numerous rhythmic variations.

Both of those things are easier to hear than describe with words, so get on your drumset and play four bars of Example 1 and then four bars of Example 2. Example 2 sounds like it has a bit of a stutter, doesn't it? This funky pattern became the backbone for most of the grooves in the Broadway musical *The Lion King*. *The Lion King* isn't a funk show, but this groove worked great on many of the songs that had an Afro-pop flavor.

Now let's have a little fun with some variations. Here's variation 2A.

Look closely at the construction of this groove. There are no backbeats, and there's a giant hole in the second half of the first measure. When you listen to the song, you'll hear how the guitar part inspired this particular groove. Give this variation a try, and see if you like it. If it's too syncopated for your taste, put some backbeats into the groove. And, of course, experiment with your own variations.

Here's variation 2B.

This is an example of a groove "spice." You wouldn't use this as the main groove for the song; it's too busy. However, playing something like this once in a while can be very effective. Obviously, there's a lot going on here, with busy hi-hat work

and intricate snare interplay. To help you with this variation, remember two words: Light and tight. If you play too hard or too loud, you'll suffocate the groove and take the life out of it.

Also, if your rhythms are sloppy, or if you don't have the technique and coordination required to pull off this groove, just leave it for another day. Work on your fundamentals some more, and then come back to it. With patience and focus, you'll be fine.

Here's the chart for the song.

The chart consists of two staves. The top staff is labeled 'SLINKY FUNK' and is in 4/4 time. It contains four measures: the first measure is labeled 'PLAY 16' with 'SLINKY FUNK' above it; the second measure is labeled 'PLAY 4' with 'GROOVE W/ BASS' above it; the third measure is labeled 'PLAY 16' with a circled 'A' and '(CLICK + GRO. OUT)' above it; the fourth measure is labeled 'PLAY 4'. The bottom staff is labeled 'FULL BAND' and contains two measures, both labeled 'PLAY 8'. The second measure of the bottom staff ends with a 'FINE' symbol.

Like last month's example, this chart tells you very little. That's what makes it a "professional" chart. As the drummer, you're expected to know what groove to play and when to fill, so you don't see those types of things notated very often in professional charts. All charts are different because all arrangers and composers are different. Someone may write out a specific groove once in a while, but be prepared to answer your own questions. Don't worry if you can't play through the chart perfectly right now. It gets easier as you gain more experience.

This song is simply a vehicle to help you sit in the pocket for three minutes, which is a task that shouldn't be taken light-

ly. To play a groove that's clear, balanced, consistent, and musically appropriate is an art. As always, record yourself as you're playing to hear any inconsistencies in your groove. You can't accurately judge your performance in real time, so you must record yourself and listen back to hear what's really going on.

Here's an important question: When the click stops at letter A, are you still in control of your time? Be careful not to become dependent on click tracks. Most bandmembers are counting on you to be the click, so you have to play confidently without a click as well as with it.

You're going to have a great time playing and experimenting with this groove. Next month, we'll rip apart an R&B/hip-hop groove. Then we'll throw it onto a track that's a little improvisational, so you'll have an opportunity to really dig in and get creative. Groove on!

Tommy Igoe is the creator of the "Groove Essentials" series of products published by Hudson Music. He is currently serving as the drummer and assistant conductor of the Broadway musical The Lion King. He has also performed with Art Garfunkel, Stanley Jordan, Leni Stern, New York Voices, Dave Grusin, Patti Austin, Blood Sweat & Tears, and many others. This article is excerpted from Tommy's book Groove Essentials: The Play-Along, which is available through Hal Leonard. Used with permission.



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