

Playing With Drum Loops

Four Essential Tips For Developing Grooves Over Percussion Tracks

by Donny Gruendler



MUSIC KEY

H.H.	X	Shaker
S.D.	•	
B.D.	•	

Percussion loops are commonly used for rhythmic texture on recordings and during live gigs. Often they're also employed as a substitute for a monotonous quarter-note click track. In both cases, these types of loops are effective because they generate a particular feel and flavor for the groove without dictating the exact parts you should play. When playing with percussion loops, your job is to keep good time and let the flow of the rhythm influence your drumset part. Before we jump into the discussion of how to do this effectively, please go to the Education page at modern drummer.com and download the loop examples that we'll be using in this article.

Tip #1: Your groove should follow the percussion loop's accent structure. Just as drumset loops have a specific bass drum and snare pattern that you should follow, percussion loops have an accent structure that must be adhered to as well. If you neglect to follow this structure, your parts won't blend well with the loop.

Look at and listen to Percussion Loop 1 and try to figure out where the loop's accents fall within the beat. Are they on the downbeat, the upbeat—or are they creating a specific rhythmic figure?

So where are the accents? They're on beats 1, 2, 3, and 4. If you played a very syncopated groove (Example 2), it would clash with the quarter note-driven loop. The accents in the beat are in opposition to the percussion's accent structure.

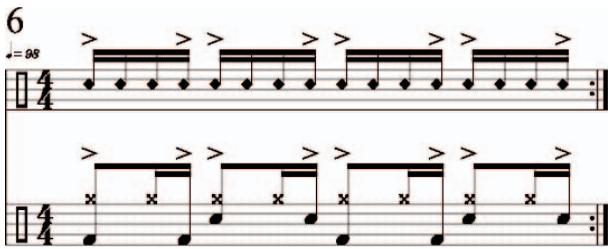
Try a groove that's based on the downbeat, like Example 3. Notice how this pattern blends perfectly with the percussion's accent structure.

Tip #2: Determine the pitches of each accent. Once you've figured out the accent pattern of the loop, listen to the pitch of each accent. Ask yourself, Is the accent a high- or low-pitched tone? In Percussion Loop 1, beats 1 and 3 are low-pitched and beats 2 and 4 are high-pitched.

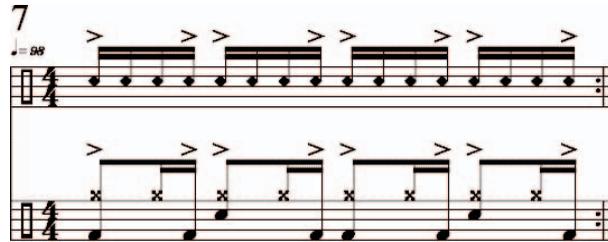
Tip #3: Decide where you can voice those accents on the kit. Once you've figured out the pitch patterns in the loop, match similar tones with various components of your kit. For example, low-pitched accents could be doubled with the bass drum, and high-pitched accents could be played on the snare.

Before we go any further, let's discuss how to voice accents in loops that don't have any pitch variations, like tambourine and shaker patterns. Percussion Loop 2 is a common shaker pattern that has accents on the downbeats and on the "ah" of each beat. There are two options for voicing these types of accents on the drumset.

Option 1: Voice accents that fall within beats 1 and 3 on the bass drum, and accents within 2 and 4 on the snare.

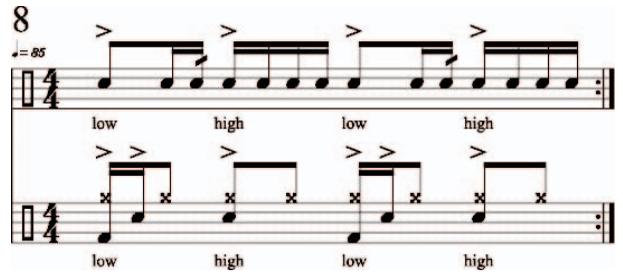


Option 2: Play a familiar drumset pattern that has a similar accent structure over the percussion loop. The pitches don't have to align perfectly, as in the bass drum notes on the "ah" of beats 2 and 4 in Example 7.



Tip #4: Identify holes or rests in the loop that should or shouldn't be filled with your groove. Percussion Loop 1 consists of a repeated pattern of an 8th note followed by six 16th notes. Notice how there's a gap in the loop on the "e" of beats 1 and 3? You could play something in that space. Unlike with drumset loops, this will not detract from the flow of the pattern.

Drumset loops are used to fatten up a track and to provide unwavering momentum. Percussion loops are used more often to help generate a particular feel and flavor, rather than a specific drum part. So you have more freedom to play *around* the loop. Here's one way you could fill the gaps in Percussion Loop 1.



After you've worked through the preceding examples, try applying my four essential thoughts with other percussion loops. I've posted a few extras on moderndrummer.com for you to check out.



Donny Gruendler is a professional drummer, Musicians Institute faculty member in Los Angeles, and the author of Carl Fischer's *Playing With Drum Loops—How To Work With Drum Loops, Samples And Backing Tracks*. His DVD *Creating And Performing Drum Loops* is also available through Carl Fischer.



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