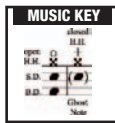


Advanced Funk Drumming In Depth

PART 1: FOUR TYPES OF GHOST NOTES

by Jim Payne



Everybody uses ghost notes in their playing, but not everybody uses all four kinds of ghost notes.

- 1. Regular ghost notes:** very soft single strokes.
- 2. Pullouts:** ghost notes followed by an accent played with the same hand.
- 3. Control strokes:** accents followed by a ghost note played with the same hand. (David Garibaldi used the terms *pullouts* and *control strokes* to describe these techniques in his article in the March 2009 issue of *MD*.)
- 4. Layered ghost notes:** ghost notes played in unison with strokes played by other limbs, like bass drum notes.

Note: All ghost notes in this article are played on the snare drum with the left hand (or with the right hand if you're a lefty).

REGULAR GHOST NOTES

Ghost notes are most often soft notes played on the snare drum, usually on the "e" and/or "a" (pronounced "ah") of a 16th-note count: 1 e & a. Ghost notes are used to create an underlying double-time feel that helps propel the rhythm along in a subtle but very funky way.

The granddaddy ghost-note groove is the so-called "James Brown beat." We don't really know who invented it, but it was made popular by Clayton Fillyau in his work with JB, especially on *Live At The Apollo, Vol. 1*, recorded in 1962.

The trick is to achieve a marked difference between the louder volume of the accented snare drum notes (which should be played as rimshots) and the much softer volume of the ghost notes. Think of it this way: People are sitting in the concert hall balcony, groovin' along with the bass drum and the backbeats. Then, as they listen more closely, they begin to hear something else that intrigues them: *What's that?* What they're hearing are the ghost notes between the backbeats.

When I first heard grooves with ghost notes, I was mystified too. It's something that makes the rhythm infectious. It sounds and feels so good that you've got to dig deeper and figure out what's going on.

Now let's do just that. The ghost note on the "e" of 3 in the following beat should be played very soft (the softer, the better). Start with the stick $\frac{1}{2}$ " above the snare drum head. It's easy to make ghost notes louder; it's harder to play them softly and make them flow and "chatter" smoothly under the rest of the groove.



Here's a way to judge the correct volume for ghost notes. Hit the closed hi-hat with the tip of the right stick. Now play ghost notes with the left stick on the snare drum, and try to make them the same volume as the hi-hat notes. Alternate strokes between the two instruments (right, left, right, left) until the volumes are close to equal. When you listen to a good groove with ghost notes, it's often hard to tell if those in-between notes are played on the hi-hat or the snare. That's the way it should sound.

Eighty percent of what the audience hears should be the bass drum and the backbeats on 2 and 4. The softer ghost notes should be added without disrupting the basic groove. When you can do that, you've got it right.

The next beat has two left-hand ghost notes in a row, on the "&" and "a" of 2. At medium tempos, these two ghost notes are bounced. You may have to work on your soft double strokes to make them sound smooth. Try playing 2 and 4 as rimshots.



PULLOUTS

To develop the pullout concept, I use the following exercise. It involves shifting doubles by one 16th note, accenting the second stroke of each double. This exercise will also help smooth out your doubles, as we usually tend to accent the first stroke. (The sticking works well as the basis for some funky rhythms, especially when spread between the hi-hat and snare drum.)



In the following beat, the pullout happens on the "a" of 3 and 4.



This beat has a pullout followed by a bass drum note—one of my favorite sounds.



IN THE POCKET

CONTROL STROKES

You'll need to use a bit of pressure at the fulcrum (the spot between the index finger and thumb where you hold the stick) in the left hand when executing the accented note. Then relax your grip immediately after the accent, as you bounce the second stroke off the head. Both the accented note and the unaccented ghost note are played with one motion of the arm and hand. Minimal effort is needed for the ghost note. If you think about it too much, it becomes forced and stiff. Just let it happen.

Start by playing the following exercise very slowly.



This groove incorporates the accented/unaccented concept on 4 and the "e" of 4.



Here's a beat with a control stroke and a pullout. Play the accented snare drum notes as rimshots.



CLYDE'S THING

I first heard this beat on James Brown's "I Got The Feelin'," with the great Clyde Stubblefield on drums. The technique needed to play the groove combines the pullout and the control stroke, in three 16ths in a row—ghost note, accent, ghost note.

All three notes are executed with one motion of the left hand. The first ghost note comes at the beginning of the motion, then the grip tightens for the accent and relaxes after the accent so that the stick touches the snare drum lightly as you begin to bring the arm and hand back up.

In this beat, "Clyde's thing" happens on 2. There's a pullout on the "e" of 3 and 4.



Here, Clyde's thing happens on 4. (By the way, the tempo of "I Got The Feelin'" is 126 beats per minute.)



LAYERED GHOST NOTES

"Layered" simply means that two sounds or two parts of the kit are played at once. We've already dealt with this in several of the previous beats that have ghost notes played

along with the hi-hat. Now let's play ghost notes along with bass drum notes.



Here's a beat with a layered ghost note on the "e" of 3. It also has a hi-hat variation.



If you really want to make progress, you have to put in a lot of practice time in the woodshed. To do that with full concentration, you need determination. As John Riley explained in his recent *MD* interview (July '09), we can understand techniques and concepts, but what makes the difference is determination. That's the most important element in all of this. Determination delivers results. And it's something we all need to work on.

Good luck with your drumming, and may your backbeats be strong and clear, with those ghost notes percolating along nicely underneath. That's funky!



Jim Payne has played with Maceo Parker and the J.B. Horns and has produced albums for Medeski Martin & Wood. He teaches in New York City and online, and his new book/DVD, *Advanced Funk Drumming*, was recently released by Modern Drummer Publications. Check out Jim's Web site at funkydrummer.com.

To watch Jim demonstrate the beats in this article, log on to the Education page at moderndrummer.com.



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