

Playing With Loops

Keeping Current In Today's Musical Climate

by Donny Gruendler



MUSIC KEY

C.C.	*	R.C.	+	Adapt	T.T.
T.T.		S.D.			
F.T.		B.D.1			
					B.D.2

The most in-demand drummers have always focused on musical issues such as touch, tone, time, feel, and stylistic diversity. However, these techniques alone are no longer enough to ensure your success.

Many of today's biggest rock, pop, R&B, and hip-hop acts use loops, samples, and backing tracks to augment their performances. Therefore, in order to work, many high-profile touring and studio drummers are no longer ignoring the trend. Technology is here to stay. And rather than letting drum machines and loop-filled laptops get all the gigs, today's drummers are embracing these tools and making them an integral part of their sound.

Here we'll examine some methods for successfully playing with drum loops in today's most popular radio styles: rock, pop, R&B, and hip-hop. (You can download each loop example and demonstration track at www.moderndrummer.com.)

Constructing Drum Parts Over A Loop

The drummer is the backbone of any great band. As experts in rhythm, we have the enviable opportunity to color and shape the music. Just as your musical influences, drums, cymbals, and tuning help shape your sound, so can the use of loops. With that in mind, here are two things to consider when you sit down to groove with a loop.

1) Avoid bass drum "target practice."

Check out the following hip-hop loop (track 1).

1

Notice that this loop contains several fast bass drum notes on beat 1. To be most effective, you should avoid playing every one. Not only will it be nearly impossible to line up with the feel of each note, but the groove will also sound sloppy.

Instead of mirroring the loop, play a few choice bass drum notes. The first and last notes of a phrase are the most important notes, so try playing the downbeat and the "ah" of beat 1. This will reinforce the loop without interfering with it.

Take a listen to hip-hop loop track 2 to hear how these two parts interact.

2

2) When in doubt, leave the hi-hat out.

Download and listen to R&B loop track 3.

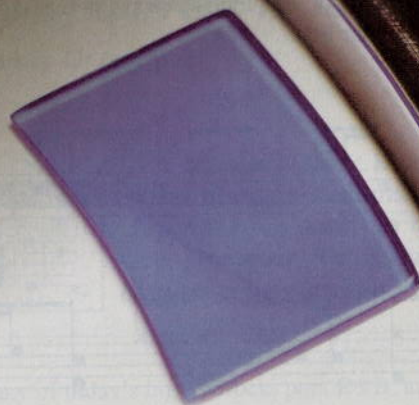
3

Notice that this loop has a laid-back snare and bass drum, combined with a stiff-sounding ahead-of-the-beat hi-hat pattern. Not many drummers can pull off this sort of feel. So what do you do? Do you try to mimic the loop with the exact hi-hat placement? The answer is no. As in Example 2, it's better to leave out the difficult hi-hat notes than risk playing them inaccurately.

Let's look at two options for playing with this loop. First, play quarter notes on the hi-hat over the snare and bass drum rhythm.

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Rock 'N' Jazz Clinic

This sounds like a simple technique, right? Wrong. Think about what you do when you sit at your kit each day. How do you get warmed up for that first tasty groove? It is usually something like this.



The pick-up fill is the drummer's most overlooked habit. Until now, this has probably been an unnoticed routine that you use to lead smoothly into your grooves. However, when you're working with loops in the radio treatment form, the pick-up phrase will give away the texture and dynamic change between the verse and chorus, therefore nullifying the purpose of this form.

Take a look at Example 14 (track 6) and notice that there is not a transition fill leading into the chorus. As you listen to this track, check out how the second eight-bar section jumps out at you. Because there isn't a transition fill, the dynamic shift is accentuated.

14 Verse drum loop

Acoustic drums lay out during the Verse

Chorus drum loop

Acoustic drums enter in the Chorus

Now play the radio treatment form yourself. (Use track 7, the radio treatment play-along loop.) Here are some things to consider as you're practicing.

1. Sing the groove during the verse. This will help you stay focused during the rests.
2. Move your hands along to the loop a couple bars before your entrance. This will help you lock into the feel of the groove and warm up your body.
3. Experiment with different tones on your kit. For example, try riding on the crash for the chorus. Or play on a sloshy hi-hat. Each voice adds a unique texture to the feel of the chorus.

Donny Gruendler is a professional drummer, a 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*. Gruendler has worked with such artists as Kenny Burrell, D.J. Logic, John Medeski, and Rick Holmstrom. You may contact Donny at donny@donnygruendler.com.

