

Playing With Drum Loops

The DJ Dropout

by Donny Gruendler

MUSIC KEY

H.H.
 S.D.
 B.D.

In addition to honing their chops, successful working drummers have always focused on musical issues such as touch, time, feel, and stylistic diversity. In today's musical climate, another skill has to be added to a drummer's "must have" list: playing to samples and backing tracks.

The following exercises are designed to help you get used to drumming over prerecorded music, while also introducing another common technique in contemporary commercial music: the DJ dropout.

Background

One of my first inspirations when I began playing with drum loops, samples, and backing tracks was DJ Shadow's album *Endtroducing*. This powerful recording was entirely conceived on an Akai MPC60 sampling/sequencing drum machine (pre-Pro Tools), and it's comprised of chopped vinyl samples, break beats, and loop fragments. On each song, synthetic drum tracks stutter, stop, seemingly disappear, and then reappear in unusual ways. I'd never heard music or drumming like this before, so I was very intrigued by the tactics and techniques that were being employed by the record-spinning DJ.

As I continued to study this disc (and many other DJ-based recordings), my ears grew accustomed to these new textures. I also discovered that these chopped samples and jaggedly placed grooves had infiltrated many mainstream commercial recordings, like Justin Timberlake's *Justified*, Beyoncé's *Dangerously In Love*, Sheryl Crow's *C'Mon C'Mon C'Mon*, and Linkin Park's *Hybrid Theory*. As a result, I had to figure out a way to emulate these new sounds on many of my Top-40 gigs in Los Angeles.

In this article, I'm going to share some of my approaches, practice routines, and supplemental exercises for effectively integrating the DJ dropout into your acoustic drum performances.

The Dropout Concept

Dropouts are created in the DJ culture by pressing the mute button on a mixing console while a drumbeat is playing. This silences the entire groove in order to highlight a particular element in the composition, such as a vocal line, lead melody, or sound effect. When the mute button is pressed again, the groove returns as if it never had been stopped.

To demonstrate this concept, listen to a CD on your stereo system. As the music is playing, quickly turn down the volume knob for approximately one second. Then quickly turn it up again. Do you hear how the music is playing as if it had never been turned down? It's playing exactly where it left off. That's what's known as a mute—or a dropout.

Dropout Exercises

From a drummer's standpoint, dropouts often occur in odd places in the beat. For instance, instead of always cutting out on beat 1, dropouts can happen at any time and return at any point in the groove.

The following exercises will help you develop the proper thought process for performing dropouts like a DJ, beat maker, or producer. Before you get started, here are three things to keep in mind that'll help you sound more authentic.

Thought 1: To give the illusion of being muted, when you drop out of a groove, it's extremely important to silence *all* sound prior to the downbeat.

Thought 2: When you resume the groove, you must start at the exact return point within the pattern. For example, if you were to drop out on the "&" of beat 3 and then return on beat 2 of the next measure, it would be played like this.

Thought 3: As drummers, we've been brainwashed to always play a cymbal crash when heading into a new section of a song. To effectively emulate a DJ, you must resist that temptation. Don't play an accent or cymbal crash when you return into the groove.

One-Measure Dropout Exercises

Here are nine exercises that we'll be using to work on our dropouts. (Slash marks = time, rests = dropouts)

Here's how to work through the exercises.

1. Pick a one-measure dropout exercise.
2. Choose a drum loop to play over, like Rock Loop Track 2 (downloadable at www.moderndrummer.com), shown in Example 11.

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Using the

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Here's v...
Rock Loop

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11



3. Play the groove during the slash marks and then drop out during the quarter-note rest. (Remember that the loop will be playing through the rest.)

Using the dropout in Example 2 with Rock Loop Track 2, we have this.

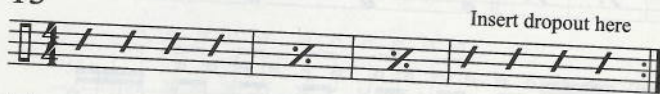
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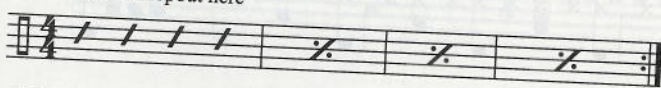
Dropout Practice Methods

Once you've mastered the previous exercises, try putting them into four-bar phrases. In Examples 13-16, insert any one of the dropout exercises where notated.

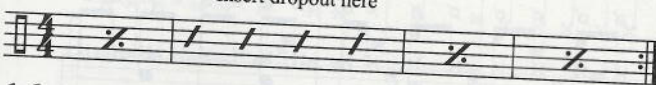
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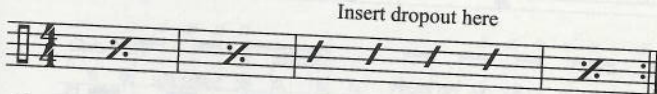
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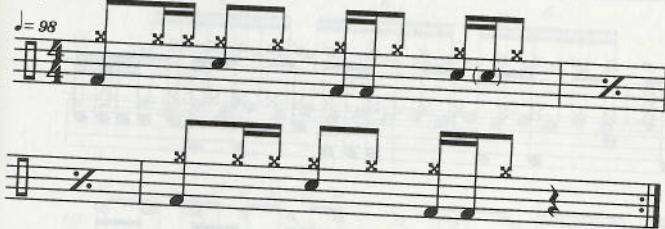


16



Here's what it would look like using the dropout in Example 2, Rock Loop Track 2, and the practice method in Example 13.

17



One Step Further

You can download more loops at www.moderndrummer.com for additional practice. Please use them to repeat the above process for whichever dropout exercise and practice method you choose.

Also, keep in mind that you're not restricted to using this dropout technique when playing with a loop. You can also use these approaches when you're playing with a click track, sequenced backing tracks, or by yourself. These concepts can serve your drumming in a wide variety of contexts. Enjoy!



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*. You may contact Donny at donny@donnygruendler.com.

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