Rhythm Fundamentals - For All Musicians
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Introduction
Having played drums since I was two years old, for a total of 48 years thus far,
some of my earliest and best memories are of improvising while playing-along
with recordings. To date, I continue to find playing with recordings a direct and
effective path toward rhythmic mastery.

Before college I was inspired by myriad American and European based musics
including jazz, fusion, rock/pop, classical, concert band, military marching music,
musicals, ethnic folk/dance styles, etc. Since then I have also been inspired by
two profoundly different yet complimentary musical cultures; the chanting and
linear rhythmic mastery of North and South Indian classical percussionists, and
the polyrhythmic textures of West African, Afro-Cuban, and Brazilian musics. My
traditional American, i.e. Euro-centric conservatory-based, education taught me,
albeit in retrospect, that such narrowly based pedagogical methods and curricula
lack rhythmic breadth and depth for many contemporary musicians. All things
considered, the most helpful theory of rhythm I know is found in Edwin Gordon's
book Rhythm: Contrasting the Implications of Audiation and Notation. I believe a
synthesis of these great musical traditions offers a wealth of rhythmic potential
for any contemporary musician.

What is rhythm?
Traditional definitions usually emphasize the "organization of time" and "duration
of sounds and silences", in other words, they are essentially mathematical
descriptions. Although sounds and silences are an important component of
rhythm, they are not its foundation, rather a byproduct. Even casual observers of
music and dance know that rhythm is primarily about movement; as the Greek
root "rhythmos", or "measured motion", confirms.

Edwin Gordon defines rhythm as **"the flow of movements through time."**

Gordon states, "The only way rhythm can be deeply understood musically is
through body movement and the audiation of body movement."

In the field of dance, Hungarian drama and physical education teacher, Rudolf
Laban used four terms to describe body movement and these elements interact
with each other regardless of whether the rhythm is regularly pulsed or not.

•**Time** - when an attack occurs

•**Space** - duration of sound or silence
•**Weigh**t - relative weight of notes
•**Flow** - how rhythm patterns are weighted in relation to each other, i.e. their character

"When rhythm is taught in terms of music theory and notation apart from movement, the appeal is divorced from the experience itself and rests solely with time and the brain. As a result, there is no alternative but to teach counting, note values, and definitions as they relate to notation. And that leads to emphasizing the relative time-values of individual isolated notes rather than the collection of durations that take on musical meaning. When notation and music theory become the focus of attention, a true understanding of rhythm as experienced by the body is sacrificed." Gordon, 2000.

Gordon's identifies three universal elements of rhythm:

Macrobeats – the tempo at which one comfortably taps feet, dances, or conducts. Macrobeats establish tempo and provide the musical framework; they may be points in time of equal or unequal length.

Microbeats - the equal division of a macrobeat that establishes meter and rhythmic feel.

Rhythm patterns - two or more sequential durations (created through division or elongation) forming a whole. Rhythm patterns are superimposed on macrobeats and microbeats. Gordon suggests thinking of meter as the context and rhythm patterns as the content. The interaction of tempo (macrobeats) and meter (microbeats) form the foundation upon which rhythm patterns are superimposed. None of the universal elements are more important, rather they must be audiated concurrently.

Fundamental Skills - a three-part approach
I find the following method, as a whole, proves successful in developing a versatile rhythmic foundation for most any musician. Creative teachers will adapt these ideas to their own contexts.

1. Macrobeats and microbeats Two exercises, Pyramid of Microbeats and the Ping Pong Microbeats, provide a solid foundation for pursuing rhythm patterns. These, and variations on them, should comprise the core of early rhythmic training.

2. Accent Permutations involve playing a constant flow of microbeats and accenting select notes to create rhythm patterns. This approach develops an awareness of all subdivisions, a fluid physical motion, and the concept and skill of learning rhythm away from your primary instrument, from the outset. Since metered music is usually in either a duple or triple microbeat feel, exercises

should address both feels relatively equally. This method is also an effective way to learn more complex hemiola or "across the bar-line" phrases.

3. World Rhythm Patterns The widespread adoption of African rhythm patterns and concepts throughout the world is a testament to their musical versatility. I enjoy playing rhythms such as son clave, rumba clave, cascara, bembe bell, bossa nova clave, partido alto, guaguanco, souskous, bikutsi, etc. because they provide a versatile rhythmic vocabulary and myriad options for development.

Chant System
I developed this simple, yet functional, syllable system after studying North and South Indian music. It includes duple and triple groupings; longer phrases are the product of additive groupings.

Two note groups = "ta-ka"
Three note groups = "ta-ki-ta".

•4 notes 2+2 (ta-ka,/ ta-ka)
•5 notes 2+3 (ta-ka,/ ta-ki-ta) or 3+2 (ta-ki-ta,/ ta-ka)
•6 notes 2+2+2 or 3+3
•7 notes 2+2+3, 2+3+2, or 3+2+2

Pronounce the vowels: ta as in "odd", ki as "key", ka as in "uh". Alternatively, try "di-ga," and "di-ga-na". Use whatever you prefer.

Upon hearing master Indian musicians, you will notice the diversity of syllables, articulation, and considerable melodic inflection in North and South Indian music. One of the beauties of their percussive art is its melodic quality.

Experiment with additional syllables and tailor them to your needs.

4 notes "ta - ka - di - me"
5 notes "ta-di-gi-na-thom"
•6 notes ta-ka-te-ri-ki-ta, which can easily be inflected 2+2+2, 4+2, or 2+4.
•7 notes - 3 + 4 or 4 +3, using "ta-ka-di-me for 4.
•8 note groups - "ta-ka-di-mi, ta-ka-ju-na", or ki-ta-ta-ka-te-ri-ki-ta.
•10 note groups – ki ta, ta ka, te ri, ki ta, ta ka

I sometimes prefer longer groupings because they create a smoother melodic flow. Thus, 16 notes could be performed as 9 + 7, with each number divided into 2's, 3's, 4's, or however you wish.