
Rick's Place

Notes, Thoughts, and Random Musings on the Online Experience
by Rick Hein, AMIS web master

When the drummer is playing with everyone else, it's jazz, but when everyone else is playing with the drummer, it's rock.

Ornette Coleman

quoted in *The Life of Miles Davis*, by George Szwed

In the post holiday period, it is refreshing to find this kernel of truth. Of course, it's not really that simple, but it provides us a good way of thinking of the rhythm section in the new calendar year. Drummers always get a bad rap, and we all know any variety of drummer jokes that insist that the timekeeper in a combo is the lowest form of life.

We know that is not the case. Hands and feet must move in their own time yet work together to keep the band together and serve as a rhythmic source for improvisations as well as maintain a listening ear for what the soloists are doing and respond musically. Just like the other members of the combo, you must be in the music as well as listening to it. Kicking in an accent or a figure, to propel the bass, piano or horn is an art form. Keeping the established tempo and not racing or dragging is a skill worthy of award in any musical endeavour. Want the worst night of your life? Play with a drummer who rushes or drags. Every song, be it ballad or blues, bossa or bop, is a headlong acceleration up Mount Rushmore or descent to Death Valley..

Hands up everyone who tells their guitarists, bassists and drummers to practice with a metronome? Good. Now *how* do you tell them to practice with the metronome? Here's a technique that I have used, both personally and professionally, to internalise the groove.

Start with a simple pattern - blues chords or scale, walking bass or simple swing, for example - then set the metronome to your desired tempo, say mm. 100. Now play the pattern in straight quarter notes for a few repetitions, concentrating on length of note - play full quarters and lock each one on to the click of the metronome. Drummers match the cymbal pings to the click. Bass and guitar players can then play a few staccato choruses, making each staccato note hit square on the click, and keep the spaces between notes the same length. Drummers keeping the ride on each beat put hi hat on two and four Mix yourself up and add drums or try it with brushes, but stay with the click. Got the idea? now let's get serious. Sticking with the same pattern, (you know it and are confident by now,) Set the metronome to mm. 50, i.e., it is clicking half note pulses. Concentrate again and play that pattern at mm.100 and make sure that your one and three are dead on the metronome. Harder? You bet. Metronomes are renowned for not listening.

You can see what's next - set it to mm. 25 - click on one in a measure - then mm. 12 every other measure. You can, of course use a drum machine or use the click on your favourite sequencing program. Using the sequencer, you can create the equivalent of mm.6. and lower.

As you work through this torture test, you'll get a much better feeling for tempo, pulse, and swing. Next step, get the whole rhythm section together and work with the metronome. Once they are in the groove your combo or band will have an easier job making music.

Next big idea for your players, especially the rhythm section, is to get them listening to some jazz. Get good swing in their ears, good Latin, good bop, good ballads. Don't know where to find it? Go for the big names and you won't go wrong. Duke Ellington, Miles Davis, Gerry Mulligan, Stan Kenton, Dave Brubeck, Count Basie come easily to mind. Need funk or electric sounds? Tower of Power, Herbie Hancock, Chick Corea and Weather Report are good starting points. Want a vocalist or two? Frank Sinatra, Tony Bennett, Sarah Vaughan, Mel Tormé, Singers Unlimited, June Christy and Anita O'Day will get you going in the right direction.

Here's a project for the next two months - send me an E-mail with one or two favourite examples of 'good practice' in jazz and perhaps what we should listen for. Items can be a song or an album - I'll put starters on the list at <http://www.amis-online.org/jazz/> Perhaps our students around the world will be better off for getting inside some of the music that has inspired some great players and hip cats - their teachers.

Send your discographies to
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What was I listening to as I wrote this? *Birth of the Cool* by Miles Davis and *Blossom Dearie sings Comden and Green*.