With Jared Falk & Dave Atkinson

Overview by Hugo "Janado"

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Funk Drumming

Lesson #14

Sheet Music Included

Featuring Mike Michalkow

With Jared Falk & Dave Atkinson

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Funk Drumming

Jared, Dave, and special guest Mike Michalkow, talk about funk drumming in this special two part live lesson. In the first one, Mike teaches 5 beginner funk beats, gives some tips on playing funk fills, staying in the “pocket” as well as practicing with a metronome, and plays along to some funk songs from two of his bands; The Brent Ellis Group (Amazon Funk and Up a Notch) were he plays as a drummer and Cinnamon Toast Funk (Funkcenter and Pig With a Pearl) were he plays as a percussionist.

In the second part of this lesson, we get some tips on playing with ghost notes, Mike walks us through 5 more beats, which are more challenging than the previous ones, and we get introduced to linear playing and latin-funk in an odd time signature. Also, Mike plays along to “What is Hip?” from Tower of Power and to “Tom Sawyer”, “Limelight” and “YYZ” from the progressive rock band Rush.

Do You Got “Da” Funk?

The history of funk drumming is huge; there are lots of great funk beats out there, simple ones, complex and even really busy ones. So, with this lesson we intend to get you introduced to some funk grooves. These beat are relatively achievable and even if you haven’t played drums before, in a couple of months you will be able to play them, but only if you put some practice time into them. Keep in mind that this is just a sort of introduction to this type of drumming. If you really want to dig deeper, the best thing you can do is listen to as much funk music as you can. Check out the music of Tower of Power, James Brown, Sly & the Family Stone, Earth Wind and Fire, Little Feat and even the Red Hot Chili Peppers.

Funk Beats – Part 1

Beat #1
This beat is based on the single paradiddle rudiment, which is the combination of a single and a double stroke roll. If you are right handed you can play it like this - RLRR LRLR – while left handed players do the opposite – LRLR RLRR. This is what your hands will be playing between the hi-hat and snare. But since this is funk drumming and we want the beat to groove, dynamic must be added. We do so with accents (represented as > on the sheet music) on the 2 and 4 on the snare drum and ghost notes (can also be called grace notes) on the remaining strokes of the paradiddle, which are represented with little
brackets surrounding them. Ghost notes are meant to be played very softly. If you play this beat without ghost notes, that is, playing everything at the same dynamic level, which is loud, the beat will not groove at all. Now you just have to add the bass drum on the 1 and 3.

Beat #2
This beat is based on a concept shown by David Garibaldi, one of Mike’s favourite funk drummers, on some of his books and videos. The concept, permutation of notes, is nothing more than the rearrangement of notes of a beat. Permutation is a mathematical term, were instead of a rearrangement of notes there is a rearrangement of numbers. Therefore, if we have 1 2 3 4, one of the possible permutations is 2 3 4 1.

For this exercise this concept is applied to the paradiddle. This way, instead of playing RLRR LRLL between the hands, the paradiddle is started on the 4th right of the rudiment. So, you play the permutaded paradiddle RLLR LRRL between the hi-hat and snare, accenting the 2 and the 4 on the snare. The rest of the strokes of the paradiddle are ghosted while the bass drum is played on the 1 and on the 3.

Beat #3
Funk is rich in syncopation, which is nothing more than the displacement of an accent from a strong beat, like 2 and 4 on the snare, to a note which is not on the beat, like the AND of any beat. In this next beat you can notice a syncopation happening on the snare drum. Instead of accenting the 2 and 4 on the snare, we displace those hits to the A of 1 and to the AND of 4 respectively, which makes this an extremely funky groove. Add 8th notes on the hi-hat and bass drum hits on the 1, the AND of 2, the AND of 3 and to beat 4, and you are good to go. Try experimenting with this one by adding some extra ghost notes as an extra challenge.

Beat #4
This is one of Mike’s favorite type of grooves, because you can play it ridiculously slow and it will sound awesome. This beat is driven by a quarter note pulse on the hi-hat and it is one of those grooves were the quarter note doesn’t seem to want to drag. The spaces
between the hi-hat hits are filled with a snare drum accent on the A of 1, just like on the last beat, and on the 4, while the bass drum is used on beat 1, the AND of 2 and on the AND of 3.

![Drum Notation]

Although it seems a very simple beat on paper, it can be difficult to really get it under your skin, because of the syncopation on the snare drum and bass drum, as well as keeping the spaces between the notes.

**Beat #5**

The concept behind this beat is the same seen on #4 but a bit busier on the bass drum. The snare hits are on the same beats, the A of 1 and the 4. This beat is linear until we get to beat 4, where the snare and hi-hat are played at the same time. Linear means that no limb plays at the same time as another.

![Drum Notation]

A good way to learn linear beats is to break them down slowly. Since this beat is almost linear you can use this approach with it. Start by dividing the beat in 4 smaller beats (one for each quarter note), since its time signature is in 4/4. Now take the notes played on the first quarter note – hi-hat, bass, bass, snare – and repeat this combination until you get it down. Afterwards, learn the combination on the second quarter note – hi-hat and bass. After you get this second part pretty solid, then it is time to cycle through the two parts of the beat that you have already learned. Now you just have to repeat the same procedure with the rest of the beat.

**Funk Beats – Part 2**

**Beat #6**

For you to get a better feel for the beat, start by playing 16th notes on the hi-hat, bass drum on 1 and 3, and snare drum on 2 and 4. After you get comfortable with this, add the open hi-hat on beats 1 and 3. Now to play the beat like we show here, your left hand must come down on to the snare playing only ghost notes, instead of playing on the hi-hat. So, as you can see this is a simple two handed 16th note groove, but instead of playing the two hands on the hi-hat, the left hand is played on the snare drum, ghosting all the hits.
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Beat #7
On the A of 3 Mike performs something called a pull-out stroke, which is playing a ghost note followed by an accent, which in this case is on the 4. This is a very tricky technique to get down, but it is a good example of how important technique is, if you want to perform certain funk grooves. Add the hi-hat on all 8th notes and the bass drum on the 1 and 3. The ghost notes will make this beat sound really hip.

Beat #8
With this one Mike introduces another type of stroke, the control stroke, which is an accent followed by a ghost note. This stroke is used on the 2 of the beat, and as you can see it is the exact opposite of the pull-out stroke, which is also used in this beat and in the exactly same place as seen on beat #7. This groove will require more practice, because you are using ghost notes, a control stroke and a pull-out stroke, so, a good place to start with this beat, is to learn the hand pattern first, and just add the bass drum when you feel comfortable with what you are playing with the hands.

Beat #9
Beats #9 and #10 are two of Mike’s favorite beats and are both linear, so no two limbs play at the same time. This groove can either be used as a beat or fill.

The very last note of the beat is played on the cowbell, so if you don’t own one, you can always use the bell of the ride instead. Once again, like was shown on beat #5, the trick to learn this type of beats is to break them down slowly. Start by dividing the beat in 4 smaller beats (one for each quarter note), since its time signature is in 4/4. Now take the
notes played on the first quarter note – bass, snare, hi-hat, bass – and spend some time going through this combination until you feel comfortable with it. Then concentrate on the second quarter note – snare, hi-hat, bass, bass – and don’t worry about the first part you have already learned, we will come back to it later. After you get this second part pretty solid, then it is time to cycle through the two parts of the beat that you have already learned. Now you just have to follow the same procedure with the second part of the groove.

Another option you have for playing this groove is to leave your left hand on the hi-hat all the time which will prevent you from having to switch from right hand to left hand on the hi-hat in the 3rd beat of this groove. As for creating new ideas with this beat, you could keep the hands doing exactly the same but move them around the different voices of the drum set.

**Beat #10**

This beat is linear and in 7/4 and is a hybrid between samba and funk. You can count it in 7/4, 14/8 or even in 4/4 + 3/4. The beat is 8th note based, having only one 16th note played on the A of 1. Like beats #5 and #9, to best learn this one, break it down first but in this case, since it is in 7/4, divide it in 7 small beats, one for each quarter note of the beat. Then use the same procedure as described on beats #5 and #9.

**Ghost Notes**

Ghost notes should be played as subtle as possible, so when you practice them on the snare, make sure you make them as low as possible. There is a small trick to make them sound even lower sounding. One of the great funk drummers of our time, Bernard Purdie, plays ghost notes near the rim of the snare drum. This approach will make your ghost notes quieter than if you play them on the center of the drum. Also, by doing this, you will have lots of room to smack the middle of the snare drum without the risk of striking the other stick or even of having to move it to avoid a collision between them. Keep in mind that to perform this you have to have a really well tuned snare.
Funk Fills

Some of the great funk players weren’t busy fill players. Guys like David Garibaldi that lay awesome grooves, play very simple and musical fills. So, for funk drumming you don’t need to go over the top and do the craziest of fills, you should keep them simple, musical and dynamic. At the end of the first part of the lesson, Mike shows how a simple paradiddle with ghosted notes on the snare and accents on the other drums, can be a great choice when playing funk fills.

What is to “Play in the Pocket”?

To play in the pocket, means to really lay down a groove that feels right for the song being played, making it sound great in the process. In funk there are various ways of playing in the pocket. In the case of the great drummers of James Brown, sometimes they would lay back the groove (for instance play a snare hit just a bit behind the 2) or push it forward (for instance, play a snare hit just a bit ahead of the 2), so it would sit really nice and tight with what the rest of the band was doing. So, in these cases, the spaces between the notes were not perfect, but the pocket was there. However, you can also play in the pocket if you play the notes as evenly spaced as possible, but only if it feels right for a song. So, to play in the pocket is more of a question of feel for the song, rather than worrying about matching perfectly with the metronome, the most important thing you need to stay in the pocket, is matching with what the other musicians of the band are playing.

Practice Tips

Practicing With a Metronome

A metronome is crucial, since it is the training wheels for any musician. The idea of using a metronome while practicing is to help you align all the notes that you play. This will develop your inner clock, and will make your playing a lot more consistent when you are not using a metronome, like playing with friends or with your band on a gig or on rehearsals. Another great side effect of practicing to a click track is reflected on studio session work for any kind of album. When recording your drum tracks, you will do it with a click track from a metronome to guide you. Since you practiced so much with a metronome, doing the recordings with the metronome will be second nature to you, the training wheels are there but you actually don’t need them. The metronome is also a great tool to keep track of your development on the drum set. This way, if you start practicing one of this funk beats at, let’s say, 60 bpm, and in a month’s time you are playing it at 120 bpm, you will know that you developed through that time’s period, and that everything is aligned perfectly with the click from the metronome. Remember that you, the drummer, are expected to be the metronome of the band.
For How Long Should You Practice a Beat?

When learning a new beat some guys decide to move after they can play it for a few seconds. This is definitely not the way to go. In the lesson, Jared advises everyone to stay with the same beat or fill until you can play it and at the same time tell a story to another person. If you can do this, then you will know that your mind is no longer tied to the beat, and the beat just comes natural to you. Another great way to know if you really know a beat is trying to play it for a long period of time (4 minutes for instance) without stopping and playing it perfectly. This is also a good exercise if you ever need to play the groove for a whole song.

Now, when you finally master a groove, sometimes you might end up wondering where you could use it. Beat #10 is a good example of this. Mike learned it some years ago and never used it on anything until the new Brent Ellis Group album. This groove is featured in one of the songs and he will be playing it a lot from now on. So, you never know when the stuff you learn will be relevant. This brings about another important issue, maintenance which is a very important factor through your learning. You have got to come back to some of the stuff you have learned already, because if you practice something for a long time and then don’t practice it for five or six months, it will get rusty.

Drummers and Bands

For some funk music and drumming check out the following bands and drummers just to get you started:

- James Brown (Drummers: Clyde Stubblefield, John “Jab’o” Starks, Melvin Parker);
- Tower of Power (Drummer: David Garibaldi);
- Red Hot Chili Peppers (Drummer: Chad Smith), this band is a funk-rock group;
- Sly and the Family Stones (Drummers: Greg Errico, Andy Newmark);
- The Meters (Drummer: “Zigaboo” Modeliste);
- Earth Wind & Fire (Band);
- Bernard Purdie (Drummer);
- Jeff Porcaro (Drummer).
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*Funk Drumming Lessons by Mike Michalkow*
*Do You Got Da Funk?*

1) [Drum notation image]

2) [Drum notation image]

3) [Drum notation image]

4) [Drum notation image]

5) [Drum notation image]