

The Drum Master Key

A Compact Guide To Musical Expression

BY FLORIAN ALEXANDRU-ZORN



Introduction

This volume is the distillation of all studies I have undertaken up to the present day. I practice these concepts in intricate detail on a regular basis. It has taken me several years to complete the process of writing this book and I am now looking forward to being able to share these practice techniques and concepts with others. *The Drum Master Key* can be utilized within a wide range of styles and is therefore timeless. I consider it essential not to limit the focus to a single genre or playing technique.

Acquiring new vocabulary enriches our own individual mode of expression and simplifies conversation with fellow musicians. We percussionists occupy a special role in music; our primary focus is on rhythm and phrasing and we devote our concentration to these two areas to a substantially greater degree than most other instrumentalists. For this reason, I consider it essential to practice exercises not only within double and triple groups, but also to incorporate quintuplets, septuplets, etc. into our daily vocabulary. This knowledge and the associated "thinking outside the box" will reinforce our playing technique and permit us to become more open-minded for new paths.

Each chapter of *The Drum Master Key* opens a further door to a wide range of musical dimensions. Beginning with fundamental rhythms and dynamics and proceeding to polymeters, displacements, and daily workouts, I have attempted to compile all essential elements for independent practice. I find it fascinating to observe how each individual percussionist has a different sound although we are all united by a single factor: the rhythmic foundation on which all our playing is based. This master key has been conceived for all percussionists, and players are individually free to decide how this material can be best employed to enhance their own personal style.

Children provide us with a good example.

They enjoy playing with building blocks and, depending on their whim of the day, produce the most amazing variety of constructions: towers, castles, dragons, etc. Sometimes they simply build whatever comes into their head.

All utilize the same starting material, but produce different results every time. If you have a precise vision of what you want to play, you will succeed in combining all these building blocks differently everytime with the aid of this book, thereby extending your abilities and learning how to employ them flexibly.

If you do not have a clear picture of what you want to play, I advise you to work systematically through the concepts towards the point at which the previously fuzzy image will gradually come into focus and reveal its clarity.

Now enjoy this musical voyage of discovery!



Florian Alexandru-Zorn

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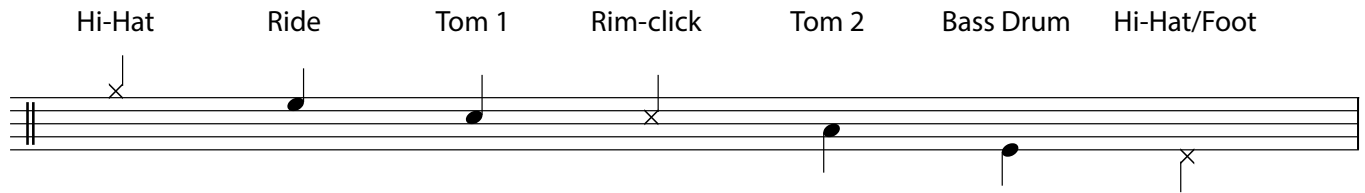
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Drum Key



How to Use This Book

It is not important to proceed through this volume in chronological order.

Each chapter is devoted to self-contained work fields that are imperative for all percussionists. A solid foundation always is the ideal basis for a stable learning process—this is provided in the first chapter “**The Key to Time.**”

The other chapters can, however, be worked through in any order. It is in fact advisable to jump back and forth between the different chapters to gain new insights into the individual exercises. Where possible, the concepts in this book are deliberately reproduced in tabular form. This means that the individual parts have to be assembled mentally which will in turn ensure that the material is memorized better, and you will be quicker in developing the ability to retrieve this material at any time.

Progress through the exercises one by one and attempt to play through each section until you are able to continue playing even if your attention starts to wander.

According to new scientific studies, the human brain requires around 160 repeated attempts to memorize something permanently. Here this will take around **15–20 minutes** at approx. **100 bpm** per 4/4 bar.

The principle of repetition is, however, only one aspect of reinforcing something that has recently been learned. I attach even greater significance to the question of how the acquired knowledge that is to be used. It is therefore first necessary to know how to go about learning something, but equally important to recognize the purpose of learning.

Here is a concrete example:

Can you remember back to your first day at school or the route you took during your driving test?

Older persons are able to recall situations, emotions, and scents that sometimes go back several decades—how is this possible?

The solution is extremely simple: the intensity of a particular situation. This is not merely dependent on repetition, but also on the individual attitude and associated degree of motivation with which exercises are performed. It is therefore necessary first to recognize why something has to be practiced, as this will make actual practice significantly easier. My guiding principle is that I feel privileged as a musician simply by being able to “play.”

The Master Key

This chapter is divided into two separate phases in relation to the relevant note value.

1st Phase:

One interpretation concept is selected for each note value as a concrete playing instruction.

2nd Phase:

In the second phase, an interpretation exercise is selected and played through with the subsequent combination possibilities of the individual note values.

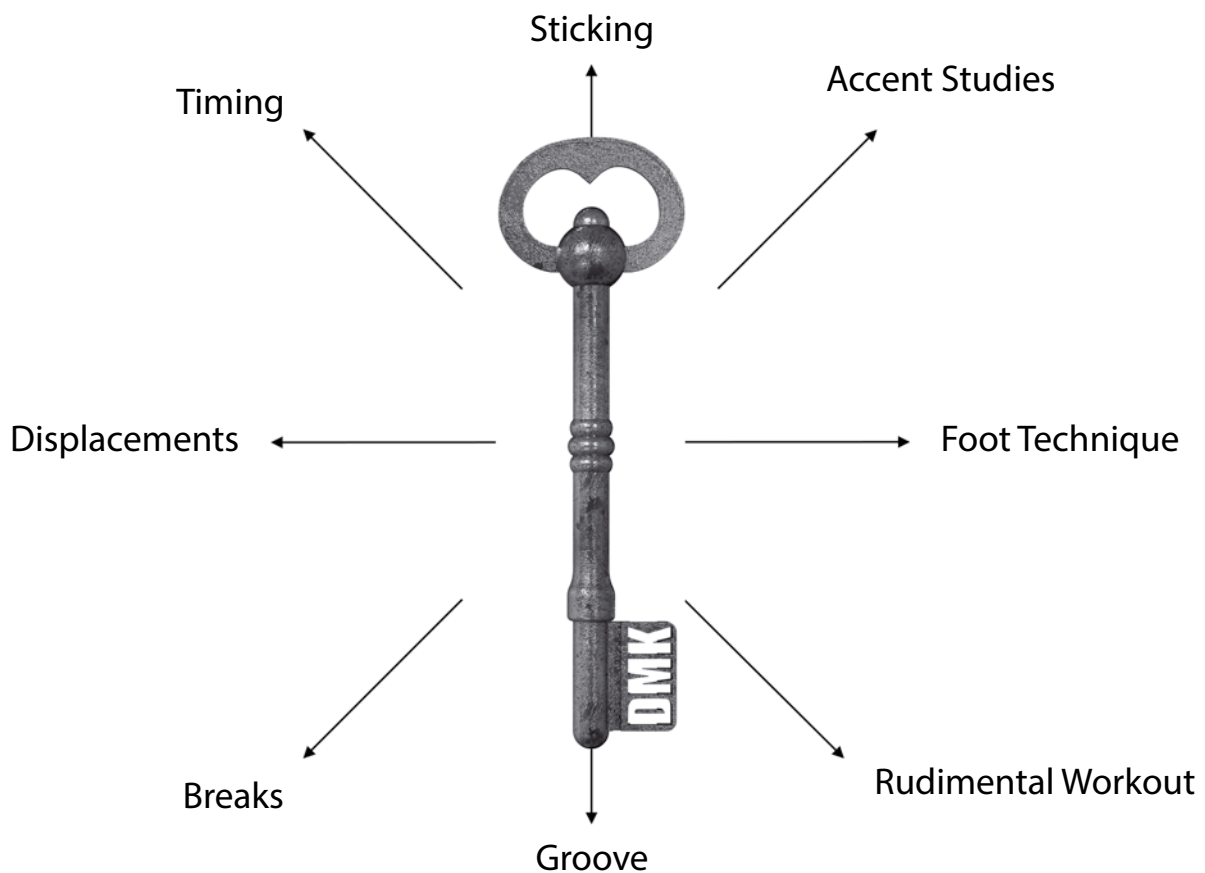
For example, an interpretative aspect is selected for working through eighth notes (e.g. accent studies or foot technique, etc.) and this interpretation concept is then worked through with the individual note values.

All interpretation exercises can either be played through individually or combined with each other as desired.

This will produce an endless series of different concepts that can be tailored to individual playing needs.

Each interpretation exercise is designed around the individual note values: rock grooves or bossa nova will for example be employed for eighth notes.

Jazz comping can be found under eighth-note triplets.



1st Phase Eighth Notes

At this point, abbreviations will be employed to enable the **Master Key** to be swiftly comprehended. You will find an exhaustive list of definitions for abbreviations below.

All combination possibilities are represented in the form of unfilled and filled note heads:



If, for example, all unfilled note heads are to be played with the right hand and all filled note heads with the left hand, this will be shown in the brief graphical representation as follows:

List of Abbreviations:

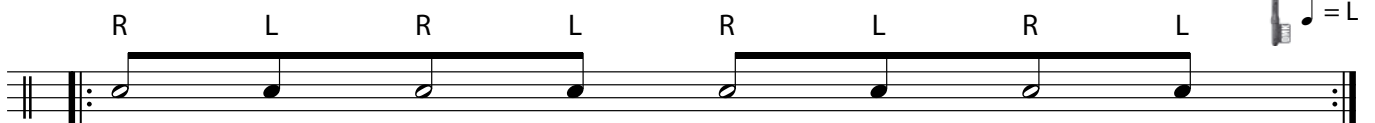
- R** = Note is played with the **right hand**.
- L** = Note is played with the **left hand**.
- >** = Note should be **accentuated**.
- flam** = Note is played with a **flam**.
- x2** = Note value is **doubled**.
- drag** = Note is played with a **drag**.
- cym.** = Note is played on the **cymbal**.
- SD** = Note is played on the **snare drum**.
- BD** = Note is played on the **bass drum**.
- TT** = Note is played on the **toms**.



Sticking

All **unfilled** note heads are played with the **right hand** and all **filled** note heads are played with the **left hand**.

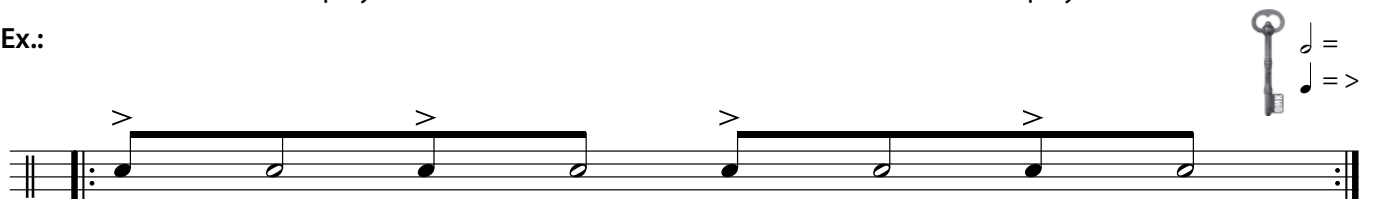
Ex.:



Accent Studies

All **unfilled** note heads are played as an **unaccented** beat and all **filled** note heads are played as an **accented** beat.

Ex.:



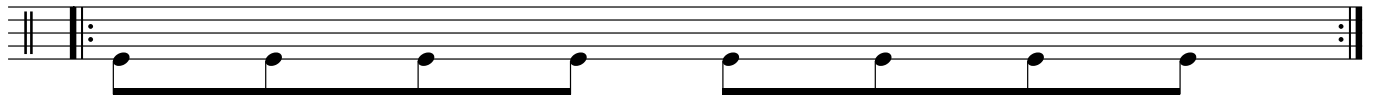
Foot Technique

Exercise 1:

All **unfilled** note heads are played with the **right foot** and all **filled** note heads are played with the **left foot**. This exercise is suitable for playing on the hi-hat and bass drum and also with a double bass pedal.

Ex.:

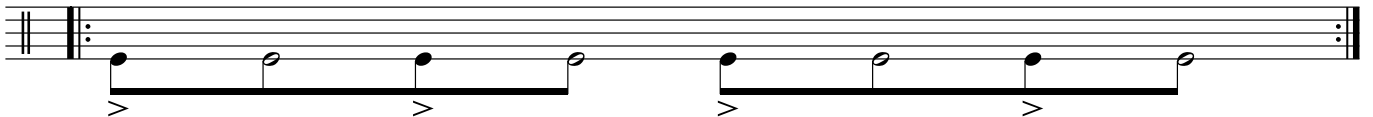
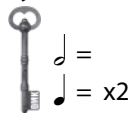
R L R L R L R L



Exercise 2:

All **unfilled** note heads are played as **unaccented** beats and all **filled** note heads are played as an **accented** beats. I recommend playing the **unaccented** beats as **taps with heel down** and the **accented** beats as **contrary motion with heel up**.

Ex.:



Rudimental Workout

Each exercise should be performed with one of the following stickings:

RLRL, LRLR, RLL, LLRR, RLRR, LLLL, RLLR, LRR, LLRL, RLRL, LRLR.

Exercise 1:

A **flam** is played prior to each note with a **filled** note head.

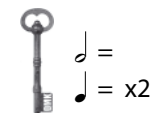
Ex.:



Exercise 2:

The value of each note with a **filled** note head is **doubled**.

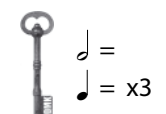
Ex.:



Exercise 3:

The value of each note with a **filled** note head is **tripled**.

Ex.:



Displacements in 5

Displacements in 5: Eighth Notes

Three staves of music showing eighth notes in 5/4 time. The first two staves have two measures each, and the third staff has one measure. Each note has an accent (>). The notes are: Staff 1: G4, A4, B4, C5, G4, A4, B4, C5; Staff 2: D5, E5, F5, G5, D5, E5, F5, G5; Staff 3: A5, B5, C6, D6, A5, B5, C6, D6.

Displacements in 5: Eighth-Note Triplets

Four staves of music showing eighth-note triplets in 5/4 time. Each triplet is marked with a '3' below it and an accent (>). The notes are: Staff 1: G4, A4, B4, C5, G4, A4, B4, C5; Staff 2: D5, E5, F5, G5, D5, E5, F5, G5; Staff 3: A5, B5, C6, D6, A5, B5, C6, D6; Staff 4: E6, F6, G6, A6, E6, F6, G6, A6.

Displacements in 5: Sixteenth Notes

Two staves of music showing sixteenth notes in 5/4 time. Each note has an accent (>). The notes are: Staff 1: G4, A4, B4, C5, G4, A4, B4, C5; Staff 2: D5, E5, F5, G5, D5, E5, F5, G5.