

Snare Drum Exercises – Christian's Way

Fun Twists on Popular Skillsets and Exercises

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Forward and Breakdown by Christian Kilgore

Once you have mastered the essentials, creating variation in your practice routine is what keeps things interesting. Finding new ways to challenge yourself helps you continue to improve as a percussionist. Each exercise in this collection is my take on a popular exercise or skillset with my own twist to make it more challenging. These are exercises that I actually use when I need to work on specific skills because they create more interest and applicability for my own playing. If you ever find yourself zoning out or going through the motions when practicing, spice up your routine with these exercises or your own variations!

8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, -1 – In this exercise, you count down the number of notes you play on each hand; starting with 8 and counting down to 2. The twist is that the last note of every phrase is a 16th note. This means that the left-hand entrance does not naturally feel like a downbeat. There are complex time signatures justifying the notes per measure, but it is easier to think about the notes as proportions in relation to each other. If you practice this one with an eighth note met, every right-hand will land with the met and every left-hand will be in between pulses. Make sure not to waiver as you transition between hands. Recommended starting tempo: eighth note = 120 bpm.

Buck 5’s – Buck 5’s is a slightly harder version of Bucks for two reasons. For one, the exercise is now in 5/4 with unique subdivisions in each measure. Instead of just groups of two eighth notes, there are mixtures of groups of twos and threes throughout. Secondly, the original exercise only requires down and up strokes. In order to play this exercise well, groups of three require a down stroke, a tap, and then an up stroke. This slight edge makes this exercise a little more engaging. Recommended starting tempo: quarter note = 80 bpm.

16th Note Accent Grid (5’s and 3’s) – This exercise is a variation on the 16th note accent grid but with a focus on groupings of fives and threes. This exercise also has a fun groove to it! While the exercise on paper is not that much harder than the original, I like to spice it up more with variations. Some examples include every accent becoming: a diddle, a press-buzz, a flam, a tap drag, a cheese, or a flam five. More examples could be adding a constant like: a press-buzz or flam on every downbeat or diddles on non-accented notes. Really mixing it up and challenging yourself is where this exercise becomes extra fun. Recommended starting tempo: quarter note = 72 bpm.

Buzzkill – This exercise is my go-to work out for getting a better and fuller sounding multiple-bounce roll. It starts off with press buzzes played at every dynamic level from pianissimo to fortissimo. This allows you to focus on stretching your dynamic range and helps you understand the pressure necessary to get a good sounding buzz at every dynamic level. The rest of the exercise uses alternating sticking with the goal of overlapping your buzzes. There should never be a moment of silence. As one stick strikes the drum, the other is still bouncing.

Focus on staying relaxed and getting as many bounces as possible. Recommended starting tempo: quarter note = 72 bpm.

Triple Stoked – Triple Stoked focuses on using the rebound of your drum to get three notes. The hand feel is similar to a multiple bounce roll, but with the control necessary to only play three notes in time. My twist is that for the first six measures, the last subdivision is 3 16th notes. This gives a similar off-kilter feeling as the first exercise in this collection. Additionally, the last full measure transitions us from 16th notes to 16th note triplets for a faster hand speed. The challenge of this exercise is getting precise rhythms while getting good sound quality from your triple strokes. Recommended starting tempo: eighth note = 160 bpm.

Metricity – This exercise is a conceptually simple idea: adding one note per beat from 1 to 9 and back down to 1. The hard part is making sure your subdivisions are accurate and your timing is steady. Make sure you don't ease in or out of any of these rhythms; they are exact changes and the downbeat is the only constant. There are two stickings to master. The first is simply alternating; no doubling or natural sticking. The second consists of common stickings for each rhythm that involve singles, doubles, and/or triples, allowing for the right hand to land on each downbeat. Both are hard for different reasons. Once these are mastered, try making your own combinations of these complex rhythms (like your phone number!) Recommended starting tempo: quarter note = 52 bpm.

Inverted Flam Freaks – Inverted flams used to be the hardest rudiment for me and my least favorite. So, I created this groovy exercise that tackles this rudiment and a few other common flam rudiments. Even though this one flies by, you get to work on: Inverted flam taps, flam accents, pataflaflas, and flops. Make sure you are nailing the sticking, bringing out the accents, and staying relaxed. Once you get the hang out it, really spice it up with a few cheeses and/or flam drags. Recommended starting tempo: quarter note = 64 bpm.

Paradiddle Puddada – This exercise is a fun one for your single to double control. Every 4/4 measure is every possible variation on paradiddles (borrowed straight from stick control, exercises 5-8). Every 15/16 measure is 4 puddadas followed by a transitional figure to get you to the opposite hand. It is a brain teaser and really tests how comfortable your paradiddles are. No matter the sticking, strive for consistency in sound quality and no wavering in your timing. Recommended starting tempo: eighth note = 128 bpm.

Paradiddle-diddle Countdown – In this exercise, I wanted to help build consistency in my left-handed paradiddle-diddles. This exercise has you play a few on your right-hand, transition to the left with a paradiddle, and then play the same figure. Each time, there are fewer paradiddle-diddles. Even though the time signatures and stickings change, all 16th notes should remain at the same speed. Focus on consistency in your timing and phrasing between both hands. Recommended starting tempo: eighth note = 180 bpm.

Metricity

Exercise 1: Metricity. A snare drum exercise in 4/4 time. It consists of two staves. The first staff has a 4-measure phrase with a 3-measure rest, followed by a 5-measure phrase, a 6-measure phrase, and a 7-measure phrase. The second staff has a 9-measure phrase, a 7-measure phrase, a 6-measure phrase, a 5-measure phrase, and a 3-measure phrase. The notation includes rhythmic patterns with stems and flags, and the corresponding drum notation (r for right, l for left) is written below the staff.

Exercise 2: Metricity. A snare drum exercise in 4/4 time. It consists of two staves. The first staff has a 4-measure phrase with a 3-measure rest, followed by a 5-measure phrase, a 6-measure phrase, and a 7-measure phrase. The second staff has a 9-measure phrase, a 7-measure phrase, a 6-measure phrase, a 5-measure phrase, and a 3-measure phrase. The notation includes rhythmic patterns with stems and flags, and the corresponding drum notation (r for right, l for left) is written below the staff.

Inverted Flam Freaks

Exercise 1: Inverted Flam Freaks. A snare drum exercise in 3/4 time. It consists of two staves. The first staff has a 4-measure phrase with a 2-measure rest, followed by a 4-measure phrase, a 4-measure phrase, and a 4-measure phrase. The second staff has a 4-measure phrase with a 2-measure rest, followed by a 4-measure phrase, a 4-measure phrase, and a 4-measure phrase. The notation includes rhythmic patterns with stems and flags, and the corresponding drum notation (r for right, l for left) is written below the staff.

Exercise 2: Inverted Flam Freaks. A snare drum exercise in 2/4 time. It consists of two staves. The first staff has a 4-measure phrase with a 2-measure rest, followed by a 4-measure phrase, a 4-measure phrase, and a 4-measure phrase. The second staff has a 4-measure phrase with a 2-measure rest, followed by a 4-measure phrase, a 4-measure phrase, and a 4-measure phrase. The notation includes rhythmic patterns with stems and flags, and the corresponding drum notation (r for right, l for left) is written below the staff.

Paradiddle Puddada

Exercise 1: Paradiddle Puddada. A snare drum exercise in 4/4 time. It consists of two staves. The first staff has a 4-measure phrase with a 16-measure rest, followed by a 4-measure phrase, a 4-measure phrase, and a 4-measure phrase. The second staff has a 4-measure phrase with a 16-measure rest, followed by a 4-measure phrase, a 4-measure phrase, and a 4-measure phrase. The notation includes rhythmic patterns with stems and flags, and the corresponding drum notation (r for right, l for left) is written below the staff.

Exercise 2: Paradiddle Puddada. A snare drum exercise in 4/4 time. It consists of two staves. The first staff has a 4-measure phrase with a 16-measure rest, followed by a 4-measure phrase, a 4-measure phrase, and a 4-measure phrase. The second staff has a 4-measure phrase with a 16-measure rest, followed by a 4-measure phrase, a 4-measure phrase, and a 4-measure phrase. The notation includes rhythmic patterns with stems and flags, and the corresponding drum notation (r for right, l for left) is written below the staff.

Paradiddle-diddle Countdown

Exercise 1: Paradiddle-diddle Countdown. A snare drum exercise in 12/8 time. It consists of two staves. The first staff has a 4-measure phrase with a 4-measure rest, followed by a 4-measure phrase, a 4-measure phrase, and a 4-measure phrase. The second staff has a 4-measure phrase with a 4-measure rest, followed by a 4-measure phrase, a 4-measure phrase, and a 4-measure phrase. The notation includes rhythmic patterns with stems and flags, and the corresponding drum notation (r for right, l for left) is written below the staff.

Exercise 2: Paradiddle-diddle Countdown. A snare drum exercise in 4/4 time. It consists of two staves. The first staff has a 4-measure phrase with a 4-measure rest, followed by a 4-measure phrase, a 4-measure phrase, and a 4-measure phrase. The second staff has a 4-measure phrase with a 4-measure rest, followed by a 4-measure phrase, a 4-measure phrase, and a 4-measure phrase. The notation includes rhythmic patterns with stems and flags, and the corresponding drum notation (r for right, l for left) is written below the staff.