

Lesson 15

Dynamics

Hello and welcome. In this months issue we are going to take a break from our reading exercises and have look at dynamics - something that I feel is often overlooked, especially by younger players. By using dynamics in our playing we can create high and low points in our performance without even having to change our pattern, fill or groove. So rather than writing out lots of complicated rhythms around the kit we are only going to play 1/16th notes so we can focus on the control it takes to create good dynamics.

Ex 1

We begin with a "p" which stands for piano (pronounced pee a no) meaning soft. We could also have "pp" this stands for pianissimo which means very soft or even "ppp" meaning as soft as possible. So when playing at "piano" level you should to give yourself enough volume to be able to play even quieter if necessary. On beat "3" we have an "f" this stands for forte meaning loud. We could also have "ff" which stands for fortissimo meaning very loud or even "fff" meaning as loud as possible. Again, when playing at "forte" level you should be playing loud but not as loud as you can.

Ex 2

On beat "2" we have "mf" which stands for mezzo forte meaning moderately loud. This fills the dynamic gap between soft and loud. On beat "4" we have "ff" - very loud. So as we play this exercise we should hear an increase of volume starting on the first of each set of 1/16th notes.

Ex3

After looking at some instant changes in dynamics lets look at a gradual change from soft to loud. This is called a crescendo meaning increasing in volume. The lines used to write a crescendo are called hair pins. This should sound like you are gradually and evenly turning up the volume.

Ex 4

From loud to soft is called a diminuendo meaning decreasing in volume.

Ex 5, 6, 7, and 8

Having spent time gaining control over your dynamics you could now try moving around the kit, so I have put together four ideas to try. In exercises 5, 6 and 7 we have crescendos and diminuendos over 2 beats and in exercises 8 a crescendo over 1 beat.

The next step is to apply some dynamics to your own fills or grooves. For instance, the next time you play with your band don't start a song playing "fff" as loud as possible. Begin at "mf" moderately loud so by the time you get to the chorus or the big ending you can take it up to "f", "ff", or "fff" to create a good dynamic effect.

The exercises are written on a single staff in 4/4 time, using eighth and sixteenth notes. Exercise 1 includes a drumstick pattern above the staff: R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L. Exercise 1 shows a crescendo from piano (p) to forte (f) over two beats. Exercise 2 shows dynamics p, mf, f, and ff across four beats. Exercise 3 shows a crescendo from p to f over two beats. Exercise 4 shows a decrescendo from f to p over two beats. Exercise 5 shows a decrescendo from f to p over two beats. Exercise 6 shows dynamics ff, mp, and ff across four beats. Exercise 7 shows a crescendo from mf to f over two beats. Exercise 8 shows a crescendo from p to ff over one beat.