



By Stephane Chamberland

# Feel & Space for the Musical Drummer

## Motions & Subdivisions

**H**ave you ever heard the expression, "It's not only the notes but the spaces between the notes that count?" As a drummer, understanding and feeling the distance between the strokes will help you create really natural and precise motions, like the Moeller technique in the low, half, and full positions.

It's easier to develop a strong groove when the body moves. When we are dancing, walking, or doing anything with our body, we are actually creating motions in time. In music, the smaller or larger distance between two notes will determine the subdivision you are in. For example, if I space out two equal notes in one beat, I am playing eighth notes; three notes: triplets; four notes: sixteenth notes, and so on. I can also learn the groups of five, six, seven, nine, 10, 11, or even 12, just to name a few. As in math, we must learn all the subdivisions to get a complete map of the possibili-

ty of the rhythms to change the feel. It is amazing how we can create a rounder feel by spacing the notes out or create tension by putting them closer. The jazz ride pattern can be played using a triplet feel but also a 1/32 note feel and everything in between.

The *cáscara* in Afro-Cuban music can also be stretched to the point where you are almost only playing eighth notes. With the Brazilian *caixa* patterns, we need to understand and play with the distance to be able to make the rhythm feel right. Playing this pattern too square will kill the feel.

Also, in funk or pop music, we definitely use the same concept between bass drum, hi-hats, and snare. You have probably heard about playing the back beat a little bit behind or ahead of the beat. Well there you go – again we are talking about space.

This is a tricky concept to teach because it's a question of feel and it's really hard to precisely notate the feel. The chart will usually give you the main rhythmic notation but rarely the right feel. It's our job to know enough about

## Collapsed Rudiments

Actually, notes can be collapsed or expanded. I was amazed by this concept when I had the chance to study with Jim Chapin. Even today, I am studying with Claus Hessler from Germany and these concepts are a huge part of today's sound for drumset. I invite you to check out these drummers if you don't already know them. Jim was working on some interesting concepts with changing the distance between the notes to create different rudiments. This is a great place to start to study the feel.

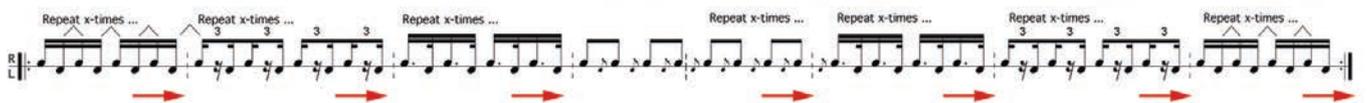
Ex. 1 and 2 are cool exercises to help develop your technique. They are really challenging exercises, so take your time. There are three steps to each:

1. The starting rudiment.
2. The transition.
3. The second rudiment.

Note that I am not changing the motion of my hands; I am only changing the space between the notes.

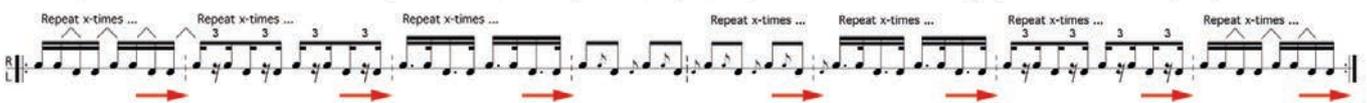
### EX. 1

**NON-ALTERNATING FLAMS are COLLAPSED SINGLE STROKES** and vice versa. Repeat the phrases marked by the dotted barline. Important note: The grace-notes of the flams are not necessarily much softer since they are derived from alternating 16th notes (see first/last pattern of the exercise). The grace note in section 6 is only played once in the beginning.



### EX. 2

**ALTERNATING FLAMS are COLLAPSED DOUBLE STROKES** and vice versa. Repeat the sections marked by the dotted barline as long as you want and gradually change the rhythm. Important note: The grace-notes of the flams are not necessarily much softer (see example above). Again, the grace note of section 6 is only played once when entering this pattern.



ties. It will also help to create different feels. In one beat, for example, you may stretch all the notes or just some notes. It is really hard for a machine to emulate this human feel.

## The Feel & Sound

In all styles of music, we can play with the

music to make it feel right in the context. It's like when you study a transcription from your favourite drummers. You read it, study, and play it, but when you listen to the track, it sounds completely different than what you have imagined.

Of course, there is more to learn about these concepts but this is a great first start. If you want to learn more about collapsed rudiments, get the book *Open-Handed Vol. 2* by Claus Hessler and Dom Famularo (Alfred Publishing). There is also a rudiment poster available at [www.claushessler.com](http://www.claushessler.com).