



The Mystery Of Great Musical Drum Solos

It's always a challenge to answer the question: "How can I build a great drum solo?" With four limbs and so many drums, cymbals, pedals, and bells around us, the drum kit is an exciting and expressive instrument but can also be overwhelming when we start thinking about playing a solo.

Range Of Expression & Technique

Being musical is a very broad topic. The way I see it is that if you create a bridge between the common characteristics of music and your solo, you will be on the right track. Start by thinking about the range of expression from the great book *It's Your Move* by Dom Famularo. Explore the differences between fast and slow, as well as loud and soft. Dynamics are so important in how you express yourself on the drum set.

Forms

In all styles of music, we use mathematics to organize and structure the form that will serve as a road map for the band. In jazz, for example, we commonly use two popular forms: the blues and the standard. The blues has 12 bars and the standard has 32 (A-A-B-A). In pop music, we call the forms by different names like verse, pre-chorus, chorus, and bridge. Try to practice playing in form. You may want to sing a song that you already know and play something that goes with the melody you are singing. Create different themes that will support your ideas. Think more about the spaces between the notes during the phrasing. It's better to play simply

with a melody and a form in your head than to play very complex patterns without order or structure.

Climax

The intensity of your solo is crucial in transmitting your emotions to the audience. It's really important to create a progression in your playing. Start by using only two drums and play as many ideas on those drums as you can. Your cymbals could be treated like a snare drum; try playing rudiments on them.

I love to start by playing a repetitive pattern on the snare and then on the hi-hats. Be aware of the short and long notes. A snare or hi-hat will give you short notes compared to a crash or a floor tom, which will give you long notes; this is the difference between staccato and legato.

There is also a difference in the projection of each instrument. For example, hitting a bass drum will produce more power and projection than hitting a splash cymbal; being aware of that will make you sound very clean and balanced. Start small and build up your ideas with more notes. Connect your playing to your emotions and imagine stories in your head while playing.

Repetition & Transitions

Repetition reinforces your ideas. With just a single idea, we can play for a long time and develop it. To achieve that, you need to be comfortable with repeating your idea as often as needed to set your mind on it. While you are playing it over and over again, listen

to yourself and converse with what you hear. It goes like this; you play something, you listen to what you are playing, and become inspired to play something else. Then listen to the next idea and repeat the process.

Transitioning between ideas is also important because sometimes you want to play a longer solo and make it interesting. A solo is like a trip that you are taking and you bring the audience with you. Try to use different polyrhythms to change the pulse. Transition between different styles, such as jazz, Latin, rock, fusion, or funk. Some styles go better together but you can also surprise people by going places they weren't expecting.

Ostinatos

Think about a pianist. Often we see the left hand playing a constant pattern while the right hand is improvising. We can do the exact same thing. We call that constant pattern an ostinato: playing a constant pattern that does not change with some limbs while the other limbs are improvising. In every single style, drummers have developed original ostinatos. Start with some cool ones played with your feet. They could be stylistic like the samba bass drum pattern, the baion, the jazz ride pattern, or the clave and tumbao. They could also be rudimental like paradiddles, doubles, or flams and drag patterns. You will develop great independence and this more complex development will impact the quality of your groove and time and push your comfort zone to a higher level.