

# MAKING TIME CLICK

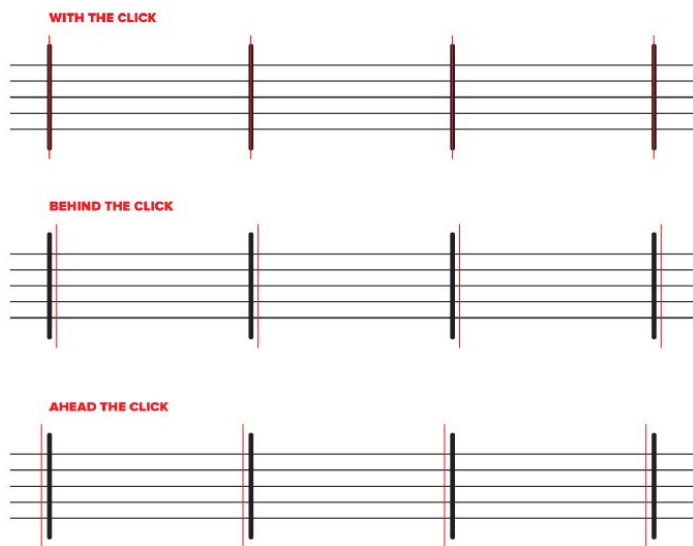
BY STEPHANE CHAMBERLAND

As drummers, we can learn so many chops and crazy things to play around the set, but with experience we all come to the same conclusion: it's really all about the music and about playing for the song, which means respecting the other musicians and doing what's necessary to support the ensemble. One of the most important things to develop in this regard is a solid sense of time.

## TIME IS GROOVE

First of all, it is critical to understand the precision aspect of the game. The click is a guide and we basically have three options: play with the click, a little bit ahead, or a little bit behind. Every drummer must be comfortable with all three and, depending on the style of music or the feel, be able to apply any one of those in context.

Start developing this facility by turning on a click and practicing a simple groove with it. You should be able to stop hearing the click whenever you are exactly aligned. Next, play the same thing, but relax, lay back a bit, and feel what it's like to play behind the beat. Finally, start using more of your body to push and dance a bit and you will find yourself playing ahead. I recommend recording yourself with the click trying each of these placements, then listen critically afterwards.



Obviously, it's hard to completely describe this idea because you need to be able to feel it. Mark Kelso's DVD, *Musician First, Drummer Second*, and Benny Greb's DVD, *The Art and Science of Groove*, are great resources to help you get a better grasp of this concept.

## MOVING THE CLICK AROUND

The click puts equal distances between two sounds, but you aren't required to use the click exclusively as quarter notes. Instead, practice placing the click on the upbeats ("&"), or perhaps on the second and fourth sixteenth notes ("e" and "a"). Experiment with triplet subdivision values or even quintuplets. The best part of this exercise is that you don't need a drumset to practice. Turn on the click (at any value) and tap on your legs, use your feet, or even your voice. By playing along with the click using a variety of subdivisions and partial beats, you will develop a strong sense of spacing.

## CHANGING TEMPOS WITHOUT STOPPING

Another thing occasionally needed in freelance situations is the ability to change tempo on the fly, without stopping the groove. For example, in a medley, play two songs without stopping, starting the first song at 130 bpm and the second one at 105 bpm. You must start the click, play the groove, stop the metronome while playing the groove, prepare the next tempo, and hit the button on the first beat of the next song. You have to be with the click right away. It's obviously something you need to practice before getting to the rehearsal or the gig. Even in a situation where you might be faced with sight-reading a new chart in a live situation without rehearsal, developing this general skill in practice sessions will put you in the driver's seat, and the musicians around you will love you for being prepared.

## WHY THE METRONOME?

The click is necessary in many situations. For example, a click is used if a show includes sequences, if the band wants to make the live performance more on time and easier to dance to for the audience, or to be precisely aligned with the screen action for film or television. In the studio, it's common to use the click because the drums will later function as the click to allow the band to play together.

I took some lessons with Joe Bergamini in New Jersey. Joe is playing tons of Broadway shows in New York City, and he taught me how to even follow a metronome visually—no sound, only the lights. This is a valuable tool when you need no noise, when the sound of your in-ears monitor could disturb the performance.

## DEVELOPING AN INNER SENSE OF TIME

Ultimately, you want to use the metronome as a tool; you don't want to depend on it. You should be able to start it, stop it, and then, when you start it again, still be locked in time.

Program four bars of click and four bars of no click. When it comes back to the click, try to be at the same place. Develop an understanding of your tendencies to either rush or lag. This is a big part of your success as a drummer for any musical situation.

### CONCLUSION

Remember, your job is to do what's necessary to support the ensemble and make the music work. For all the minutes and hours you work on licks or chops, spend at least that long working on your time. You, and those you play with, will be glad you did.

**Stephane Chamberland** is an internationally recognized drummer, clinician, educator, and author who has performed and recorded with numerous musicians playing hundreds of live shows. Known to be a versatile drummer—performing, reading, and writing all styles of music—Stephane is currently playing with his own jazz quartet while freelancing with about 30 bands per year. Stephane maintains a busy private teaching schedule on Skype and in-person, coaching students from 12 countries. He is the co-author of the books *The Weaker Side*, *Drumset Duets*, and *Pedal Control* with Dom Famularo and Joe Bergamini. He also edited the latest editions of *Stick Control* and *Accents and Rebounds* by George Lawrence Stone. **RIS**



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