

Advanced Techniques for Jazz Soloing

Creative Solo Applications Inspired by a Master

by Stephane Chamberland

I had the chance to study with the great Jim Chapin during the last four years of his life. (Jim passed away at ninety years of age on July 4, 2009—coincidentally, as he's been referred to as the "Father of Independence" in the drumming world.) For four years I'd been studying intensely with Dom Famularo, who suddenly said during one of my lessons, "Steph, you're now ready for Jim." He picked up the phone and called Jim right away. He came, and we started our first lesson.

It was moving to watch Jim having a hard time getting out of his car, yet impressive to see him sit at the practice pad and play like he was still twenty years old. From that day on, almost every month that I was on Long Island, I took lessons with him. We worked on techniques on the pad for a long time and eventually moved to the drumset to focus on jazz concepts and independence.

Jim wrote the highly regarded books *Advanced Techniques for the Modern Drummer, Volume One* and *Volume Two*, and was the author of the video *Speed, Power, Control, and Endurance*. Jim had been one of Sanford Moeller's best students, and after his studies with the influential player/instructor, Jim traveled the globe teaching Moeller's concepts to many of the best drummers in the world.

In this article, I'll show you my personal application of Jim's first book. I came up with this idea while I was looking for a method to improve my vocabulary in jazz solos and trading phrases of four or eight bars. (At the time I felt that my comping was at a much higher level than my soloing.) One day while I was at Steve Maxwell's Vintage Drum Shop in New York City, I found the amazing *Philly Joe Jones Solo Book*, which was transcribed by Joerg Eckel, and it inspired me to work on solos and find ways to incorporate any comping vocabulary from Chapin into my phrases.

Removing the Ride Cymbal

Let's begin with Exercises 5 and 6 from Page 41 of *Advanced Techniques*. That's one of my favorite pages to start with when demonstrating this concept.



Start by playing the patterns as written without the ride cymbal. Make sure to use a sticking that feels comfortable. Because both hands are playing the phrase now, the sticking possibilities are numerous. Try to alternate hands as much as possible. You should notice the conversation that's created between the snare and the bass drum—already we've got fodder for tremendous jazz drum solos.

Note that it's harder to play when you're leaving more space. But it's important to practice soloing without always filling in the spaces between our ideas. In other words, be as confident with the rests as you are with the notes you play. Sing your phrases to help you to connect more with the musical side of your composition.



One-Handed Orchestrations

Another famed jazz drummer and teacher, John Riley, gave me great advice to improve my technique and get more ideas out of one single pattern. "Play it with just one hand," he said, and that's exactly what we are going to do next. This will help you work on endurance, precision, and movement around the drums. Go slowly and start on the snare, and then move between two drums. Finally, orchestrate this phrase everywhere you want—for instance, from the rack tom to the floor tom or from the floor tom to the rack tom—and create random combinations. In this second step, you can hear the melodies created by your drums. I'll also use some stick-on-stick strokes that are very common in jazz. Here's one possibility.



Incorporating Double Strokes

Now it's time to fill in the spaces. Double-stroke rolls are so important when it comes to feel and getting a fuller sound. In this next step, we'll change all the singles that are not accented into doubles. The accented singles are going to stay accented. Make sure to play the doubles soft and the accents loud to create dynamics. You may also want to displace the accents on cymbals or on toms, though staying on the snare also sounds good.



Combining Phrases

Now you can have fun doing the same thing with all the pages of the book. Some patterns will feel and sound better, so write down your favorite ones in a journal. Then take those figures and put them together in a jazz context. Use some play-along tracks, and find musicians to play with as well.

I recommend practicing these ideas by trading phrases. Start by trading one, two, four, eight, and even twelve bars. If you're by yourself without music, you can play time in between your phrases. When you play time, stay light with the comping, and focus more on the sound of the ride cymbal. Make music, and have fun!



Stephane Chamberland is an internationally recognized drummer, clinician, educator, and author who currently leads the Stephane Chamberland Jazz Quartet. He is the co-author of the books *The Weaker Side*, *Pedal Control*, and *Drumset Duets* (Wizdom Media). Chamberland endorses Yamaha, Sabian, Promark, and Evans products. For more info, visit stephanechamberland.com.



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