



From Drummer to Writer

WE all know that having “more arrows in your quiver,” as they say, is a positive thing. As a freelance musician, I am so happy to be able to play many styles of music and to have an open mind to always be learning new things.

In music, just like in related aspects of the music industry, we may explore different avenues in order to hone our artistic skills and business acumen. For example, some avenues could be: teaching, recording in studios, promoting our bands, doing clinics, presenting at conferences, and many others.

Here, I want to focus on and encourage you to develop one additional skill, and explain how this has served me well. I am talking about developing transcription skills and working with software applications to present your work professionally.

Types of Charts

Learning to transcribe drum parts is amazing. I divide the types of charts into three categories:

First, a transcription is a note-for-note writing-out of a song or solo. This is a great way to study what your favourite drummers think, how they phrase their playing, and what subdivisions and placements they use around the kit. When I studied with John Riley at the Manhattan School of Music, he was always having me transcribe solos from great jazz drummers. Some were extremely difficult to transcribe, but it made me understand much more about what I was playing.

The second type of chart is the drum chart format. This is most widely used by freelance drummers and what I use often for gigs. Charts give us the form, main grooves, and the places to fill in. If you want a great example, look at volumes one and two of *Groove Essentials* by

Tommy Igoe. (I use these books to practice sightreading as well.) What I like about these kinds of charts is that they make you develop your improvisation skills and allow you to infuse your own ideas. Having less information on the paper, you must listen and figure out the best parts possible to play in the moment.

The third type of transcription involves the use of the music charts for bass or piano. Look at the well-known *Real Books* series of jazz improvisation books. They are tremendous tools to have in your toolbox. I always recommend that my students get together with other musicians and work on their real book skills. There are no drums on these charts; only the form, chords, and melody. It will very likely motivate you to learn some piano and musical theory to be able to better follow what other musicians understand and are reading. These are probably the most challenging charts for a drummer because we must read and process something beyond how we write, or perhaps think, about our own instruments.

Personal Stories

Having charting skills for reading, transcribing, and organizing a clear music sheet is a must. Many years ago, I was asked by my mentor, Dom Famularo, to write some ideas for a book he was working on. I was so excited that I went home, bought a music notation program, and started learning it through tutorials. After about a month, I was able to put all my ideas into the program and we had started to write our first book. I didn't know at the time that this would lead to writing *The Weaker Side*, *Pedal Control*, and *Drumset Duets* with Dom Famularo and Joe Bergamini for Wizdom Media and the opportunity to formalize charts for many other books such as *Elements* by John Favicchia and *Drum-*

set for Beginners by Paul Hose and Jim Farey in London. I also had the immense privilege of writing the new editions of George Lawrence Stone's *Stick Control* and *Accents and Rebounds*. I work on educational posters and write articles for many magazines all over the world, too. I mention this not to show off but to encourage you to learn these skills in order to push your career to the next level.

Using Technology to Create & Read Charts

Now the question you may be asking is, “Where do I begin?” Well, I always recommend that you find a great teacher who will be able to help you develop your transcription skills. With my first drum teacher, Vincent Marchessault, I was always bringing in new try-outs of transcribed songs and grooves. He helped me by making me aware of my mistakes and showing me how to write properly. Then, get a good program for your computer or tablet. Google all the music notation programs and you will surely find other great ones to suit your tastes. Once you know how to write charts, you can export them in various formats to use in a chart reading app.

Create, Share & Learn

Can you imagine being able to write your own professional charts for your band or students, or even for clinic reviews or for personal notes? From education to practical application, you will definitely benefit from learning more things connected to your drumming passion. It only takes a little bit more to get to the next level. Learn a little more every day on a consistent basis. Everything is at the tip of your fingers. It is just a question of believing in yourself, acquiring the skills you need, practicing, improving, and learning from your mistakes.