



By Stephane Chamberland

Developing a Musical & Creative Improvisational Facility

My father comes from a family of 16 children. Many of them wanted to learn to play an instrument but the financial situation made it impossible to engage music teachers. So, instead, they bought some cheap instruments and learned by ear, working really hard to understand what was being played on their favourite records. My uncles all grew up with fewer resources than we have available to us today, yet they all became musicians. My father told me that they had just a little bit of information but made the most of it.

I sometimes feel that, nowadays, we are working the opposite way; we learn many things but use just a small fraction of them. I remember covering so many drum methods at some point in my studies only to now realize, years later, that I retain only about 20 per cent of that information. That was a key moment in my life because I started realizing how to learn effectively and how to practice and study in a more mature way – a way that would make my evolution last forever.

Knowing, Understanding & Mastering

There is a big difference between knowing, understanding, and mastering. My goal is to learn slowly and master more, so when all the books are closed and I am playing with a band, I will be able to pull out things I have really mastered and share them with the audience in the right context. If you want to freely play in the moment and let your emotions and imagination guide you, you must first master the material in a way so you no longer have to think about it, but rather simply feel it and play it. It's a process that starts with effective practice on your instrument.

Challenge Yourself to Explore One Idea in Different Ways

Start playing a simple idea and keep expanding upon it until it becomes something new. Do the same thing with that new thing you created; explore it and start building even more amazing phrases. The word "phrase" here is very important. When we speak, we use letters to create words and

words become sentences with which we can then express increasingly complex ideas and effectively communicate those ideas to others. Music works to create this communication in much the same way. It has been said that the nature of jazz is like a free form conversation between the players (and even extends to the audience). Let me share with you some ideas that helped me to develop a musical and creative improvisational facility.

Starting the Phrase at a Different Place

This is something I learned from jazz improvisation. All musicians use this concept. I recommend starting with a simple phrase. We'll use a lick I heard Steve Gadd play years ago. Let's start on the first beat and move the beginning of the phrase to different points along the bar. Check out Ex. 1:

In part two next issue, we'll look at stretching the phrase, putting phrases together, and a few other concepts.