

Basic Brush Maps

Tools To Improve Your Brush Playing

by Jason Edwards

I had been drumming professionally for three years when I was first asked to use brushes on a gig. I was playing old standards like "Take The 'A' Train" at a wedding with a jazz quartet. At that point I knew a few basic swing patterns, but not much more. So when the bandleader called up a bossa nova tune and said, "Play brushes on this one," I was caught off-guard. With my feet to the fire, I did what any drummer would do: I improvised.

Improvising got me through that gig, but I knew I needed to develop better brush skills in order to get hired again. I began working through books, listening to recordings, attending lessons and clinics, and practicing for many hours to get a handle on the essential techniques. What follows is a breakdown of some of the best resources I've used to improve my brush playing.

Put In The Time

In order to improve, you must make brush playing a regular part of your practice routine. Practice individually, with a bass player, or with several other musicians. When you're playing with others, run through different styles at various tempos. Try trading two-, four-, eight-, and twelve-bar solos, or take a few solo choruses. Record your sessions so you can see and hear what needs more practice.

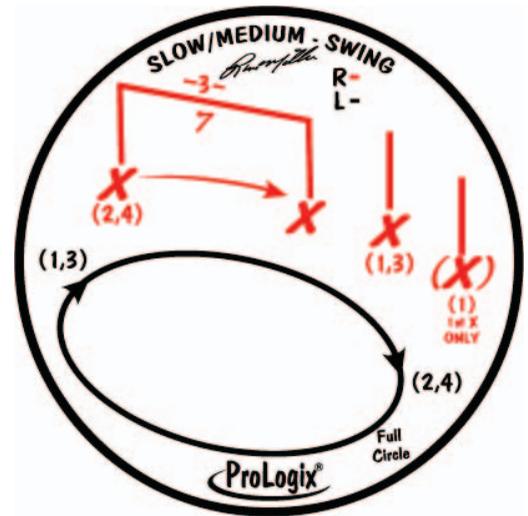
One of the best ways to practice by yourself is to play along with classic brush recordings or play-along CDs, such as *Turn It Up & Lay It Down, Volume 4*. To keep your focus on improving your brush skills, set up a dedicated brush area in your practice space. This could be something as simple as a snare drum and a pair of brushes. Or you could pick up something like the ProLogix Signature Brush Maps. These maps are the size of a snare drum head, and they have brush patterns printed right on them.

Some Brush Maps

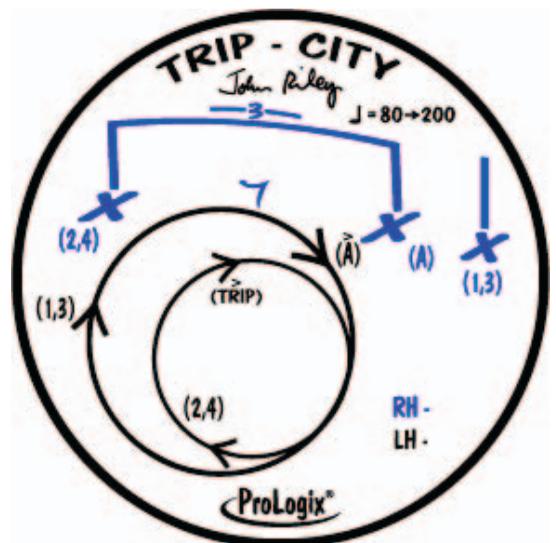
The following brush-map lessons come from three contemporary brush masters. LA session great Russ Miller's pattern is perfect for slow and medium-tempo swing feels, while NYC jazz great John Riley's map adds an extra texture in the left hand. Our last brush map is a fun samba pattern from big band specialist Steve Fidyk.

Our first groove, Russ Miller's "Slow/Medium Swing," represents one of the most common brush beats. The left hand plays legato half notes from the ten o'clock to the four o'clock positions on the drumhead. The movement should be oval, not circular. The motion also gets smaller as the tempo increases. Try to get as much of the

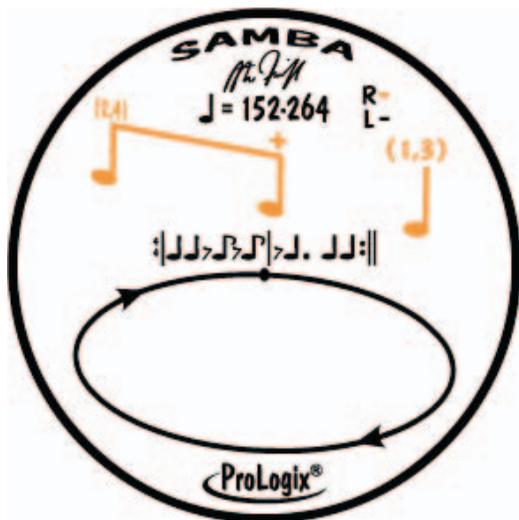
brush surface on the head as you can, to give you a bigger sound. The right hand plays a basic swing pattern between the eleven o'clock and two o'clock positions. The slower the tempo, the more legato the quarter notes should be. Again, try to make a circular movement throughout this pattern; it swings harder. This pattern works great between 70 and 120 bpm.



Once you have that groove down, try John Riley's "Trip City," for a more advanced feel. In this pattern, the left hand adds an accent on the "ah" of beats 2 and 4 beneath the right-hand swing pattern. You can play this pattern for an entire song, during a section of a song, or as a variation/fill within a more basic feel. All of the action is towards the center of the drum, so be careful not to rush the larger left-hand circles.



Our final brush map is a samba beat from Steve Fidyk that features a common Brazilian rhythm in the left hand. As you sweep the left-hand brush, your fingers should close into the palm to bring out the notes in the two-measure pattern. The dot at the top of the left-hand diagram is the point where the brush crosses the head as it accents the samba rhythm.



Do Some Research

There are a lot of great resources on brush playing, from instructional books and magazine articles to DVDs, CDs, and drumming Web sites. So start building up a brush-playing library. One particularly good resource is the *Modern Drummer Digital Archive*, which allows you to search through every article printed in the magazine between 1977 and 2002.

It's also important to study recordings, books, and videos featuring brush masters so you can gain a sense of where the techniques originated. Two highly recommended drummers to check out are Philly Joe Jones and Ed Thigpen. Their brush playing helped define the art form. Each of them, as well as other jazz legends, had his own techniques, which helped produce their unique identities.

The Internet is full of great information. Simply type in keywords like "jazz brushes" or "brush playing" to get a sense of what's out there. Or set up a YouTube account so that you can search and save videos. You can also use MySpace to check out other drummers who play brushes. And register with an online drum forum. Almost every drum company has one, and forums are a great place to post questions. Plus you'll often find professional drummers offering advice on these forums.

Take Some Lessons

One of the best ways to develop your drumming skills is to take some lessons from a professional teacher. Visit your local drum shop or music college to find out who's available. You might discover that one of your favorite drummers offers one-on-one instruction. When you find someone you'd like to study with, send him or her an email to see if you can set up a lesson time.

You should also go to as many live performances as you can. Nothing is more instructive than listening, watching, and feeling music in person. Brushes are a visual instrument, and no two drummers play them exactly the same way.

Jason Edwards is the owner of ProLogix Percussion. For more information visit www.prologixpercussion.com.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

Here are various brush resources for you to check out.



Books/DVDs/Videos

Brushworks (book and DVD) and *The Living Art Of Brushes* (VHS) by Clayton Cameron

Mastering The Art Of Brushes by Jon Hazilla (book)

The Art Of Bop Drumming by John Riley (book)

The Sound Of Brushes (book) and *The Essence Of Brushes* (DVD) by Ed Thigpen

Different Brush Beats by Phil Zamino

The Art Of Playing With Brushes (DVD)

Recordings

Ballads:

"Infant Eyes" from Wayne Shorter's *Speak No Evil* (Elvin Jones)
Wolfgang Muthspiel, Marc Johnson, and Brian Blade's album *Real Book Stories* (Brian Blade)

Medium Swing:

"What Can I Say (After I Say I'm Sorry)?" from the Red Garland Trio's *Groovy* (Arthur Taylor)

"Eternal Triangle" from Jon Hazilla and Sazabone's *Form And Function* (Jon Hazilla)

Up Tempo:

"Have You Met Miss Jones?" from McCoy Tyner's *Reaching Forth* (Roy Haynes)

"Apple Honey" from the Jeff Hamilton Trio's *Live!* (Jeff Hamilton)

Brush Masters

Ed Thigpen, Philly Joe Jones, Papa Jo Jones, Buddy Rich, Gene Krupa, Louie Bellson, Jimmy Cobb, Jack DeJohnette, Shelly Manne, Mel Lewis, Clayton Cameron, John Riley, Steve Fidyk, Ed Soph, Steve Gadd, Russ Miller, Steve Smith, Peter Erskine, Joey Baron, Bill Stewart, Joe Morello, Matt Wilson, Adam Nussbaum, Billy Ward, Carl Allen, Ferenc Nemeth, Jeff Ballard, Brian Blade, Ari Hoenig, Jeff Hamilton, Jon Hazilla, Jorge Rossy, and many more.

