

Groove...*the Elusive Butterfly*

by Dick DiCenso



What is this elusive butterfly that we refer to as groove, pocket, meter, rhythm or time? For me time is a *force* which, like a gust of wind, can't be seen yet can be felt. If you have found yourself tapping your feet, feeling goose bumps, smiling or wanting to get up and boogie while performing or listening to music, you have felt the force. Perhaps you have wondered what's involved in creating that force that we call the "groove".

Because of the vast, complex nature of this subject, this article is not intended to be a complete, all-inclusive explanation. Instead, I will focus on creating a groove in the swing/jazz idiom; the basic principles can be applied to creating a groove in any style of music. I will also share some concepts and basic principles that I have found effective.

Internalizing What We Play

To internalize what we play, we must understand that what we play has to first get processed through the brain/mind, which I refer to as the 'computer'. Furthermore, our eyes and ears are the 'windows' through which our computer receives information. What we play is a direct result of what information is processed and how accurately our computer processes it. Finally, I have found that it is imperative to **say out loud what we play** because it profoundly enhances the connection between mind and body...connecting **what you want to play** with physical execution. Think of your mouth/voice as the 'amplifier' that provides an audible element that helps to process the information we're receiving. In other words, when we count, say or sing what we play, especially something that is new, we not only make it easier to learn and execute but we enhance the whole process of internalizing what we play and how we play it.

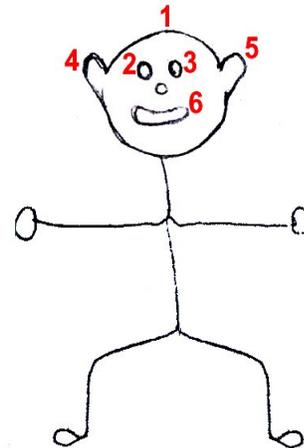
Mister Groove

Mister Groove knows he stands a much better chance of success **if** his computer (brain/mind) is turned on, the shades are up on his windows (eyes/ears), and the volume on his amplifier (mouth/voice) is turned up. What he plays with his hands and feet is a direct result of what and how his computer receives and processes the information involved.

Computer (brain/mind), #1

Windows (eyes & ears), #2,3,4,5

Amplifier (mouth/voice), #6



Mister Groove

Collaborative Effort

To create a groove in any style of music takes a whole lot more than playing the correct notes in time. There are, at the very least, musical, mental, physical and emotional aspects that influence the groove. Moreover, while it may well be the drummer's primary responsibility to keep good time, it is also the responsibility of every good musician to perform with good time as well as to listen and react accordingly. Ultimately, creating a groove is a collaborative effort.

Pulse, Space, Subdivision

When keeping good time, the pulse is either played or implied and is subdivided accordingly in order to maintain a steady, even rhythm. An obvious example of subdivision in our every day life is a wrist watch or clock. The second hand subdivides each minute into sixty seconds and each hour into 3600 seconds. If one second is off, the entire hour is off. The drummer's internal clock

rhythmic patterns and *stick definition*. By overtones, I mean the accompanying sound that the cymbal produces when the stick makes contact. The overtones, which I call the cymbal “drone” sound, provide the force, or gust of wind, that give the rhythm its spirit, its vitality. By Rhythmic patterns I mean the way we alter the basic cymbal rhythm and the way we accent certain notes. Rhythmic patterns give direction, shape and feel to the force. By stick definition I mean being able to hear the stick sound as it contacts the cymbal. Stick definition, in turn, greatly enhances the force, shape and sound. It is determined by where and how the cymbal is played. The desired area is approximately mid-way between the bell and the edge of the cymbal. Playing too close to the edge produces too many overtones; too close to the bell, too few. When the overtones, rhythmic patterns, and stick definition blend in a compatible way, a good cymbal “drone” sound is created.

Moeller Technique

Moeller Technique applied to the cymbal “drone” sound enables the drummer to create a full, consistent, relaxed cymbal “drone” pattern. This is accomplished by playing what I call a “three step dance” with the tip of the stick.

This “three step dance” is accomplished by playing the right stick in three different positions on the ride cymbal, producing three different sounds. Because of the nature of Moeller Technique and the motion of the “three step dance”, we can play more and work less. (See **Examples #3 & 4**)

The Down Stroke (∇) gives the stick energy/momentum to play both the tap (○) and the Up Stroke (△). This approach is similar to a downward push of the basketball and two controlled dribbles. When playing **Examples #3 & 4**, apply the following:

- On beats 1 and 3 your right arm moves the stick to the right away from your body as you play an Up Stroke (△). This is the 3rd position of the “three step dance”.
- On beats 2 and 4 your right arm moves the stick to the left toward your body as you play a Down Stroke (∇). This is the 1st position of the “three step dance”.
- On the upbeat of beats 2 and 4 you play a tap (○) between beats 2 and 3 as well as between beats 4 and 1. This is the second position of the “three step dance”.

By consistently playing the same three places on the ride cymbal and using Moeller Technique, the stick does a “three step dance” (∇○△), producing a full, relaxed, consistent cymbal “drone” sound. Refer to **Examples #3 & 4**.

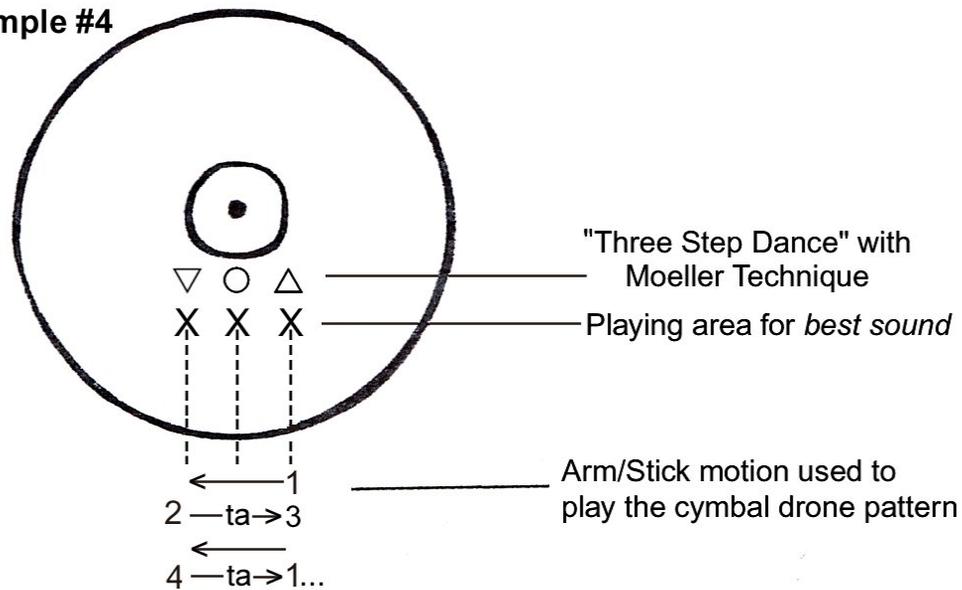
Moeller Technique Applied To the Cymbal Drone Pattern

Example #3

Count	1	2 ta 3	4 ta 1	2 ta 3	4 ta
RH Cymbal Rhythm...	: 4/4 x	x ⁻³⁻ x x	x ⁻³⁻ x x	x ⁻³⁻ x x	x ⁻³⁻ x :
Moeller Technique	△	∇ ○ △	∇ ○ △	∇ ○ △	∇ ○
Three stick positions of the <i>Three Step Dance</i> }	→ ce	← → → 1 2 3 dance	← → → 1 2 3 dance	← → → 1 2 3 dance	← → 1 2 dan -

The physical motion of this “three step dance” using Moeller Technique is determined by the tempo. The slower the tempo, the larger the motion; the faster the tempo, the smaller the motion.

Example #4



When playing swing/jazz, the basic ride cymbal rhythm is the force, or the propeller, that lifts and moves the groove. From a drummer's perspective, the swing/jazz beat walks straight ahead and is built from the top down (cymbal and hi-hat). Consequently, the cymbal is the main component that affects the feel of the swing/jazz groove. When the quarter note pulse is executed with a consistent, even feel, the forward walking motion is created.

The swing/jazz beat can be written with triplet notation (**Example #5**). It can also be written with eighth note notation (**Example #6**). Even though the notations are different, they are played exactly the same way when playing swing/jazz. Unless otherwise indicated, eighth notes (♪♪) are swung and played as the first and third partials of a triplet ($\text{♪}^{\frac{3}{7}}$).

Example #5

Example #6

$\text{♪♪} = \text{♪}^{\frac{3}{7}}$

Count.....	1	2	TA	3	4	TA	1	2	TA	3	4	TA
Moeller Tech..	△	▽	○	△	▽	○	△	▽	○	△	▽	○
RH cymbal	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
LH snare sticking:		T	R	R	T	R		T	R	R	T	R
RF bass dr.	●	●		●	●		●	●		●	●	
LF hi-hat	X	X		X	X		X	X		X	X	

Practice Tips for Examples #5 or 6

A. Work with and without a metronome to help internalize a steady quarter note pulse while playing the swing/jazz cymbal pattern with the right hand and add the left hand snare drum tap on beats 2 and 4.

B. Add a quarter note pulse with the right foot on the bass drum. The idea is to feather the bass drum so that the pulse is felt but not heard. This approach will avoid interfering with the bass player.

C. Add the hi-hat with the left foot on beats 2 and 4. A heel-to-toe motion can be used to help create an even quarter note feel. The heel opens the hi-hat on beats 1 and 3 and the toe closes the hi-hat on beats 2 and 4.

D. The decision whether or not to use the bass drum to keep time depends on the music. Practice **Examples #5 or 6** with and without the bass drum.

Rhythmic Patterns

The following examples show several ways to affect the shape and feel, including the use of Moeller Technique.

Example #7

Count.....	1	2 ta 3	4 ta 1	2	3 ta 4	1 ta 2	3 ta 4	1	2	3	4 ta	
RH Ride Cymbal.....												
Moeller Technique....												
Three stick positions of Three Step Dance }												

- The downstroke(▽) is always played in the 1st position, (close to your body)
- The tap(○) is always in the 2nd position, away from your body
- The upstroke(△) is always in the 3rd position, away from your body

Other Considerations

As stated at the beginning, because of the vast, complex nature of this subject, this article is not intended to be a complete all - inclusive explanation. However, I feel compelled to include the following because they are critical components in creating any groove.

The way you think, listen, sit, breathe, move your arms, hands and sticks as well as *where* and *how* your sticks contact the cymbals and drums greatly affect the sound and the feel you create. Any or all of these elements can, in fact, determine whether or not you swing.

Conclusion

The examples, concepts and suggestions in this article are intended to help develop an approach that will enable you to become one with your instrument and your music. When mind, body and spirit are integrated and you, your instrument and the music become one, you can better create a groove that swings.

While we cannot see the wind/force, we can feel it. While we cannot see the elusive butterfly we call groove/pocket, we can feel it. Good luck with your efforts to feel the magic and the joy of feeling that elusive butterfly we refer to as the groove that swings.