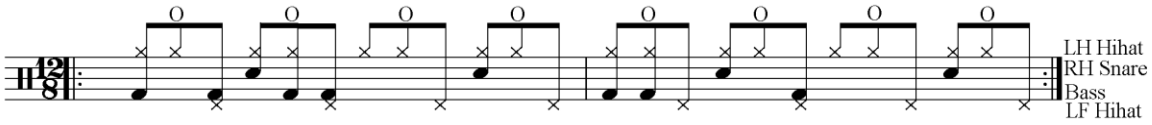
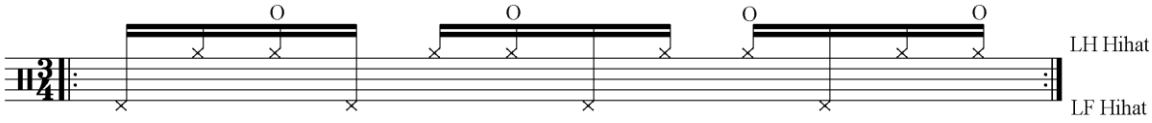
“The 3-Note Hihat Challenge”

By Bryan Valeriani

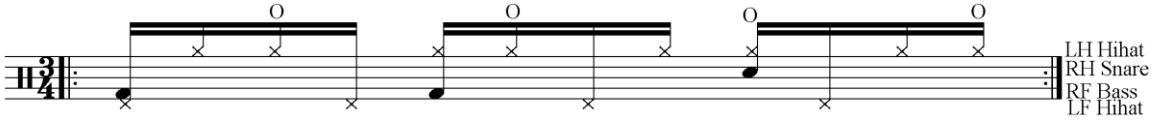
The original inspiration for this technical challenge comes from Canadian drummer Magella Cormier. Danny Cary and Virgil Donati have also used this concept to great effect. Here is a groove that Magella played on bassist Alain Caron’s tune “S.E.C”. Notice the unique three-note hihat pattern…



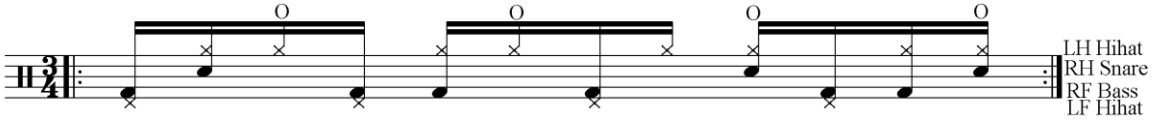
Once this groove becomes comfortable, convert the hihat pattern to 16th notes. The first 16th is a stepped left foot hihat note and the left hand plays the next two notes (open handed). Play it in ¾ time to begin. This pattern forms the foundation of this technical challenge so be sure to become very comfortable with it before moving on.



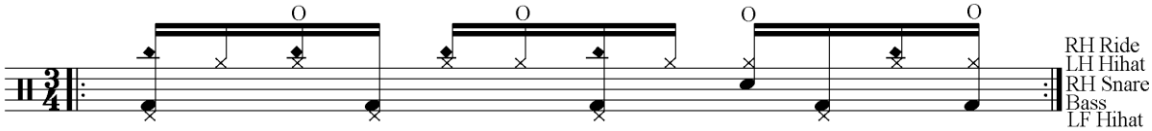
Next, add some snare and bass notes to create some simple grooves…



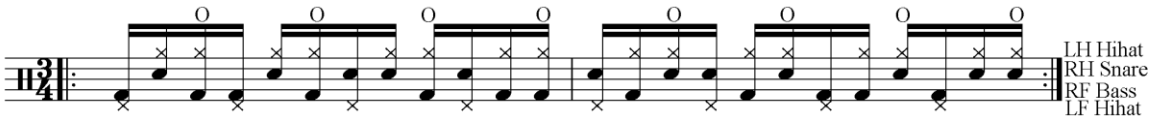
Add more bass and snare notes as your comfort level increases…



The following example uses a “layered” approach as the RH now plays both the ride and snare parts…

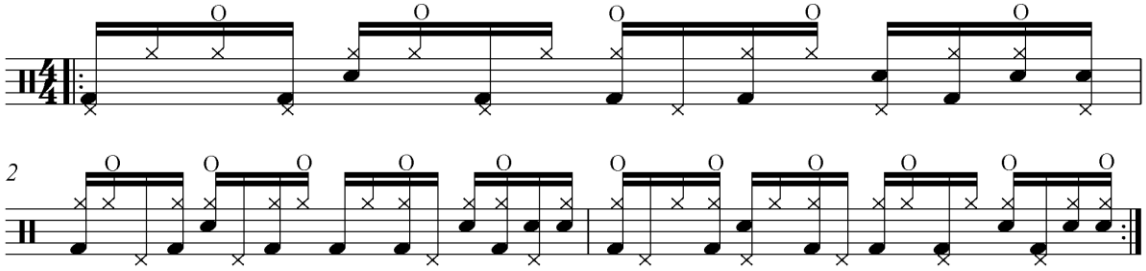


A good way to build your facility with this system is to play various sticking patterns between the RF and RH such as the single paradiddle...

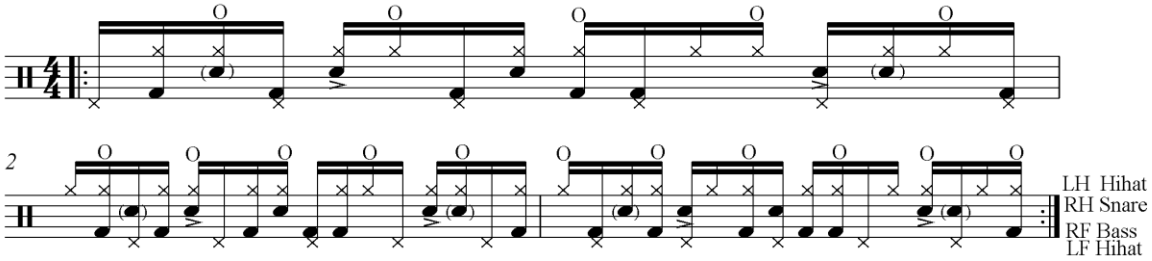


Be sure to try single and doubles between your RH and RF as well as any other combinations you can think of ... get creative with your coordination!

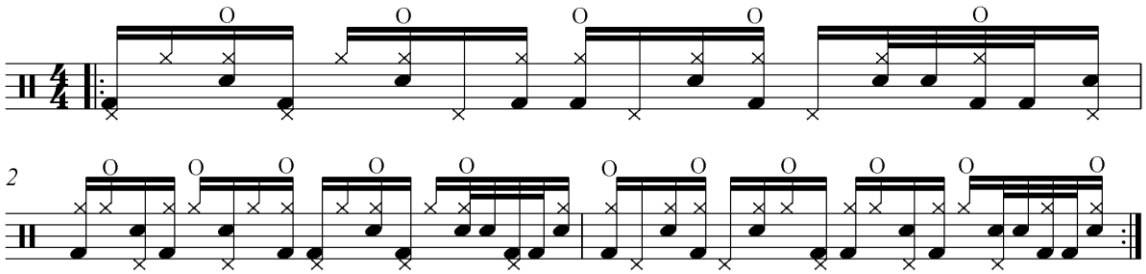
Once these examples feel very easy to orchestrate, begin to apply the hihat pattern to 4/4 time. It will now take three bars for the cycle to repeat. Again, start with simple snare and bass grooves and gradually add more notes as you progress.



Don't forget about dynamics! Use accents, non-accents and ghosted notes on bass and snare...



Lastly, here's a more advanced application of this concept in a "drum & bass" style. (Practice the double stroked 32nds between RH and RF first before attempting to do this one!)



Once these exercises feel comfortable be sure to experiment! This is a vital step to making this concept become a part of your drumming vocabulary. Some possibilities could include: playing it in 7/8, playing it with a samba groove, moving your left foot to different pedals, moving your left hand to other left side instruments, or simply applying it as 16ths to your favorite James Brown bass and snare patterns. Challenge yourself to step out of your coordination comfort zone!

When your body feels completely at ease with the mechanics of this challenge concentrate on using your acquired coordination musically… never let it *sound* like a technical exercise! Also, resist the urge to use it as a simple display of athletic prowess! Practice slowly and with patience so that your body/mind can thoroughly absorb the coordination involved. Your efforts will be rewarded with an improved sense of independence/ interdependence, greater rhythmic awareness and ultimately some unique sounding grooves. Now go practice!

***Bryan Valeriani** is a professional drummer and drum instructor based near Ottawa, Ontario Canada. He endorses SONOR drums and is a member of the Vic Firth Private Teacher program. Visit his website:*
www.drumhead.ca