

Magic Touch

BY ALBE BONACCI

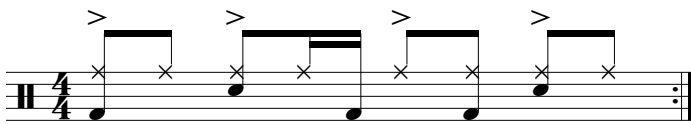
A word I've been hearing for some time to describe a drummer's technique is "touch," as in "nice touch." Another word is "feel." "Nice touch" and "good feel" are two descriptions I love hearing about my playing, even more than praise for a big fill or some razzle-dazzle lick. Touch and feel are what I focus on when playing and practicing. However, I think "touch" could include fill and lick ideas in a "tasty" way (another great word).

To me, the word "touch" means more than nice technique or smooth flow. I believe it means that a drummer has a comfortable and confident approach to his or her instrument including posture, stick position, and dynamics. Dynamics are essential to good touch—not only dynamics or volume within the beat itself, but dynamics as they pertain to the music, the room, the style you're playing, and the way you blend with other musicians and singers. Touch is that indescribable thing you hear or see when watching musicians do something that is completely instinctual. They not only make it look easy, they make it look like fun. That's what puts a big smile on your face when you see or hear it.

I have heard people say you can't teach feel, but there are certain things you can do to improve your grooves. When I'm teaching, I'll have a student play a simple beat and then I'll play it. The student will usually ask, "Why does it sound so much better when you do it?" Obviously, since I've been playing for a while, experience is a factor in touch along with your dedication to practice and listening to music.

Let's take a look at a simple beat and see if we can improve the "touch" on it.

Example 1



This is a simple eighth-note groove with a sixteenth note on the "a" of beat 2. Right off the bat I'll give 2 and 4 a rimshot: half drumhead, half rim. This really sets the volume tone for the rest of the notes. Now, let's give a push to each main beat on the hi-hat, the 1, 2, 3, and 4. Keep the "ands" down in volume. That will groove harder.

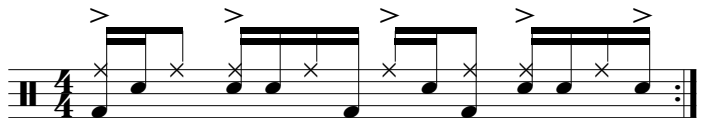
Now let's take it a step further with more sixteenth notes on the snare, keeping them low in volume. Sing, count, or "drum speak" sixteenths.

Example 2



Notice the accented snare on the "a" of 4.

Example 3



Example 4



The hi-hat can also ghost in beat 3. Keep the "and a" down in volume.

Example 5

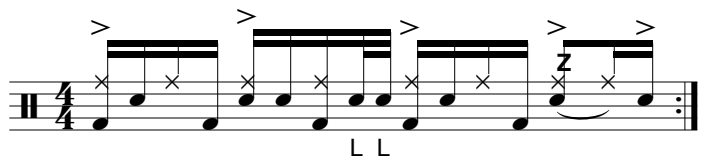


Example 6

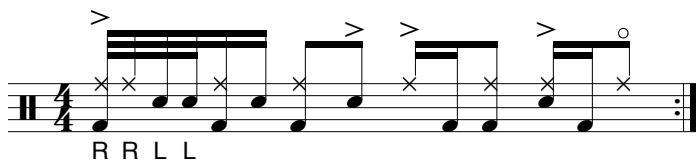


So far we have used the same kick pattern. The next two are a little "Gadd-ish."

Example 7



Example 8



The goal is not just to add notes or make it fancier. With these additions we hope to develop a better groove, as the additional notes give us more opportunities to enhance the dynamic levels. For instance, if you are playing a show, using Example 4, people closer to the stage may hear all the small ghost notes, and that's great. Someone at the back of the room may not, but that person will hear a very locked and grooving Example 1 because of the sixteenth-note flow. If the sixteenths were all the same volume, however, it would sound like a locomotive. Touch is tough to describe, but you know it when you hear it and see it. I know nothing about golf and have never golfed, but when I see Tiger Woods drive a ball down the fairway I can't help but say, "Nice touch."

Albe Bonacci is a full-time studio and performing drummer and clinician in Los Angeles. He studied orchestral snare drumming

and multi-percussion at the University of Utah, and is a graduate of Percussion Institute of Technology (PIT) in Los Angeles and The Drummer's Collective in New York. He is currently touring with ethereal pop-Christian artist Michelle Tumes. PN

AVAILABLE ON DVD!

Historic Drummer's Heritage Concert Celebrating the power, pride and glory of field drumming

Filed at PASIC 2002, this 2-hour DVD features some of the most accomplished field drum artists in the world.

Appearances by: Jim Kilpatrick, Marty Hurley, Alfons Grieder, Jeff Queen, John Pratt, Nick Attanasio, Americlique, Bethune-Cookman College Marching Wildcats Drum Line, Canadian Associates Drumming Rudimental Excellence (CADRE), Camp Chase Fifes and Drums, Colonial Williamsburg Fifes and Drums, Oak Village Marching Percussion Ensemble, University of North Texas Drumline.

Also includes an exciting mass ensemble finale with NEXUS, and a special interview with Artistic Director Robin Engleman.

Cost: \$30 Supplies are limited

Order online: www.pas.org/shop Or call: 317-974-4488

Why settle for a djembe, Tubano, bongo, conga or doumbek? Why not have them all?

Modular Drum With Ergo-Drum System

Using the various Modulator Tubes you can produce authentic fundamental sounds like a Quinto, Conga, Remo® Tubano®, Doumbek, Darbuka, Shime Daiko, Hira Daiko and more. Play it: seated in an stand, between your legs, on a table, on your lap, or even standing with a strap.

Check out a demonstration of the Modular Drum at remo.com