



Inner Drumming

Part 1: How to Listen With All Four Limbs

by George Marsh

Ever since I privately published my book *Inner Drumming* in 1983, I've received hundreds of letters and emails wanting to know exactly what it is and how to obtain a copy. This is the first of a series of articles bringing this very simple and powerful approach to you.

Before we delve into the complexities of what I call Inner Drumming Rudiments, it's important to pay attention to each limb separately. With any style of music, there's always the need to learn certain rhythmic patterns with specific limb combinations. These patterns are part of the accepted styles and are extremely important because they get you through the door so you can play music. They work great as you learn to interact with other musicians and play the music you love. But the potential downside of playing only style-specific patterns is that you can become restricted in your ability to create fresh ideas. The concepts we're going to explore here can help change this by training your reflexes to be free to respond and listen in new ways. The exercises prepare you for spontaneous playing, thinking, and listening.

PERMISSION

It's important to give yourself permission to feel and listen deeply while doing these exercises. Drummers are used to playing fast and getting on with it. Inner Drumming is different, because by working slowly at first you'll gain the immediate benefit of greater relaxation and the long-term benefits of increased control and endurance at all tempos. If you want to achieve speed with control and sensitivity, then you must incorporate internal awareness as an essential part of your sound. This will help you discover new ways to play the music you love.

ONE AT A TIME

Start with one limb, and take your time. Begin with the bass drum. Sitting at your drumset, visualize and feel the energy coming from the center of the earth through your lower belly to the leg, ankle, and foot. Notice how the muscles work as you make a stroke. Relax your foot and listen to the sound until it dies away. While relaxing, visualize the energy moving back through your foot, ankle, leg, and lower belly to the center of the earth.

This internal visualization, the sound itself, and the relaxation before and afterward form what I call listening—or sounding—with the limbs. You're dealing not just with the sound that's coming from the bass drum but rather with the whole scanning process *plus* the sound. At first this is done very slowly, until you create a natural groove. This slow groove should be played with full attention to the movement of internal energy. As you do this, continue to listen to the

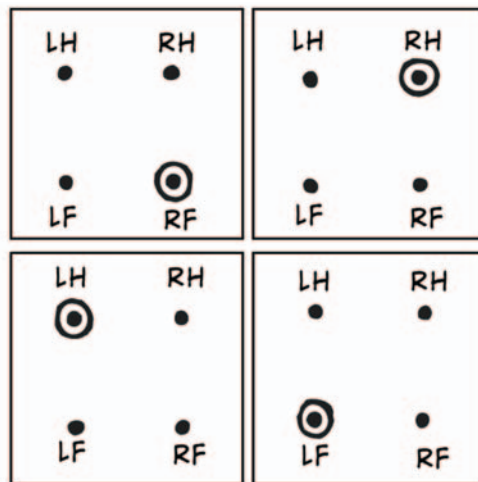
sound coming from the bass drum.

Next, try a slightly faster tempo with the same attention to energy flow. Continue increasing the pace until you reach a tempo that's slightly uncomfortable. Breathe and relax until it feels smooth and effortless again.

Now slow down the tempo and try a favorite rhythm. Continue to feel internally as you play the rhythm. When you think you're ready, bring your attention to another limb, and repeat the entire process. Continue until you've explored all four limbs individually.

ENERGY FLOW CHARTS

I've been using a simple system in which four dots represent the right foot, right hand, left hand, and left foot. The circled dot indicates the starting point for each particular exercise. The diagrams below show the previous exercises of sounding with each limb separately.



TWO-LIMB COMBINATIONS: ALTERNATES

After working with each individual limb, try combinations of two. There are two ways of sounding with two limbs: alternates and unisons. We'll start with alternates using the right foot and the right hand. Begin by making a single sound with the bass drum, and slowly visualize the energy moving through the body to your right hand. Now make a sound with your right hand. Relax your hand and visualize the energy moving down through the body to the bass drum. Continue sounding back and forth between these two limbs.

As with the single-limb studies, let a slow, steady groove appear. Stay there for a minute or two, and then play slightly faster. Let each new tempo settle into a groove and become internalized. Continue this way until the process starts to get uncomfortable. When this happens, breathe and focus on the muscles until things smooth out. At some point you may

start to lose touch with the flow from right foot to right hand. If this happens, gradually slow things down until you return to a relaxed tempo that allows for full awareness.

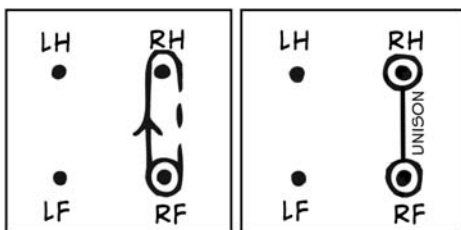
As with the single-limb studies, plug in rhythms that travel back and forth between the two limbs.

TWO-LIMB COMBINATIONS: UNISONS

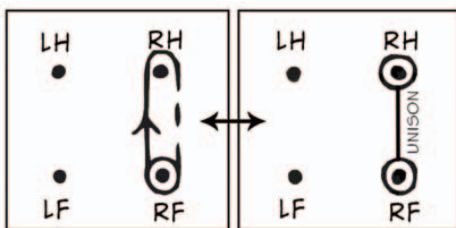
Next, work with the right foot and right hand to play unisons. Bring your awareness from the center of your belly to both limbs simultaneously, and make a stroke. Continue sounding this way until you're playing unisons with a minimum amount of flammings. Like before, let a slow tempo appear, and stick with it until it's internalized. Then pick a slightly faster tempo, and work with it in a similar way.

TWO-LIMB DIAGRAMS

In the diagrams below, the circled dot represents the starting point for the right-foot/right-hand combination (RF-RH). In the first box, the solid line represents scanning from the right foot to the right hand. The dashed line represents scanning from the right hand to the right foot. (The reason for the dashed line will become apparent later, when we work on more complex patterns.) The box with the two circled dots represents the right-foot/right-hand combination played in unison.

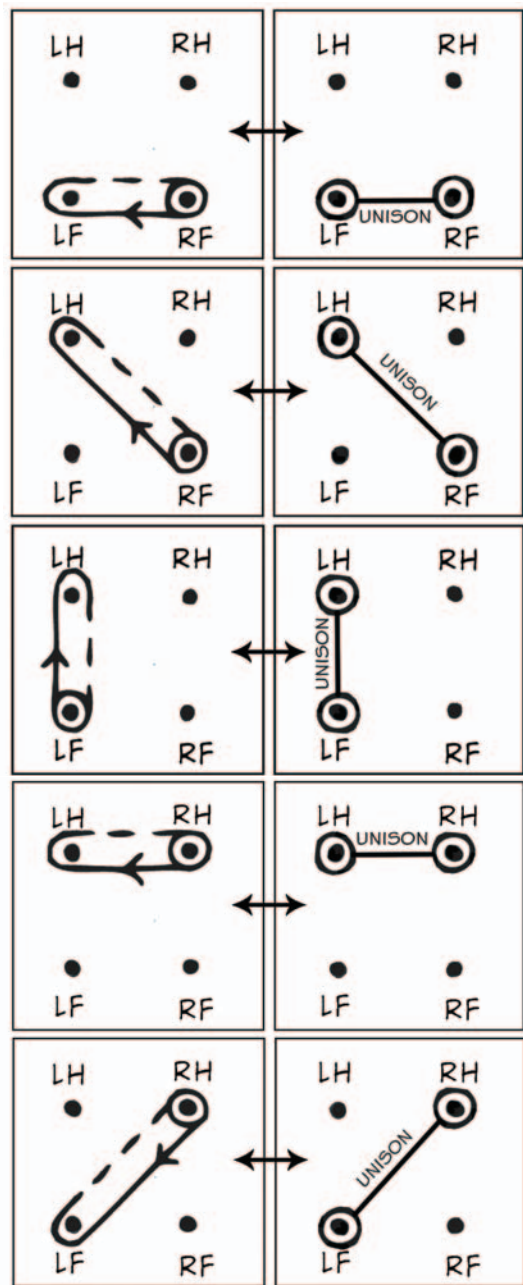


There are six different two-limb combinations, each containing an alternating and unison approach. When you play each combination, practice the alternating one first, followed by the unison. Give yourself permission to work slowly, to enhance the awareness of sound and feeling. This helps you develop elasticity and relaxed control. Your internal groove, the physical movement, and the sound will all become one. It may take several days to work through all of the combinations, but there's no hurry. Here's the first one. (The remaining five are to the right.)



TRY EASY

For years I've wanted to play controlled, fast single-stroke rolls between my bass drum and my right hand on the floor tom. Although there are many drummers who can do this fluently, there are also many who cannot—and I was one of



them. So about a year ago I homed in on listening and sounding with each individual limb. After working on that for a couple of days, I started to work on alternating between the bass drum and the right hand on the floor tom. I made sure I approached this very slowly, and I increased the speed gradually as my comfort level rose. The end result: I could do it! Maybe this isn't too big of a deal for some drummers, but it was very important to me because it opened up an area of my drumming that had been dormant...and it was easy.

George Marsh is a San Francisco-based jazz drummer/composer currently playing with the David Grisman Sextet. He's recorded with John Abercrombie, Terry Riley, Jerry Garcia, Pauline Oliveros, Denny Zeitlin, Maria Muldaur, and others. Marsh has taught at the University of California at Santa Cruz and at Sonoma State University since 1982, and he maintains a private studio in Santa Rosa, California. For more info, visit marshdrum.com.

