

Transcribing can improve your reading, dictation skills, and help stimulate creativity

In order to evolve as musicians, it is essential to digest concepts and techniques of the great drummers. Transcribing and analyzing, listening to recordings and practicing transcriptions can help increase your understanding of a particular player's style in greater depth. For example, when listening to a piece of music for the first time, you might extract one lick or groove from it with the human ear. Through repetitive listening, you may extract two or three. By transcribing the piece in its entirety, you can begin to juxtapose any phrase on the page. By drawing on influences and assimilating this information, you will begin to realize how and why these ideas are played.

Let us compare this concept of learning from transcriptions to that of an archeologist who studies material evidence of human life in past ages. An archeologist who has found the skeletal remains of a person from three hundred years ago can only learn so much about that person's life and culture. If the archeologist found the body with its skin in tact, he would have more information about that person to study and research. He would have even more information if of course the person was alive to talk to and learn from. This analogy makes sense when compared to studying transcriptions. A transcription alone represents 25% of the puzzle. It is a document for us to practice and digest at our own pace. A transcription with recording represents 50% (Aural Aid). A transcription, recording, and video represent 75% (Aural and visual aid). Experiencing the player in a live situation is the best source for information stimulation.

On the following page there are three four measure solo examples rooted in the bebop tradition. Immediately following these examples, I included various solo applications to apply each four measure phrase.

Ex 2 Juxtaposed



Shifting the departure points on each example makes the four measure phrase sound and feel completely different. Each example has a total of sixteen departure points to choose from: four beats in each measure X four measure's sixteen beats. This "circular fours" approach will allow you to come up with new solo phrases based on the original example, sixteen possibilities in all! Now try playing example two starting on beat one of measure three and then beat one of measure four. Next, try incorporating the hi hat from above.

The next tier is to combine examples: Example one, measures one and two, with example three, measures three and four.



Finally, you can expand each note value within the four measure phrase. For example, written quarter notes would become half notes, eighth notes would become quarter notes and eighth note triplets would become quarter note triplets. By expanding each note value, the four measure phrase now becomes an eight measure phrase.

Ex 3 Expanded



In addition to expanding the phrase, you can also compress the phrase. For example, written quarter notes would become eighth notes, eighth notes would become sixteenth notes, and eighth note triplets would become sixteenth note triplets. By compressing each note value, the four measure phrase now becomes a two measure phrase.

Ex 1 Compressed



The combination possibilities are endless! Mix it up and have fun. Try devoting a portion of your practice time to transcribing and playing those transcriptions with the recordings. Do not limit your listening or transcribing to one style of music. The more musical experiences you have to draw from, the more you will be called upon to play. Try combining transcriptions from different idioms to come up with a completely unique style, your own! To approach transcribing from this angle serves as a tool to develop a better time feel and a sense of that drummer's phrasing. It can also improve your reading, dictation skills, and help stimulate creativity. In essence, you are using that particular drummer's ideas (based on transcription with its modifications), to orchestrate your style.