

Core Arts Drum lesson #9

Drum machines and drumming.

Hi drummers and potential drummers. I hope you are keeping well. I was thinking about what to write and decided to write about machines – drum machines – digital rhythm programming. Where you can ‘make a beat’ with a drum machine or using a programme such as logic or Garageband. If you have done this you will have your own way of doing it, this is how I do it.

- I usually set the **tempo** first. I know roughly **what speed** I want to make the beat, even if I don’t know exactly how the rhythm will go yet.
- I will know what **time signature (how many beats to the bar)** I want it to be. Probably in 4/4 or 6/8 (four or six beats to the bar). But it could be in 5/4, or 12/8 (five or 12 beats to the bar).
- **Drum sounds.** In the drum machine or software you will have options of different sounds and kinds of drum kit. Choose something you like but don’t get bogged down in it, you can always change the kit sound later or tweak the sounds as you go along (more on this later).

Anyway. **To the beat!**

- I will usually start with the **bass drum pattern**, finding a simple pattern that is one bar long, or maybe two. I like off- beats, but I find that often **less is more** with bass drum. Two finely placed bass drum beats in a bar, just in the right place, can be very effective.
- Let’s do the **hi-hats pattern** next. This can be simple, constant, quite rapid, or more sparse, chilled out or whatever kind of feel you think will go with the bass drum pattern. **Don’t forget you can always change/adjust things as you go along.**
- Next, the **snare drum pattern**. Again, this can be very simple on the two and four of the bar and be very effective. But don’t be afraid to put the snare drum beats in different places, try off beats. Experiment, how does it interact with the bass drum? **(This is important)**

These are the three main elements of a beat – though of course you can use whatever sounds you like, for the purpose of this I’m talking about the bass drum, hi-hat and snare combination, the foundation of the physical drum kit.

Because... drum machines and programmed drum rhythms (or beats) have influenced drum kit players a lot in the last 40 years or so.

There was a time before drum machines, and when they were invented and made available for professional musicians and the music instrument buying public, many drummers feared for their jobs. Machines are going to replace us! They cried (or muttered). Well, that hasn’t really happened. Though it is true that there are many live shows you can go to where the drums are provided by a machine, and many records which use digitally programmed drums or drum loops and samples, **people need live drums.** A gig with a good drummer just brings a different, human, physical and emotional energy to the music. And it’s great to watch, often. As are other musicians, of course.

Many drummers now use pads to trigger electronic sounds as part of their set up for gigs and recording, in conjunction with their acoustic drum kit.

Also, the way some drummers play is directly and consciously influenced by the different rhythms that producers were able to make using drum machines/computers.

In hip-hop, **J Dilla** (James Dewitt Yancey) produced his beats using an Akai MPC in such a way that rhythms like that had never been heard before. The way the the hi-hat, bass drum and snare sounds interacted was very fluid, changing but coming back, kind of woozy feeling and VERY FUNKY. Some drummers now have integrated this feel into their playing. Chris 'Daddy' Dave is probably the most well and a completely amazing drummer. Check him out!

Drummers are influenced by House Music, Jamaican dancehall, drum n bass and all kinds of electronic – based music. Sometimes, being able to play in a relentless, machine-like way, can be a good thing for a drummer. **Sometimes.**

I think it is good for drummers to programme beats, to create rhythms with a drum machine or software. I think it can influence your drum kit playing in a good and creative way. Take what you want from it.

Drum machines haven't taken over from human drummers, and I hope they never do. I think people will always want to drum. I know I will.

Keep drumming and make beats, not war!

Peace. Paul.