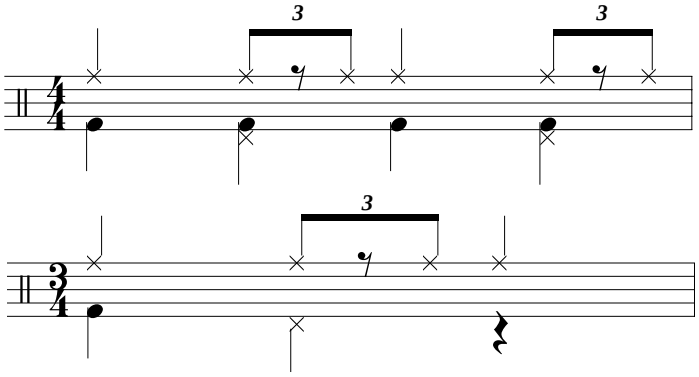
Swing Independence and the "Bouncing Ball" Exercise

BY JON BELCHER

These exercises were inspired by the late Shelly Manne. He could create the illusion of a ball being dropped on the snare without interrupting the jazz time feel. Our goal is a fluid technique that allows us to create rhythmic illusions which can float across barlines and to provide more expressive comping behind a soloist.

For the sake of clarity, the exercises do not show the hi-hat and bass drum in the notation. Refer to the patterns below to see what the feet are doing in the two different time signatures used in the Exercises.



To successfully create the bouncing-ball illusion in Exercise 1, do not swing the eighth notes. Play the snare line with a literal interpretation of the note values. Do swing everything else. In addition, play gradually softer (decrescendo) with the left hand (snare).

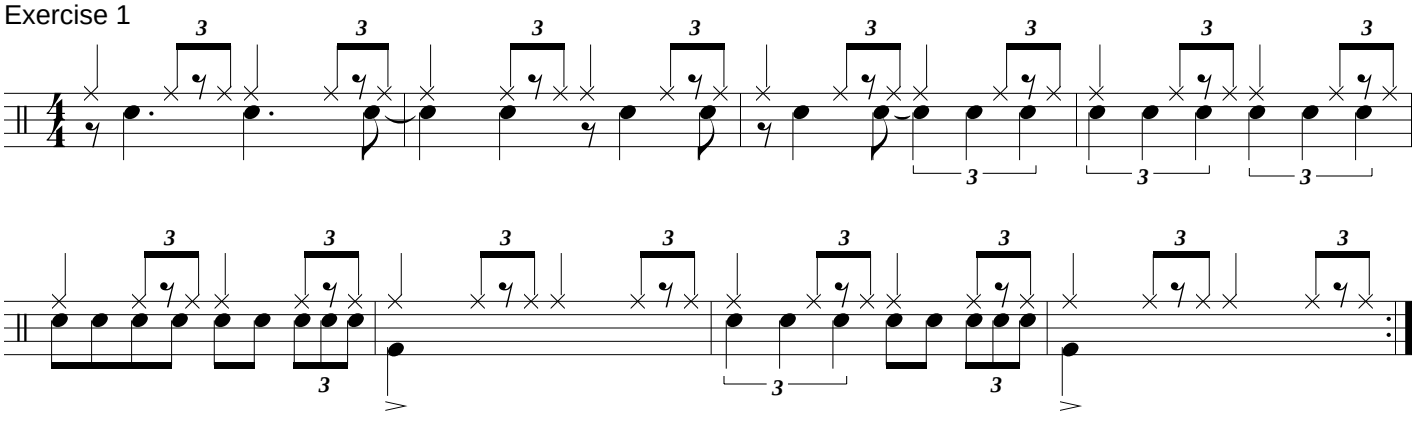
Next, using the 3/4 bass drum/hi-hat pattern as a foundation, play Exercise 2. Both exercises will work best at a moderate tempo in the quarter note = 160 range, but try them faster and slower. Also, try substituting the bass drum for the snare.

Finally, Exercise 3 looks at two related independence challenges. They are polyrhythmic, and interesting as well because of the 3/4 time. The first two measures contain the 3-against-2 polyrhythm between the snare line and the quarter notes of the pulse. Notice how the snare pattern overlaps the barline.

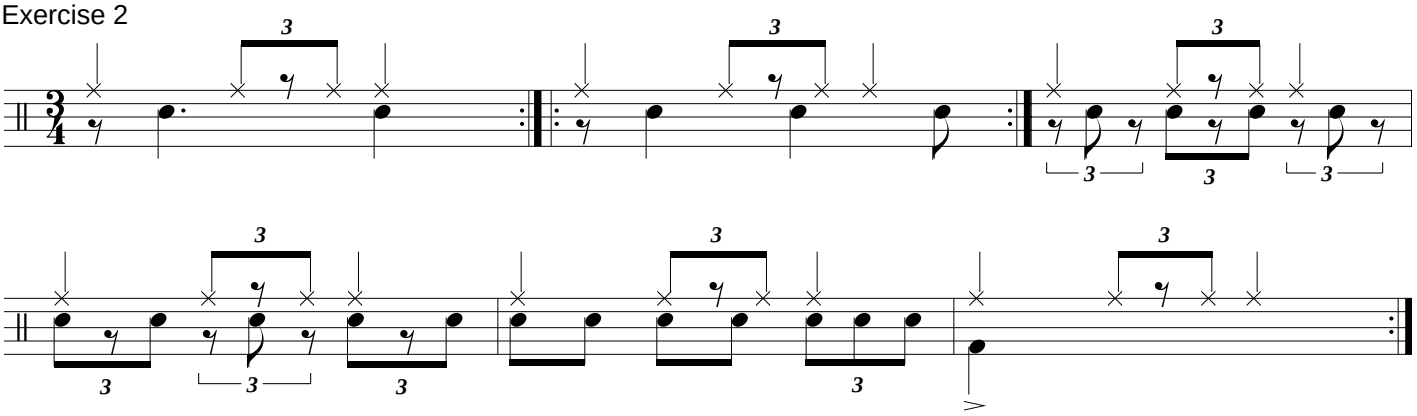
The last measure contains the 4-against 3-polyrhythm between the snare line and the quarter notes of the pulse. To emphasize the polyrhythmic relationships, play the bass drum on all three beats of the measure.

Remember to try all three exercises at different tempos, and try substituting bass drum for snare. I recommend recording your practice sessions to see if you really have created the illusion of a bouncing ball.

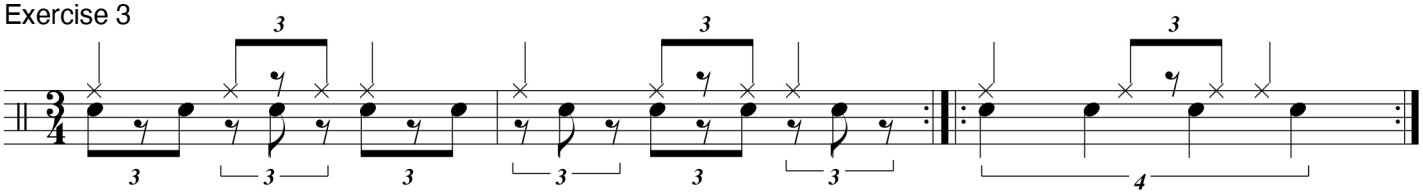
Exercise 1



Exercise 2



Exercise 3



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Jon Belcher is an author, teacher and clinician specializing in drumset. He performs and records with his group Savoy Swing and teaches in the Seattle area. He may be contacted at jbgroove1@juno.com.

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