

**What are the pros and cons of practicing with a metronome? Can a metronome actually make your time worse?**

Very interesting topic! I like this format in MD since it gives us the opportunity to have some open dialogue and present different points of view on issues, and because I think it's good for all drummers and musicians to constantly analyze and examine how and what we practice and play. We grow and develop by questioning and studying closely-held beliefs to see if they hold up under scrutiny or to see if there may be ways to improve them. Examining the use and value of a metronome in developing our time and feel is a perfect topic for this forum, as it invites a range of opinions to make us reflect on what we do and why we do it. The question also reminds me of a famous Roy Hayne's quote "I am not a metronome", that started me really thinking about the subject years ago.

A metronome is just a tool, and like any other, if used correctly can help a drummer in a variety of ways. But it's not magical; turning it on and just playing along with it doesn't mean it's going to improve your time. Playing time that 'feels' and 'sounds' good is not the same thing as playing mathematically and metronomically perfect 8ths, triplets, 16ths, etc. Some band members may think the drummer's only job is to keep everyone playing in time; but playing in time is everyone in the band's shared responsibility, the same as playing in the correct feel and style. When a drummer plays in a deep pocket or swings very hard it helps the music feel better which ultimately helps the overall sense of time throughout the band. I believe one of the best ways to develop good time is to feel and internalize the time, not just hear the time. I suggest that if you're going to practice a lot with a metronome, make sure that you're trying to feel and move to the pulse, and not just hear it. If you keep your limbs relaxed and moving fluidly in time with the pulse or the music, it will help develop your feel and groove, which will improve your time. I also recommend setting the metronome to quarter notes or half notes (depending on the tempo and time signature), so the notes between them (8ths, triplets, 16ths, etc.) can "breathe" a little. In jazz, rock, folk, 2nd line, Cuban and Brazilian music, and even a symphonic/classical music where there is no drummer, the time breathes and the music feels great.

Most (but not all) drummers who practice regularly and have been playing steadily for at least a few years will develop a pretty decent sense of time. If you practice correctly, your time will naturally improve the longer you play. I've heard drummers who can play rudiments and rhythms perfectly matching 16th notes with a metronome all day long, but who have trouble playing with a good feel, in the pocket, swinging, etc. when they sit at a drumset. That's why I strongly encourage my students to practice to music, recordings, loops, play in a band, and listen to, and analyze a lot of music, in order not only to develop a good sense of time, but also their musicality. Remember, many of our musical and drumming heroes never even owned a metronome; they developed good time by practicing and playing with music, listening to music, and learning to play drums musically, which ultimately developed their feel and groove.

Here's something else I've been thinking about: if a drummer uses a metronome

incorrectly, it might not improve his/her time at all. Why? Because, a metronome is an external sound source that's probably not going to be there next to you when you're in rehearsal, on the bandstand, or in concert (unless you're playing with a click track). Becoming overly dependent on something that's only with you in the practice room could slow the development of your natural internal clock, which is critical in having good time. Plus, it certainly isn't going to help you identify song form, or lock in with a bass player, horns, etc. You don't acquire those skills from a metronome, you get those from practicing and playing with, and listening to, music. The more you do that, the more you'll develop as a drummer AND a musician.

So, my point here is balance. Don't get me wrong – a metronome can be a valuable measuring tool to check relative tempos, mark progress, identify correct tempos for playing various literature and musical styles, and even in developing your ability to play with a click or a click track. I encourage my students to balance their use of a metronome with a very large dose of playing to music, and learning to rely on, and develop their internal clock and their own musical time and feel.

Good luck and have fun!