

METRIC ILLUSION: A DIFFERENT VIEW

Let's define Metric Illusion as playing certain rhythms using phrasing, accents, etc. to give the illusion that you are actually playing in a different time signature, tempo, feel, or style. The purpose of this is not to drive the band crazy, or to try and ruin the groove, but to create temporary rhythmic tension. Tension and release are basic components of contemporary American music and improvisation, especially as found in jazz. There are numerous players who have developed this skill and who use it regularly in performance.

Often times, the rhythmic tension is created between players or instruments, for example, drums and bass. But there are also ways to create the tension within your own drumset patterns, between limbs and sounds. That's what I'll demonstrate in this article.

First, some explanation. You can create a Metric Illusion using any 'pivot rhythm' as the basis for the new, or implied, feel or tempo. A 'pivot rhythm' is a note value that is used as the basis for the illusion. In the examples in this article, the quarter note triplet is the pivot rhythm, but it's phrased so that it gives the illusion of sounding like it is actually a quarter note. This may all sound a little confusing, but it's really not; it is a very interesting and unusual rhythmic and musical device, which also helps build a strong sense of independence and control for the drummer.

Here is a series of exercises that develop a metric illusion using quarter note triplets. The illusion is that, in the later exercises, they begin to sound more like quarter notes played in a straight-eighth note groove.

Enough talk - let's do it! Be sure to practice all of these exercises at a slow tempo at first, until you develop control of the independence.

Examples 1a, b, & c stress developing the basic independence that is required.

Examples 1a, 1b, and 1c are drum set exercises. Each example consists of two staves. The top staff shows a quarter note triplet (three eighth notes beamed together) followed by a quarter note, then another quarter note triplet, and so on. The bottom staff shows a steady eighth-note groove. Brackets labeled '3' are placed under the triplet groups in both staves to indicate the 3-beat feel.

Examples 2a & b begin to develop cross-limb independence. Also try other variations of this hand-foot combination.

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In examples 3a & b, you can begin to really hear the effect of phrasing in '2'. This is due to the shift of the high hat. As you practice these exercises, you can start to increase the volume of the illusion (snare, bass, high hat), and decrease the volume of the ride pattern slightly.

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Now it's starting to get interesting! Examples 4a & b have the quarter trips phrased in groups of four. This takes two measures to cycle.

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Alright - we've arrived! Here is the complete pattern - with three high hat variations. These examples group four notes and rests in a way that, when listened to alone, sound like a straight eighth pop/rock groove. But, of course, they're not - that's the illusion! Play the independence a bit louder than the ride pattern, to call more attention to that rhythm. I call this 'selling the illusion'.

5a

5b

5c

Of course, there are many variations to this illusion. In all of the previous examples, we started the quarter-note triplet independence in other parts of the measure, and experiment with different combinations of rhythms. Here's one more:

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Work with this same multi-step process to create your own rhythmic illusions. Remember, you can use any pivot rhythm from your original tempo, and phrase that so as to give the illusion of shifting tempos and feels! Good luck and have fun with this! Feel free to e-mail your questions or comments to me at mdicciani@uarts.edu

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