

Inside “Cissy Strut”... And Beyond

By Todd Bishop

ANTICIPATING THE BROKEN, linear playing of the '70s and '80s in an incredibly loose, earthy way, The Meters' “Cissy Strut,” performed by the venerable funk master Zigaboo Modeliste, would make anyone's short list of history's funkier drumming pieces. Galactic drummer Stanton Moore's new DVD and book, *Groove Alchemy*, offers a valuable new insight into the “Cissy Strut” groove. With information he gained through interactions with the master himself, Moore reveals the unusual, frequently misinterpreted stickings behind the its deep feel.

The following lesson expands on where Moore leaves off. It is a method for beginning to explore and improvise based on Modeliste's approach in this song, and using Ted Reed's definitive *Progressive Steps To Syncopation* book as a rhythm source. ▣



In the original groove, Modeliste plays a linear pattern largely using “natural” sticking, in which the right hand lands on the eighth-notes (on the downbeat and on the &'s), and the left hand on the following sixteenth-notes (the e's and ahs). Here's an example of this from the A section of “Cissy Strut,” stickings courtesy of Stanton Moore. ▶

To begin, let's do a little warm-up from pages 10–11 of *Syncopation*, played in cut time on the hi-hat. The right hand plays quarter-notes, and the left hand plays any written &'s. Here's an example of using the first four measures of the 20 Bar Exercise (Reed, p. 11). ▶

Then make a basic half-time-feel funk groove out of this by moving the right hand to the snare drum on beat 3, and adding the bass drum on beat 1. ▶

Once this feels comfortable, apply the same concept to the one-measure syncopated patterns (Reed, pp. 30–31, 33–37), then to two- and four-measure excerpts from the eight long exercises (pp. 38–45), and finally to the complete long exercises. To help illustrate the concepts involved, our first source phrase will be a modified version of a well-known passage. ▶



First, play the pattern on the hi-hat with both hands, again using natural sticking: The right hand plays on the beat while the left plays the &'s. Play the snare drum on beat 3 with the right hand. If the pattern contains a rest or tied note on beat 3, insert a snare hit as in the second measure of the example. ▶

Then add the bass drum on beat 1. ▶

When this feels comfortable and you've got it grooving nicely, introduce some basic bass drum variations. Start with the following patterns, or similar ideas of your choosing. ▶

Then combine bass drum patterns to make two-measure phrases. Here is this concept applied to one- and two-measure hand parts. ▶

Since you'll often play these grooves in 4/4, be aware of how the rhythms will convert into eighth- and sixteenth-notes. ▶

Next, we'll develop the linear style used in the original groove, using this passage from *Syncopation*. ▶

Play the hand part on the hi-hat as before, with a snare drum hit on 3. Add the bass drum to any gaps to make a continuous eighth-note rhythm. ▶

Add to that a bass drum hit on beat 1 of every other measure ... ▶

Ex. 5

R L L R R R R R L L R R R L L R L R L R L L

Ex. 6

R L L R R R R R L L R R R L L R L R L R L L

Ex. 7

R L L R R R R R L L R R R L L R L R L R L L

Ex. 8

R L L R R R R R L L R R R L L R L R L R L L

Ex. 9

R L L R R R R R L L R R R L L R L R L R L L

Ex. 10

R L L R R R R R L L R R R L L R L R L R L L

Ex. 11

R L L R R R R R L L R R R L L R L R L R L L

Ex. 12

R L L R R R R R L L R R R L L R L R L R L L

WORKSHOP

From here you can start improvising by combining the previous concepts and adding accents, hi-hat splashes, drags, and other embellishments. ▶

Ex. 13

R L L R R L R R R L R L R L L R L R L R L R

Ex. 14a Ex. 14b

L R R L L R L L R R L

Ex. 15

Ex. 16

R L L R R L R R R L R L R L L R L R L R L R

Ex. 17

R L L R R L R R R L R L R L L R L R L R L R

Ex. 18

R L L R R L R R R L R L R L L R L R L R L R

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