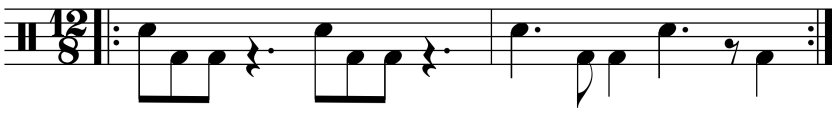Cross-Rhythms for Cymbal

By Jerry Leake

In two companion articles I examined 12/8 cross rhythms for snare drum, and cross rhythms for bass drum. This article focuses on cross rhythms for cymbal played to a consistent 12/8 drum groove. Examples toward the end explore treatments in 24/8—two bars of 12/8 that form one long phrase.

Before delving into the cross rhythms, the snare and bass drum pattern has several characteristics worth mentioning. As shown below, snare strikes occur on beats 1 and 3 of both bars. This establishes forward momentum that marks even accent points during the cymbal variations. In essence, the snare establishes a long 4 cross rhythm over a 2-bar phrase. In the first bar, the two bass drum strikes that immediately follow the snare enhance phrase momentum. Heightened drama occurs on beats 2 and 4 of the first bar, where both drums are rested. In the second bar the bass drum brings in a more relaxed and open "response" to the energy of the first bar.
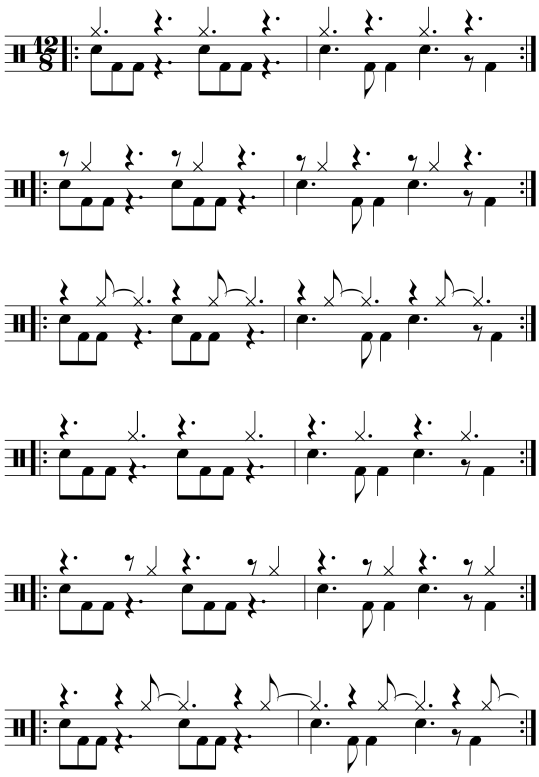
Snare and Bass Drum Groove:
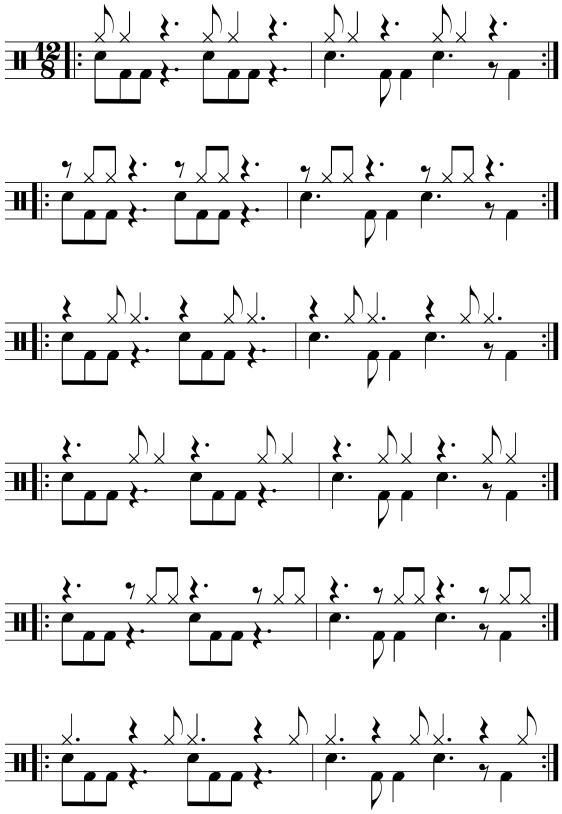


2 Cross Rhythm

The 2 cross rhythm explores six possible positions with single, double and triple cymbal strikes (12 divided by 2 equals 6 positions). In the first bar the shifting cymbal pattern and drum groove maintain a relationship in 2. The second bar introduces more syncopation between cymbal and drum patterns.
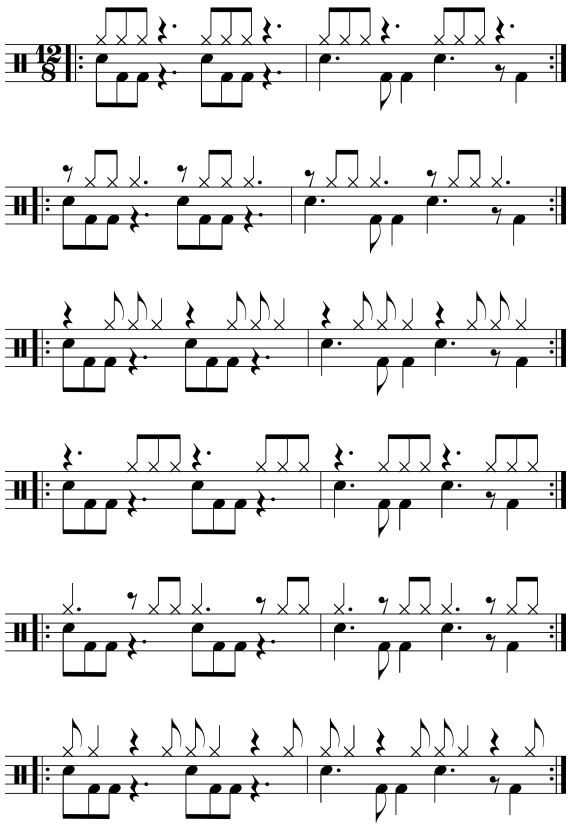
2 Cross Rhythm: single hits



2 Cross Rhythm: double hits
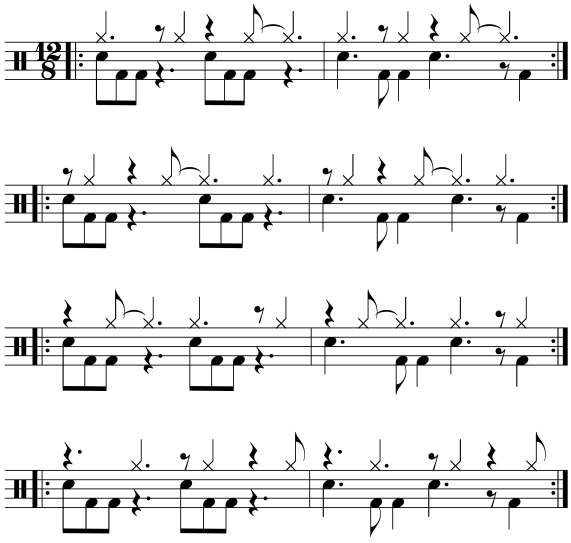


2 Cross Rhythm: triple hits
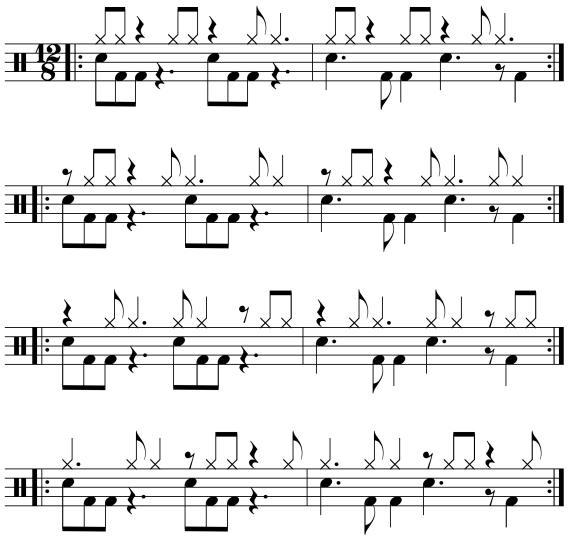


3 Cross Rhythm

The 3 cross rhythm explores four possible positions using single, double and triple cymbal strikes (12 divided by 3 equals 4 positions). In the first bar the shifting cymbal pattern in 3 and the drum groove in 2 create high levels of tension and resolution. Greater counterpoint arises as the cymbal rotates its position. These more challenging and rewarding phrases require significant practice and focus.
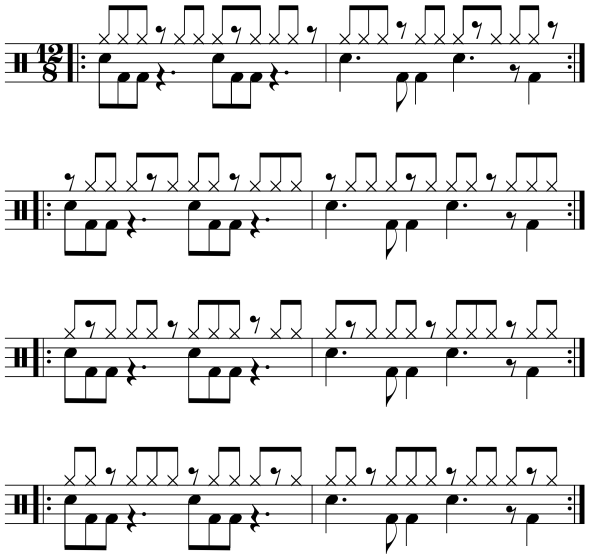
3 Cross Rhythm: single hits



3 Cross Rhythm: double hits
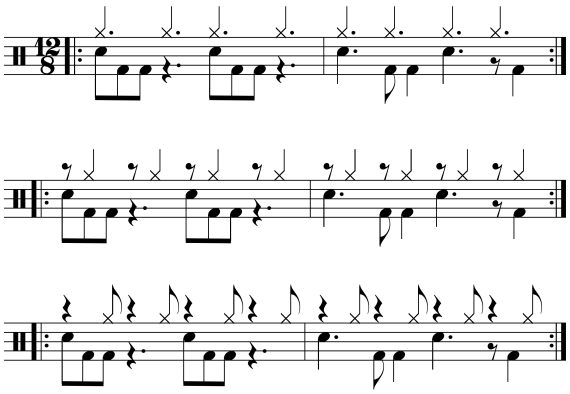


3 Cross Rhythm: triple hits



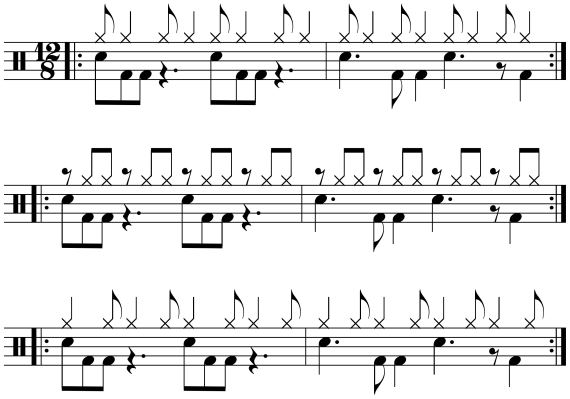
4 Cross Rhythm

The 4 cross rhythm (4 CR) explores 3 possible positions using single and double cymbal strikes (12 divided by 4 equals 3 positions). The 4 CR follows the model in 2, with double the action and energy.

4 Cross Rhythm: single hits



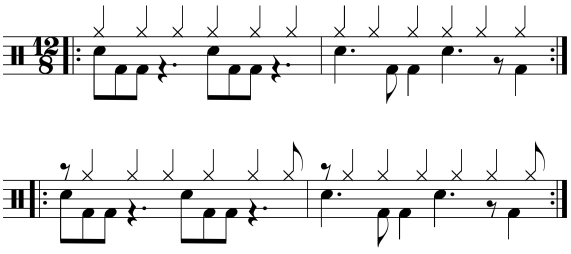
4 Cross Rhythm: double hits



6 Cross Rhythm

The 6 cross rhythm explores 2 possible positions—on-beat and off-beat—using a single cymbal strike for each (12 divided by 6 equals 2 positions). The 6 CR follows the basic model of the 3 CR with more action and energy.

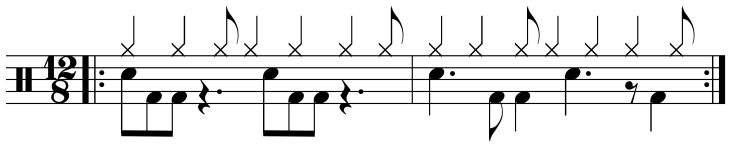
6 Cross Rhythms



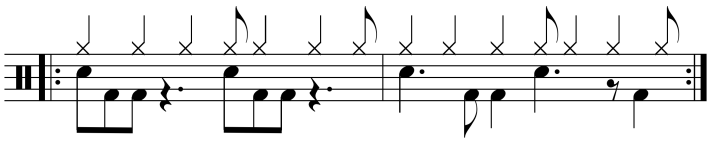
Assorted Bell Patterns

What follows are traditional and non-traditional bell patterns from African, Afro-Cuban, and contemporary perspectives with the drum groove. These provide inspiring and challenging frameworks to build upon.
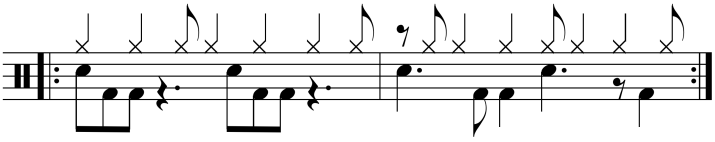
Standard African 12/8 Bell



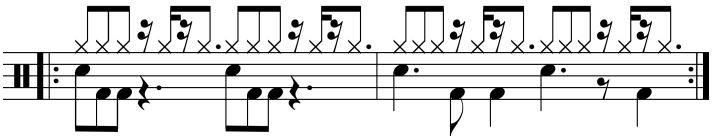
Afro-Cuban 12/8 Bell



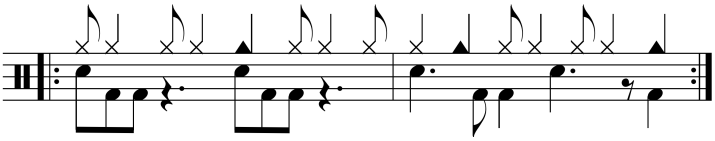
Palo Bell: 24/8 bell



Fast Style

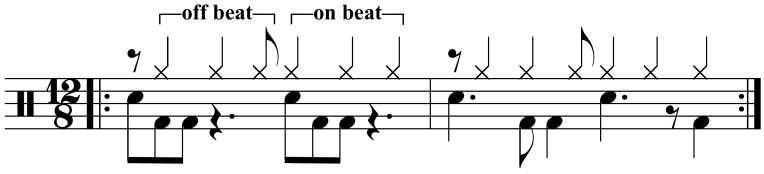


Adjogbo 24/8 Bell (triangle note head = bell of cymbal)



Off- and On-beat 6 Cross Rhythm

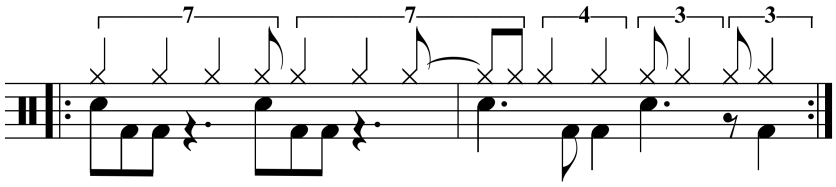
The cymbal pattern below illustrates 3 off-beat strikes and 3 on-beat strikes for both bars of the 2-bar phrase (see analysis). Cymbal flips result in a rhythmic retrograde inversion, with strikes landing on beats 2 and 3 and off-beat tension on beats 1 and 4.



Indian Inspiration in 24/8

The cymbal rhythm shown below is derived from Indian inspiration and subdivision. As the analysis reveals, the phrase begins with two groups of 7. Cymbal strikes highlighted in bold can be spoken with South Indian syllables—**ta**ka **di**mi **ta**ki**ta / ta**ka **di**mi **ta**ki**ta**. Two bars of 12/8 meter = 24 total 8th notes, with the two phrases in 7 occupying 14 of them. The 10 remaining 8th notes are built as 4 + 3 + 3: **ta**ka **di**mi **taki**ta **taki**ta. Speak the entire cymbal phrase—7 7 4 3 3—while clapping on bold syllables:

taka **di**mi **ta**ki**ta / ta**ka **di**mi **ta**ki**ta** / **ta**ka **di**mi / **taki**ta / **taki**ta



Conclusion

With so many sources from around the world to draw from, the inspiration to create new concepts and grooves has no boundary, whether from traditional African and Indian repertoire and rhythm theory, or contemporary outside-the-box derivations. Gaining ownership of existing tools, or inventing new ones to add to an organized toolbox of ideas, allows the pioneering musician to construct unique rhythms during improvisation, composition or arrangement.