Sambinary

By Jerry Leake

This article examines an original samba pattern for drum set that explores four metric perspectives and two approaches for the bass drum. Unlike a traditional samba adaptation, which incorporates an interlocking bass drum and hi-hat pattern, this more basic treatment will help the player get inside the changing meters and time feels. Once the 8 examples have been mastered, by all means, explore other foot combinations.

"Sambinary" (samba+binary) began as an exercise for a class that I teach at Berklee College called Alternate Setups for Drum Set. In it I talk at length about the "alternate setups" that must also take place in the player's mind to develop a more "percussionist" approach to playing drum set. We strive for higher aesthetics of limb independence and the orchestration to a wide array of instruments and sound combinations, including piano. Substituting for the bass drum can be ankle bells, jam block, foot cowbell, shakers, and so on. With the limbs set strongly into motion, these patterns can be played anywhere.

Bass Drum

Phrases A, B, C and D establish a strong "4" feel with the quarter note bass drum pattern. Phrases E, F, G and H apply the same hand patterns except that the bass drum is now set to dotted quarter notes for a more challenging "3" feel.

Phrase A

Phrase A is a one-bar pattern in 4/4 that is presented as a repeating four-bar phrase. The strong hand plays the cymbal with the weak hand playing rim clicks using samba-inspired on- and off-beat syncopation. The bass drum quarter note pulse grounds the phrase. Repeat this many times before moving to Phrase B.

Phrase B

Phrase B adapts the pattern into 3/4 meter by merely eliminating the first beat of Phrase A. Once you are comfortable in 3/4, switch back and forth between A and B phrases.

Phrase C

Phrase C in 2/4 continues the paradigm of eliminating the first beat of the previous phrase. What results is continuous off-beat syncopation of the rim click pattern.

Phrase D

Phrase D (in 3/4) deviates from the model of dropping beats, and is derived by repeating just the first cymbal hit and rim hit of Phrase C. This results in a potent 4:3 against the bass drum and marks a clear musical conclusion to the samba reduction that began with Phrase A. Repeat the sequence A, B, C, D many times and come to "own" the reduction concept. Also shuffle phrases freely: B, D, C, A, and so on.

Phrases E, F, G, H

The hands play the exact same patterns as shown in phrases A–D; however, the bass drum has now moved from quarter notes to dotted quarter notes. This change results in a profound shift of feel, cycle and limb independence. As shown in the composition, Phrase E in 4/4 requires a three-bar cycle before returning to its original position with the bass drum starting on the "1." Phrase F (in 3/4), by contrast, works as a 1-bar phrase that is repeated four times.

Phrase G is probably the most demanding in the entire composition. In my Berklee class we played just phrase G for fifteen minutes, with only me aware of the clock. Afterward, students described their transformation of mind and body as they worked through moments of agony and ecstasy to conquer the complex pattern. By the end of class, they owned it all!

Phrase H, which aligns the hand pattern to the bass drum, concludes the Sambinary composition on a more relaxed and satisfying note. Repeat the entire sequence and get your eyes off the page.

Video

Refer to the online video for a performance of the entire composition.

Conclusion

Nothing left to say except enjoy the ride and make it your own!

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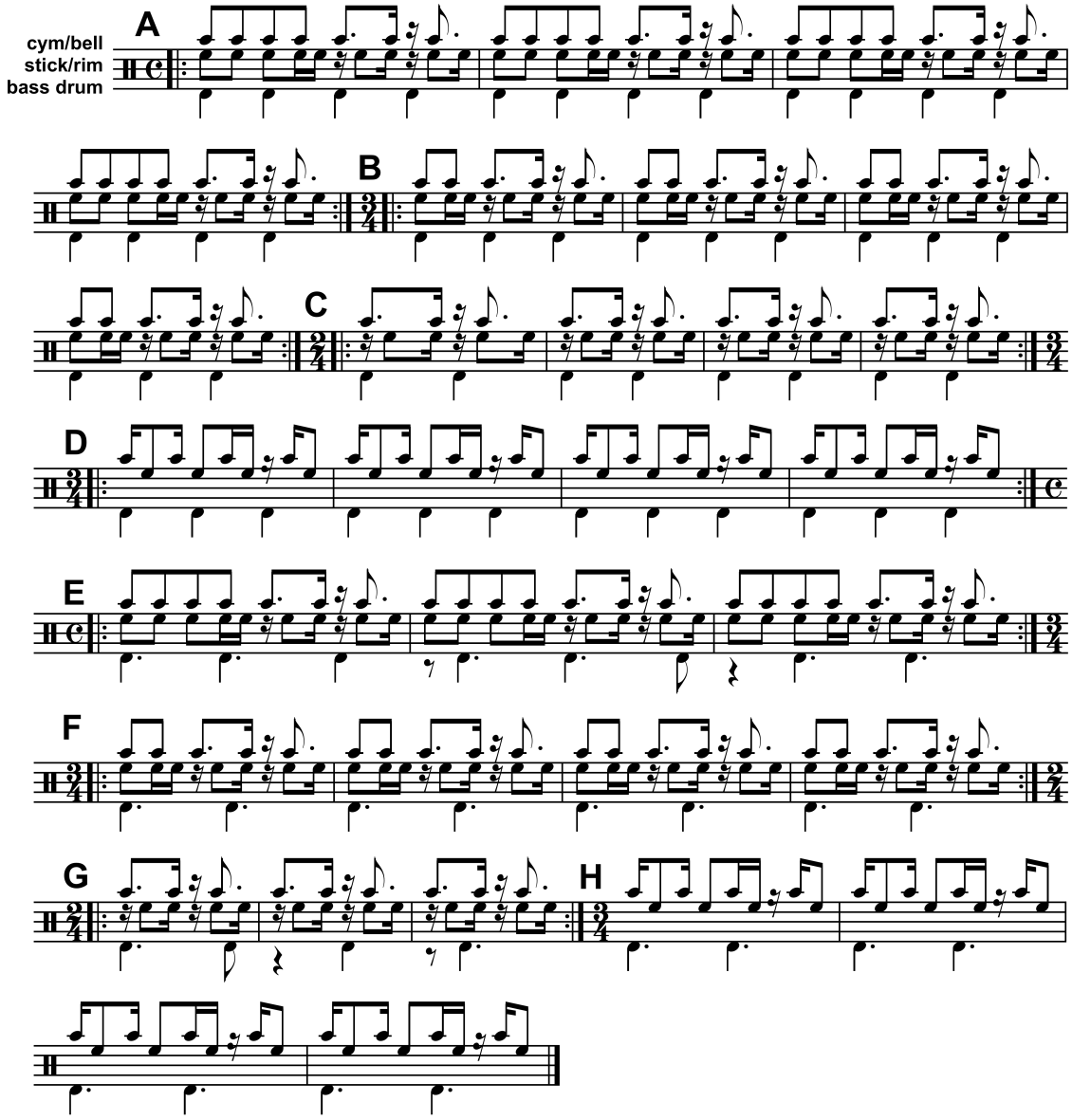
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