

Developing a Vocabulary for Improvising

MAX ROACH MELODIC PHRASE

The first bar is a phrase that I heard Max play on a video. I transcribed it and started to make up some variations. I use it here as a two part "Question/Answer" phrase. You can take the idea and reduce the phrase from a 4/4 phrase to 3/4 or 2/4. Then you can use the ideas as building blocks for creating new soloing phrases.

SWINGING FLAM DIDDLES

Here are some of the building blocks that I use to create phrases using flams. I like to put a flam on diddles (two notes played in a row by the same hand) which can give you a hip sound and are easy to play. These are not exercises — they are building blocks of my vocabulary using this approach. Start with these and see where it takes you.

1. Start with the paradiddle in its basic form. Put a flam on the first note of the diddle. Play this slowly with a swing feel. As you play them faster they become more even but if you start by swinging them they will have a better feel at faster tempos.
2. Paradiddle variation 2 puts the "diddle in the middle."
3. Variation 3 with the diddle in front is my favorite and the variation that I find most useful when improvising. As a rudiment this is called a Single Flammed Mill.
4. Variation 4 with the diddle as a "pick-up." This is a syncopated and swinging variation. Next play all four variations in sequence. You can play each variation as long as you like but move from 1-2-3-4. Start by playing each variation four times, then go to two times before moving to the next one and eventually play each variation one time and move to the next. When you follow the 1-2-3-4 sequence they flow smoothly from one to the next.
5. You can play the sequence starting on any variation. Here I start with variation 3 using **LEFT HAND LEAD**. It's important to be comfortable playing these ideas leading with either hand. That way as you "hear" phrasing ideas in your mind and play them on the kit you can improvise freely starting with either hand. I find as I improvise I never know which hand will take the lead (much of that depends on which hand you end with on a previous phrase) so I've trained myself to be comfortable with **RIGHT LEAD** or **LEFT LEAD**.
6. & 7. Flam-Taps, in this scenario, are to be regarded as phrasing groups of 2 beats or 4 beats. Start with either hand.
8. 9. & 10. Non-Alternating and Alternating groups of 3.
11. & 12. Combining a group of 2 beats and a group of 3 beats creates a phrase of 5. Play a single flam-diddle before the "Swiss-Triplet" version of this phrase of 3 and you get a phrase of 5 that naturally alternates. If you start with the Right Hand it leads you to the Left Hand version.
13. The next step to develop interesting phrases with flammmed-diddles is to play the ideas in 4/4 time. By combining a phrase of 3 with a phrase of 5 we have 8 notes, one bar of 4/4.
14. An example of a longer phrase, that is even, is to play two phrases of 3 and two phrases of 5. My shorthand for this is: 3+3 5+5. For a 4 bar phrase try: 3+5 3+3+3 5+5+5.
15. & 16. Play a Flam-Tap and a group of 3 and we have a phrase of 7 that does not alternate.
17. Play a Flam-Tap and a group of 5 and we have a phrase of 9. Play 7+9 for a 2 bar phrase of 4/4. Then try 7+7 9+9 for a 4 bar phrase. For an 8 bar phrase: 7+9 7+7+7 9+9+9.

TONY WILLIAMS INSPIRED FLAM PHRASES

In the BOX are some phrases that I came up with inspired by the flam ideas that I heard Tony Williams play. I start with the basic phrase of 4 notes with the flam on the 1st note and the BD plays the last note. Generally Tony didn't play a flam in the rudimental interpretation with a light grace note before an accented note, he tended to accent both notes, which gave his flams a big sound. That is the reason there is an accent over the grace note. These phrases sound very good played between two toms.

You can follow the progression of starting with the 4 note phrase, then the 3 note phrase and finally the 5 note phrase. Using these three building blocks you can come up with phrases of 8, which is 3+5, 7 (4+3) and 9 (4+5). The phrase of 16 is 7+9, which is broken down into 4+3 4+5. Similar to the phrasing concept that we apply to the Swinging Flam Diddles try longer phrases like: 3+5 3+3+3 5+5+5 and 7+9 7+7+7 9+9+9.

Enjoy!

