

The Snare Drums' "Flow"
Using the "Flow" Patterns of Hip-Hop Artists to Create "Rap Rudiments"

by

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ABSTRACT

Within percussion pedagogy, rudiments serve as foundational components used to develop rhythmic and technical proficiency. While American, French, and Swiss rudimental drumming share common rudiments, there exist nuanced distinctions between these styles. Similarly, hip-hop rapper's "flow" has evolved amid diverse regional, social, and emotional influences, shaping their rhythmic articulation. This study centers on the "golden age" of hip-hop (1986-1996), aiming to identify recurring patterns of "flow" and potential confluences between percussive rudiments and how rappers' structure their rhythmic and melodic language.

The examination of "flow" represents a relatively recent discourse within music theory, attracting scholarly attention concerning analytical methodologies using computer programs and diverse analytical lenses. Notably, scholars specializing in this domain have laid foundational groundwork, offering comprehensive insights into the nuanced aspects of flow dynamics. Although there exists a substantial body of research on flow analysis, limited scholarly attention has explored the correlation between rap music and the percussive facets inherent in snare drum performance. This study elucidates the connection between the intricacies of hip-hop flow and rudimental snare drum playing, culminating in four snare drum etudes emulating the flow of specific artists and regions.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Within percussion pedagogy, rudiments—the sticking pattern or sequence of strokes—serve as foundational components used to develop rhythmic and technical proficiency. Across traditions of American, French, and Swiss rudimental drumming, rudiments are markers of those styles. Similarly, the evolution of hip-hop emcee’s “flow” reflects diverse regional, social, and emotional influences, shaping their rhythmic articulation. Although the analysis of “flow” is a relatively new topic within music theory, in the last fifteen to twenty years there has been an increasing discourse around the subject. This discourse, led by authors such as Adams (2009), Duinker and Martin (2017), Edwards (2009), Gilbers (2020), and Ohriner (2019) has mobilized computer programs and other analytical frameworks to delve into rhythm, inflection, and tone with increasing specificity and granularity. This project will build upon existing work to connect hip-hop flow patterns and rudimental snare drum playing.

Percussion education emphasizes developing rudiments, which is the foundation of all percussion performance. Etudes for young percussionists are often constructed around variation of these rudiments.¹ As a pedagogue, I find it noteworthy that teachers and performers emphasize the importance of developing a sensitive touch and stylistic versatility on their instruments but do not include early instructional material that exposes students to a diverse range of musical genres and styles. Norman Weinberg’s book, *Touch: Developing Subtlety and Nuance for Percussionists*, is one of the few method

¹ These variations are often called etudes, or “short studies” which tend to focus on very specific musical aspects.

books that introduces developing touch and style towards the percussion instruments—done through classical music examples.

My decision to address this gap in percussion pedagogy involves exploring a genre that is both accessible and deeply rooted in rhythmic and lyrical intricacies: hip-hop. By investigating into the realm of hip-hop music, I aim to gain insights into the concept of hip-hop “flow” and its potential role in developing a percussionist’s sense of touch and similar lyrical expression. This project aims to bridge this gap by examining hip-hop during the “golden age” (1986-1996)² and analyzing the rhythmic choices, rhyme patterns, and repetition throughout the albums. Specifically, the study will center on four influential hip-hop artists: Run-DMC, N.W.A., Queen Latifah, and Snoop Dogg, whose contributions to the genre have left a lasting mark on both musical and cultural landscapes. Composing four short etudes with similar rhythmic and formal structures to those present in songs by those artists, this paper and set of etudes with backing tracks aims to contribute to both percussion pedagogy and the study of hip-hop, and the interconnections between the two and the potential for innovative educational purposes.

This paper begins by defining “flow” in the realm of hip-hop music, subsequently narrowing down this definition to suit the parameters of the present project. A meticulous examination is conducted on the evolution of “flow”, elucidating its transition into a multifaceted genre from coast to coast during the late 1980s and early 1990s. While the hip-hop landscape boasts a plethora of artists across various styles, this paper scrutinizes

² There is discourse between when this “golden age” takes place. The date ranges from 1985-1992 (as stated by Bradley and DuBois), to 1986-1996 (Duinker and Martin), to 1986-1993 (Allmusic.com). All these dates center around the artist Run-DMC with the corpus of study ending between 1992-1996.

the flow development of four selected artists within the intricate socio-cultural climate of the time. Delving into the nuanced interplay between social and cultural dynamics and the artistic output of these individuals, this study aims to shed light on the intricate process of flow evolution. Furthermore, an exploration is undertaken to discern the implications of these findings on the development of etudes within the niche field of snare drum playing. The discussion extends to the creation of the etudes and how they bring a new understanding of “touch” towards young percussion students.

CHAPTER 2

"FLOW"

When discussing the “flow” of an artist, it becomes apparent that each artist possesses a unique pattern within their music, contributing to their individuality. Paul Edwards, in his work *How to Rap: The Art and Science of the Hip-Hop MC*, defines flow as “the rhythms and rhymes” of a song, likening its significance to the role of melody and rhythm in instrumental music.³ Similarly, Mitch Ohriner expands upon this notion, identifying flow as comprising “all the rhythmic, articulative, and prosodic features of a verse.”⁴ Kyle Adams, in his article “On the Metrical Techniques of Flow in Rap Music,” equates flow to the instrumentalist’s technique, enabling the performer to convey expressive meaning.⁵ These three definitions encapsulate the essence of flow and its pivotal role in the artistic expression of hip-hop artists. These scholars approach “hip-hop flow” with an emphasis of rhythm and rhymes as the foundation of flow, akin to instrumentalists developing their unique sound through individualistic sound quality and technique. For this project, it is necessary to establish a more focused definition of “flow.” Here, I define flow as the deliberate utilization of rhythmic patterns and varied techniques throughout artists’ songs and albums. This definition prioritizes the rhythmic aspect of an artist’s works while acknowledging the contributions of rhyme schemes, repetition, inflection, and articulations within hip-hop. Additionally, while this analytical

³ Paul Edwards, *How to Rap: The Art and Science of the Hip-Hop MC* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2009), Apple eBooks, 48.

⁴ Mitch Ohriner, *The Rhythmic Voice in Rap Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 4–5.

⁵ Kyle Adams, “On the Metrical Techniques of Flow in Rap Music,” *Society for Music Theory* 15, no. 5 (2009): para. 7.

lens delves into the rhythmic and lyrical aspects of flow, it is important to note that there are various ways to analyze an artist's flow.

Duinker and Martin argue for a comprehensive approach to flow analysis, considering both musical and production parameters. By giving equal weight to more traditional parameters such as tempo, texture, and lyrics alongside production parameters like component analysis and vocal effects, the concept of flow becomes clearer.⁶ For the scope of this project, the focus is primarily on musical parameters, with acknowledgment of the importance of production elements in shaping the overall sound of each album. Furthermore, the use of sampling is recognized as a critical production parameter but is not the primary focus of the etude project in this study.

The beginning of hip-hop traces back to the early 1970s, evolving from various genres including jazz, rock, Rhythm & Blues, and radio DJ culture.⁷ These genres became powerful outlets for artists to express frustrations and emotions with racial, gender, and class inequalities. Tricia Rose's book, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America*, vividly illustrates the conception of rap music, portraying hip-hop as a platform for black artists to narrate stories of urban culture, addressing both pleasures and problems inherent in urban life, including gang violence, drug use, and sexual dominance.⁸ As the 1980s unfolded, hip-hop underwent rapid evolution, with styles changing dynamically and the genre becoming increasingly

⁶ Ben Duinker and Denis Martin, "In Search of the Golden Age Hip-Hop Sound (1986-1996)," *Empirical Musicology Review* 12, no. 1-2 (2017): 84-87.

⁷ Adam Bradley and Andrew DuBois, eds., *The Anthology of Rap*, 1st ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 2.

⁸ Tricia Rose, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1994), 22.

commercialized. Artists like Run-DMC and Rakim ushered in a new era characterized by faster-paced lyrical delivery and increased creative opportunities within verses.⁹ Initially male-dominated, hip-hop saw the emergence of female artists in the mid-1980s, “shedding light on the female perspective of life in urban America, often employed [by] strategies such as appropriating male performance behavior and contradicting male standards as a way to gain recognition.”¹⁰ Soon, regional differences in the style and sound—epitomized by the East and West Coast styles—began to shape hip-hop’s development.

Scholar Steven Gilbers analyzes the difference in East Coast versus West Coast prosodic rhythm and melody all from quantitative perspective.¹¹ In the study, musical transcription differences are not apparent, but under the micro-timing analysis, there are differences of rhythmic fluctuation between West Coast and East Coast flow styles. While there are clear differences between West Coast and East Coast as seen from the data collected from their study,¹² the information that is present is more analytical rather than practical. Transitioning to a comparative analysis of East Coast and West Coast hip-hop styles, it is crucial to acknowledge their differences, while understand that they have qualities that overlap.

⁹ Adam Bradley and Andrew DuBois, *The Anthology of Rap*, 123.

¹⁰ Gwendolyn D. Pough, *Check It While I Wreck It* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2004), 86.

¹¹ Steven Gilbers et al., “Regional Variations in West and East Coast African-American English Prosody and Rap Flows,” *Language and Speech* 63, no. 4 (2020): 714.

¹² Steven Gilbers et al., 734–38.

East Coast vs. West Coast Style

By 1985, hip-hop had gained popularity on the East Coast, with artists like the Sugar Hill Gang, Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five, Run-DMC, and Public Enemy becoming more prominent in wider circles. East Coast rap originated in New York in the 1970s and is characterized by gritty lyricism, complex rhyme schemes, aggressive beats, samples collages, and lyrical dexterity.¹³ Music of this style is intended for listening with awareness of the words, rather than listening to the music to dance to. Artists that fall into the category of East Coast Style are DJ Kool Herc, Grandmaster Flash, Afrika Bambaataa, Sugar Hill Gang, Salt-N-Pepa, Kurtis Blow, Run-DMC, Queen Latifah, Funky Four+1, and Missy Elliot—just to list a few.

Conversely, West Coast hip-hop, while initially influenced by the party rap sound of the East Coast, later established its own identity with the emergence of gansta-rap in the late 1980s. The West Coast sound is described as, “hard-hitting and minimalistic, its lyrics alternating between violent hedonism and righteously angry social commentary.”¹⁴ Artists in the West Coast scene consisted of: N.W.A, Dr. Dre, Snoop Dogg, Ice Cube, 2Pac, and Coolio. By the end of the 1990s, the West Coast focus began to diminish and shift to other styles from the East Coast and South.¹⁵ To explore the nuances of hip-hop flow, two artists from each coast are selected, aiming to extract traits from both styles and understand the essence of a rapper’s flow. In *The Anthology of Hip-Hop*, Adam Bradley

¹³ “East Coast Rap Music Style,” Allmusic.com, para. 1, accessed April 2, 2024, <https://www.allmusic.com/style/east-coast-rap-ma0000002563>.

¹⁴ “West Coast Rap Music Style,” Allmusic.com, accessed April 2, 2024, <https://www.allmusic.com/style/west-coast-rap-ma0000002932>.

¹⁵ “West Coast Rap Music Style.”

argues that during the early 1980s, “the craft of MCing began settling into its maturity as artists started paying more attention to song structure with 4 bar choruses and 16-bar verses, with narratives and message raps.”¹⁶ In examining the artists Run-DMC, N.W.A, Queen Latifah, and Snoop Dogg, an exploration unfolds to discern how each of them exemplifies the evolution and diversity of flow with-in hip-hop.

¹⁶ Adam Bradley and Andrew DuBois, *The Anthology of Rap*, 199.

CHAPTER 3

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

When looking at which artists to choose that exemplify the East and West coast styles of rap, it was important to look at artists that influenced how rappers created their flow over for the next generation of hip-hop. Understanding that the East coast and West coast styles of rap were different, I chose to look at two artists from each of those regions. This does not encapsulate what an “east vs. west coast” sound should be, but it is my hope to take traits from each of these and start to see what makes a rappers’ flow. As stated earlier, there are many ways to look at the flow pattern of a rapper, and it was my intent to scratch the surface of how artists create their flow. For this reason, I looked at the artists: Run-DMC, N.W.A, Queen Latifah, and Snoop Dogg.

Run-DMC

Formed in Queens, New York, Run-DMC, consisting of Joseph “Run” Simmons, Darryl “DMC” McDaniels, and Jason Mizells “Jam Master Jay” is renowned for their iconic image, status as the second rap group inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, and pivotal role in the establishment of Def Jam Records.¹⁷ Run-DMC revolutionized rap with their distinctive blend of lyricism and energy as well as their innovative production, solidifying their status as one of the preeminent hip-hop acts of the late 1980s.¹⁸ The group’s distinctive, simple, and effective flow permeates their

¹⁷ Adam Bradley and Andrew DuBois, *The Anthology of Rap*, 265.

¹⁸ David Toop and Will Fulton, “Run-D.M.C.,” *Grove Music Online* (Oxford University Press, July 10, 2012), <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.A2225458>.

discography which includes platinum-selling records like *King of Rock*, *Raising Hell*, and *Tougher Than Leather*.

Run-DMCs flow is characterized by simple, yet effective rhyme schemes predominantly composed of short words ranging from one to three syllables, such as “rhyme,” “pressure,” “king,” “break,” and “mouth.” These short words are combined with a highly syncopated rhythmic vocabulary. In “Run’s House” from *Tougher Than Leather*, the final line of the verse, “It’s all about no doubt, just shout cus we turn it out!”¹⁹, creates the stresses on the words on the fourth note of each group of sixteenth notes, showcasing their adept use of syncopation and varied phrase length. This rhythmic complexity offers ample opportunities for translating their flow patterns into snare drum performance, making Run-DMC a compelling subject of study in the intersection of hip-hop flow and percussion pedagogy.



Figure 1: Daniel Barsetti-Nerland's transcription of "Run's House", Verse 4 from Run-DMC's album *Tougher Than Leather*, 1988.

¹⁹ Run-DMC, "Run's House", Track 1 on *Tougher Than Leather*, Apple Music (Profile Records, 1988).

N.W.A.

A contrasting group to Run-DMC is the iconic N.W.A, short for N***** With Attitude comprised of members Eazy-E, Yella, MC Ren, Ice Cube, and Dr. Dre, and emerged from Compton, California, in 1986.²⁰ Renowned for their unapologetic portrayal of inner-city life, N.W.A. quickly gained notoriety for their raw and uncompromising lyrics, particularly with their treatment of woman and depiction of police brutality. Scholar Robin Kelley gives a very graphic description of the style of rap. She states, “And like violent pornography, NWA’s misogynist narratives are essentially about the degradation and complete domination of women”²¹ and goes even further to say, “...Dre orchestrates what is best described as a lynching [in the song ‘One Less Bitch’].”²² Given the controversial nature of their music and the vulgarity of their lyrics, one might question the merit of studying this group. N.W.A. merits study because of their cultural impact on the gangsta rap genre and West Coast scene. Their lyrics were typical of life in Compton during the 1970s and 1980s and that resonated with people that experienced similar struggles in their own life.

Kelley vividly paints a picture of what Los Angeles looks like during the 1970s and 1980s and its influence on artists like N.W.A in shaping gangsta rap. She explains, “virtually every South Central resident experienced routine stops, if not outright harassment, and thousands of African Americans and Latino youths have had their names

²⁰ Adam Bradley and Andrew DuBois, 232-233.

²¹ Robin D. G. Kelley, “Kickin’ Reality, Kickin’ Ballistics: Gangsta Rap and Postindustrial Los Angeles,” in *Droppin’ Science: Critical Essays on Rap Music and Hip-Hop Culture*, ed. William Eric Perkins (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996), 143.

²² Robin D. G. Kelley, 144.

and addresses logged in the LAPD antigang task force database.”²³ Growing up in this environment, the members of N.W.A. were subject to the same adversities. According to Bradley and DuBois, their album *Straight Outta Compton* is aptly described as a “virtual blueprint for the genre of gangster rap,”²⁴ laying the foundation for a subgenre that would dominate hip-hop in the 1990s. Despite facing censorship and criticism for their explicit content, N.W.A. left an indelible mark on the music industry, influencing generations to come.

N.W.A.’s impact extends beyond the realm of music, sparking conversations about censorship, freedom of speech, and the portrayal of urban life in mainstream media. Their unapologetic approach to storytelling challenged societal norms and provided a voice for marginalized communities. In the context of percussion pedagogy, N.W.A.’s emphasis on rhythm, cadence, and intense lyrical delivery offers valuable insights into the concept of flow. By analyzing their compositions and lyrical techniques, percussionists can gain a deeper understanding of rhythmic intricacies and develop their own sense of musical expression. Furthermore, N.W.A.’s cultural significance underscores the importance of exploring diverse musical genres in percussion education, promoting inclusivity and cultural appreciation in the classroom.

Queen Latifah

Returning to the East Coast, Queen Latifah is a pioneer for the female rapper, blending various rap styles and lyrical techniques in her music. Before starting her solo career, she was a part of the female hip hop group, Ladies Fresh where she was known

²³ Robin D. G. Kelley, 118.

²⁴ Adam Bradley and Andrew DuBois, *The Anthology of Rap*, 233.

for her skill in beatboxing.²⁵ From there, she began working on her solo presence as a rap artist. As Bradley and DuBois describe in the anthology,

Queen Latifah's dignified demeanor and commanding presence earned her the regal name, but her rhymes maintain it. Latifah is adept at various styles, able to throw in a reggae flow, slow it down still further with a love song, deliver a message with the strength of her convictions, or slay a wack MC for daring to get in her way.²⁶

Queen Latifah challenges the prevalent themes of sex, drugs, violence, and gang culture in hip-hop during the late 1980s, offering a counter-narrative through her own stories and anthems.

Gwendolyn Pough argues that Latifah “has definite goals that do not include the label ‘feminist,’ but her agenda, because she is a Black woman, certainly overlaps with feminist causes such as harassment and domestic violence.”²⁷ While other female artists of the “golden age” existed, Queen Latifah’s distinctive flow captivated listeners, advocating for female solidarity, and striving to counteract the misogynistic undertones pervasive in rap music of the late 1980s.²⁸

Latifah’s lyrical themes of empowerment and resilience, coupled with her smooth and melodic delivery influenced by jazz and R&B serve as valuable insights for percussionist. Her versatility as an artist, traversing various musical styles beyond hip-hop offers opportunities for percussion exercise focusing on groove, musicality, and the

²⁵ Ian Peel, “Queen Latifah,” in *Grove Music Online*, 2001, <https://www-oxfordmusiconline-com.ezproxy1.lib.asu.edu/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000047246>.

²⁶ Adam Bradley and Andrew DuBois, *The Anthology of Rap*, 261.

²⁷ Gwendolyn D. Pough, *Check It While I Wreck It*, 89.

²⁸ Adam Bradley and Andrew DuBois, *The Anthology of Rap*, 261.

fusion of different genres. By examining Queen Latifah's approach to flow and musical expression, percussionists can gain a deeper understanding of rhythmic versatility and incorporate other influences into their own musical repertoire.

Snoop Dogg

The final artist under examination for this project is Calvin Broadus Jr. aka Snoop Dogg. Emerging onto the hip-hop scene in the early 1990s, Snoop Dogg gained prominence through his collaboration with Dr. Dre on the seminal album *The Chronic*. Remaining true to the distinctive style of West Coast rap during the "golden age," Snoop Dogg nevertheless evolved as a significant figure in the hip-hop scene. He fused elements of the West Coast sound with his own unique flair, thereby shaping a distinct musical identity that left an enduring impact on the genre. This includes blending his laid-back delivery, smooth cadence, and melodic flow while creating a vivid image through his storytelling.

Born in Long Beach, Snoop Dogg grew up as a part of the Crips gang throughout high school, but after being released from jail, he worked on music and quickly got noticed by Dr. Dre.²⁹ As he began writing and working with Dr. Dre, his artistic evolution resulted in a fresh and innovative style, diverging from the conventional West Coast sound. As Snoop Dogg worked on his first album *Doggystyle* (1993), his sound was referred to as "[making] the gangsta life sound like a party occasionally interrupted by gunplay... [and songs] smoother and simpler than East Coast Rap."³⁰ Snoop Dogg's

²⁹ Adam Bradley and Andrew DuBois, 505.

³⁰ Jon Pareles, "Rap Review; Four Hours of Swagger from Dr. Dre and Friends," *New York Times*, July 17, 2000, E.1 edition, para. 6.

distinct sound and style set him apart from his peers, as he infused the gansta rap ethos of the West Coast sound with a lighter touch.

In relating to percussion pedagogy through the style each artist, Snoop Dogg offers a great deal of information that motivates young students to learn. As noted above, Snoop Dogg infused the gansta rap ethos (heavy-hitting, hard, intense) with the lighter and smoother approach. These two styles can easily relate to understanding touch on the snare drum. By studying Snoop Dogg's compositions and lyrical techniques, instructors can explore into the intricate interplay of rhythm, encouraging students to explore new avenues of musical expression (through articulations and creation of length on the snare drum).

These four artists have all made significant impressions on the hip-hop genre, helping to delineate the two primary styles that emerged during the 1980s and 1990s. As Ben Duinker and Martin Denis note, these East and West Coast styles are shaped by both musical and production decisions.³¹ While individual artistry can be difficult to pinpoint, the most salient musical parameters in these artists' flow are their rhythmic choices, rhyme patterns, vocal dynamics, and use of repetition. Taken together, these parameters are the essence of the "golden age" sound. This analysis focuses primarily on the musical parameters emphasizing the need to annotate and define the artists' flow within the framework to compose the four snare drum etudes effectively.

³¹ Ben Duinker and Denis Martin, "In Search of the Golden Age Hip-Hop Sound (1986-1996)," 80.

CHAPTER 4

COMPOSITIONAL PROCESS

To compose my etudes, I first selected an album to serve as a model for each selected artist: *Tougher Than Leather*, by Run-DMC, *Straight Outta Compton*, by N.W.A, *All Hail the Queen*, by Queen Latifah, and *Doggystyle*, by Snoop Dogg. It is important to note that I chose these albums because they were enjoyable albums to listen to as well as released between 1988-1993 which puts them in the “golden age” of hip-hop. Snoop Dogg’s album *Doggystyle* is released at the end of that period and begins to show new styles of flow and differ from the other three albums—all which were written within a year of each other. I chose to look at the “golden age” because of the simple yet influential type of rap that was being created during that time. I took the lyrics from each song and put into the note-taking software, *Notability*, where I was able to annotate each of the songs using music notation over the specific syllables of the words.

As seen in figure 2, there are rhythmic durations above specific syllables in each line. The first line of “Papa Crazy” by Run-DMC is, “Now Papa don’t give a damn, or say ‘Thank you, ma’am’”³², which I have notated as eighth notes, tied eighth notes, and quarter notes. In listening to this line, this is the rhythm that I heard most clearly. I repeated this process of listening and notating the rhythm above the line of text for each of the nineteen songs that I transcribed.

³² Run-DMC, “Papa Crazy”, Track 6 on *Tougher than Leather*, Apple Music (Profile Records, 1988).



Figure 2: Daniel Barsetti-Nerland's transcription of "Papa Crazy", Verse 1 from Run-DMC, *Tougher Than Leather*, 1988.

Each word has a rhythm associated with it (quarter notes/rests, eighth notes/rests, tied notes, etc.) and each of these songs is in the 4/4 time signature. Thinking about what makes the most sense for starting to understand the flow of the pieces meant transcribing and using rhythm as a key factor. By listening to the rhythm, I was able to hear that many of the songs incorporated syncopation, sixteen-note figures, and an emphasis of musical phrases starting on the pickup-notes of the measure.

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It's a fact I'll at-test to mess a-round and I'll ar-rest you I ain't

3

play - ing you know what I'm say - ing This ain't the best you've

4

e - ver hear com - ing from a fe - male M - C. But

6

e-ver hear com-ing from a fe-male M - C But you know what I mean? (Hail to the Queen!) This

6

M C stands for "Mi - cro - phone Com - man - do"

7

up in the air_ yeah, just_ like that now

9

When I com-mand that you take a hand And throw it up in the air_ yeah, just_ like that_ now

11

Chill_ and watch me rap_ cause I'm flow-ing (Flow - ing) Just like Wa - ter I

13

slaugh-ter (Slaugh - ter) A bat- tle, put me in it, I win it The mis-sion is mu-sic and rhy - thm. Rhy

14

thm backed by words all in my sy - stem. Sy -

15

stem by tech - niques, tech - niques I got my heart in. Heart

15

in - to the mu - sic, mu - sic I take part in. One try, one God, and one Des - ti - ney

Figure 3: Daniel Barsetti-Nerland's Transcription of "Dance for Me", Verse 1 from Queen Latifah, *All Hail the Queen*, 1989.

This transcription includes different ossia staff rhythms when distinction between swung notes vs. written triplets would be more appropriate. In the lyrics "This ain't the

best you've ever hear coming from a female MC," "A Fe-Male M-C" sounds like it is swung sixteenth notes at a seventy percent of the playback speed, while the original speed makes the vocal inflection sounds like a triplet.³³ There are other examples like this throughout the songs in music of Queen Latifah, as well as in Snoop Dogg's music. With the rhythmic discrepancies spoken by the artists, it is often harder to notate the "exact" rhythm from an artist. In this case, I think it is okay to not have the "exact" perfect rhythm because the purpose of these etudes is to have the student listen to a song or album or whole artist discography and begin to discern rhythmic differences. Also having a general "close" rhythmic transcription makes these etudes more approachable.

The difficulty level in terms of musical literacy goes down, but the importance of understanding musical nuance goes up. The focus of the student can be matching the style of a song or artist, rather than worry about the difficult rhythm they might not be playing correctly. Notating each artist's rhythm within a western classical framework was challenging. Performers actively listening to rhythmic similarities can help with understanding the flow pattern of the artist and deepen their understanding of groove and style on a non-pitched instrument. Through listening to many songs by Run-DMC, N.W.A, Queen Latifah, and Snoop Dogg, performers will begin to see a similarity in style and composition within the snare drum flow etudes.

Each etude is structured to model the songs of each of the artists. When listening to each of the songs, the structure is built around verses and a refrain. A rap group like Run-DMC varies how they begin a song. In listening to each of the songs, they have a

³³ Queen Latifah, "Dance for Me", at 0:21-0:23 on Track 1 on *All Hail the Queen*, Apple Music (Tommy Boy Music, 1989).

drum track introduction with a vocal introduction as well. On the songs, “Run’s House”, “Tougher Than Leather”, “Mary, Mary”, and “Beats to the Rhyme”, there is an introduction with the refrain or a vocal introduction that prepares for the verse. Other songs on the album start with the verse right at the beginning, but I felt it was important to keep the overall structure similar. On three of the four etudes, I start with a verse style rhythmic idea and develop that for twelve to sixteen bars. With the Snoop Dogg etude, I reverse the form and start off with a refrain first, and then go into the verse.

In each of the etudes, there is a chorus also known as a “hook” that I incorporate in each etude. Edwards defines hook as “short sets of lyrics that are repeated more than once in a song. They’re also known as *hooks*, because they’re designed to ‘hook’ the listeners and to stay in their heads.”³⁴ Throughout the songs of all the artists, there is a hook adds to the etude and gives more structure to the piece. Three of the four etudes start with the verse and go to the hook/refrain, but Etude 4 – Influenced by Snoop Dogg, begins with the hook/refrain. Often, the artist uses the hook as an opportunity to grab the listeners attention—through the musical, lyrical, and repetitive effects that cue the listener into what the song is about.³⁵ In the etudes, this could be the chorus, a difficult rhythmic passage, a different sticking that stands out, or any combination of the three, but each etude has an element of a hook that catches the performers attention. For example,

³⁴ Paul Edwards, *How to Rap: The Art and Science of the Hip-Hop MC*, 221.

³⁵ Adam Bradley and Andrew DuBois, *The Anthology of Rap*, 24.

in the Snoop Dogg etude, I consider the hook to be the sixteenth-note triplet connected to the sixteenth-note with the sticking of RLLRL.³⁶



Figure 4: Measure 7-8, Etude 4 – Influenced by Snoop Dogg (Hook)

Measures 7-8 (figure 4) from the etude shows that the sticking is repetitive, and through the rest of the etude, examples of the RLL sticking occur. In measure 9, the first instance of this variation. There is a lilt to this sticking and when combined with the full RLLRRL sticking, this is a variation of the rudiment, Paradiddle-diddle (RLRRL). This variation of the “hook” is seen three times through the etude.³⁷

With choosing rhythmic variation throughout, I used the sticking to help create the type of inflection that is necessary to develop the snare drum “flow”. For percussionists, “flow” is developed and shown by the sticking that is performed. Just as in vocal inflections, the ability to change the inflection of the rhythm comes from what sticking a performer chooses as well as where accents and the weight of the played notes is. While practicing a rudiment or traditional rudimental solo, performers are expected to follow a sticking because that is what helps create the musical phrase. Like a melodic line having specific articulations written in the music, percussionists are aware of the sticking they are using and match the musical phrase that is being asked of them.

³⁶ Stickings are the rough amalgams to fingerings for pianists, string players, and wind players.

³⁷ The variation happens in mm. 9, 39, and 69.

CHAPTER 5

PEDAGOGICAL APPLICATIONS

One recurring observation in the percussion realm is the continued emphasis on traditional rudimental snare drumming through the materials such as Charley Wilcoxon's *The All-American: 150 Rudimental Solos*, John S. Pratt's *14 Modern Contest Solos* and more recently Joe Tompkins *9 French Rudimental Snare Drum Etudes*. These etudes and exercises expose students to the different rudiments that make up the foundation of snare drum playing. This transfers into percussionists participating in marching band, indoor drumline, and continuing further on for percussionists to develop their touch towards the snare drum. Amidst this tradition, I saw an opportunity to infuse a contemporary flair into percussion education by merging rudimental solos with the infectious beats of hip-hop music. This fusion not only injects vitality into traditional percussion techniques but also resonates deeply with students, offering a fresh and engaging approach to musical exploration.

Blending Rudimental Solos

First and foremost, these etudes offer a distinctive educational experience, seamlessly integrating the technical precision of rudimental drumming with the dynamic rhythms and innovative flows characteristic of hip-hop. In doing so, students not only refine their snare drum skills but also immerse themselves in hip-hop records, fostering a deeper appreciation for the genre's artistic intricacies.

Furthermore, blending rudimental solos with hip-hop encourages creative exploration and experimentation, empowering students to push the boundaries of

conventional musical expression. By adapting hip-hop rhythms and flows to the snare drum, students unlock new realms of musical possibility, fostering creativity and innovation in their artistic endeavors. Additionally, this innovative approach to percussion education opens exciting performance opportunities for students, enabling them to showcase their skills in diverse settings. Whether it's captivating audiences with hip-hop-inspired solos in school concerts or performing at a local coffee shop or record store, students will find new avenues for self-expression and artistic growth.

Backing Tracks for the Etudes

Hip-hop music relies heavily on drum samples and other elements borrowed from various genres and artists. These etudes are designed to educate young percussionists about rhythmic inflections found in rap music, while also introducing them to a genre they can emulate. The rhythm and structure of the etudes mirror those found in hip-hop songs, allowing students to easily listen to tracks such as "Beats to the Rhyme" or "Radio Station" by Run-DMC and identify rhythmic and vocal inflections to practice on the snare drum. By actively listening to the drums in the music, students can immerse themselves into the groove of the song.

To aid students on their musical journey, I've crafted backing tracks to accompany their performances. These backing tracks are my own interpretation of the drum tracks that would have been sample for the artists to lay a vocal track down. These are all influenced by the tracks of artists while creating a modern spin on sampling. These tracks offer a sturdy rhythmic groundwork, enabling students to fully immerse themselves in the groove as they bring the etudes to life. This immersion enhances their musical experience

and brings confidence during performances. The utilization of these tracks is essential for executing each of the etudes.

The overarching aim of this project is to delve into hip-hop/rap music, seeking avenues to infuse the specific "flows" into the touch that performers bring to their instrument. These four etudes mark the inception of what I envision as a comprehensive etude collection comprising ten to fifteen pieces spanning various decades of rap music. These future etudes will also feature backing tracks that authentically emulate the sounds of artists from the 90s and 2000s. Furthermore, I aspire to explore avenues for publishing these etudes, thereby making them accessible to students and educators as a valuable resource for practice and for gaining insights into different musical styles. Recognizing the significance of understanding musical style, particularly for young students, is crucial, yet often overlooked and underemphasized.

Challenges for Students

While working on these etudes, students will struggle with understanding the sense of touch towards rhythmic passages through the etudes. Each etude uses rhythmic motifs that come straight from different songs from each artist. As seen in figure 5, Etude 2 – Influenced by N.W.A, I take the opening line “verse” style of Ice Cube and have it incorporated rhythmic similarities from the song “Straight Outta Compton” and “Fuck the Police.” In Etude 2, these are the challenges I see for students:

1. m.1, How much space is needed between the sixteenth notes? Does Ice Cube have some stutter to the short-short-long duration?

2. The accents that happen on beat four of most bars should have the same weight to the note from measure to measure. They act as an articulation rather than a volume level that students play.
3. While incorporating the flam in m.2, is the flam supposed to be very over to give more length to the note? If so, how much is appropriate? I would say that it needs to be open to give a length to the notes.
4. Sticking is included when there is intention behind having two different sounds of sixteenth notes. Measure 8 should have a lilt to it; the sticking leads the phrase to beat two and four. Altering the sticking would change the possible inflection of the passage.
5. The refrain can have a similar style to the refrain found in “If it Ain’t Rough.”

That should be the starting point for understanding the rhythmic inflection.

These notes to the performers will be part of each of the etudes as they develop more and go for publication. The specificity of challenges will look at individual measures as well as more generalized comments that help with greater understanding of the etudes. These etudes incorporate the exploration of the artist to achieve a great performance.

Etude 2 - Influenced by N.W.A.

Listen to the album, "Straight Outta Compton", for interpretation of flow.

Danny Barsetti-Nerland

1. ¹⁰³ Verse, Ice Cube Style *mf*

2.

3.

4

7

4. A
r l l r l r r l l r l r

10

14

5. B Refrain r l l r

18

mp *f* *pp* *f*

22

mp *ff*

25 C Verse, MC Ren Style
r l l r l r r l l l r r l l r

Danny Barsetti-Nerland 2024

Figure 5: Etude 2 - Influenced By N.W.A by Danny Barsetti-Nerland performance problem areas for students.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

“Flow” within rap music helps to define an artist’s style and personality that they bring to the genre. By looking at different traits of select artists’ during the “golden age” of hip-hop, style and personal choices have been made to develop a sound. Similarly, percussionists are expected to perform in any style and have an appropriate touch on the instrument. Percussionists are well versed with their rudimental vocabulary and exploring ways of making this more challenging than just playing the rudiments. The development of these snare drum etudes brings a new understanding of rhythm and style to the snare drum, while expanding the students’ musical horizons.

As the percussion education field continues to evolve, creating new materials for the snare drum broadens the styles of music that students are being exposed to. Ultimately, the aim of this project is to delve into the realm of hip-hop/rap music and infuse its distinctive "flows" into the fabric of percussion performance. These four etudes mark just the beginning of a comprehensive collection that spans the diverse landscape of rap music over the decades. By sharing this resource with students and educators alike, I aspire to foster a deeper understanding of musical styles and inspire a new generation of percussionists to explore the endless possibilities of musical expression.

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APPENDIX A
BACKING TRACK FILES

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/rogbzjut80wrzj7t05p3a/h?rlkey=8lj65roj4greth0uqu593bcll&st=u4gm0oh1&dl=0>

APPENDIX B

ETUDE 1 – INFLUENCED BY RUN D.M.C.

Etude 1 - Influenced by Run-DMC

Danny Barsetti-Nerland

$\text{♩} = 108$
Verse

mf r l l r

3

f r r l r l r l r

6

9 **A** Refrain

mf

13 **B** Verse

f r

16

19

21 **C** Refrain

mf

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2

24

D Verse

f

27

r r l r l r l r l

30

mp

33

p

35

cresc. poco a poco

37

E Refrain

f

rr l r l r l r l r l r l l r

40

APPENDIX C

ETUDE 2 – INFLUENCED BY N.W.A.

Etude 2 - Influenced by N.W.A.

Listen to the album, "Straight Outta Compton", for interpretation of flow.

Danny Barsetti-Nerland

$\text{♩} = 103$

Verse, Ice Cube Style

mf

4

7 A

r l l r l r r l l r l r

10 *r l l r*

14 B Refrain

18

mp f pp f

22

mp ff

25 C Verse, MC Ren Style

r l l r l r r l l l r r l l r

Danny Barsetti-Nerland 2024

2

29



32



35



39

42 D Refrain

46

50 E

Verse, Eazy-E Style



53



56



59



62



APPENDIX D

ETUDE 3 – INFLUENCED BY QUEEN LATIFAH

Etude 3 - Influenced by Queen Latifah

Danny Barsetti-Nerland

$\text{♩} = 120$
Verse

f

5

p *mf*

9

13

mp

16

A Refrain

sub. p *mf*

20

23

B Verse

p

26

3 3 3 3

Danny Barsetti-Nerland 2024

2

29



32



35



38



41 C Refrain



44



47

D Verse



50



53



56



59



62



APPENDIX E

ETUDE 4 – INFLUENCED BY SNOOP DOGG

Etude 4 - Influenced by Snoop Dogg

Listen to: Gin and
Juice, Murder Was the
Case, and The Shiznit

Danny Barsetti-Nerland

♩ = 98

Refrain



4



8

A Verse



11



14



17



20



23

B Refrain



Danny Barsetti-Nerland 2024

2

26



29



32



35



38



41



44



47



50



54 E Verse

57

60

63

66

69

mf

ff

pp

ff

l l r

3

3

6

6

r l l r r l r l l r r l