

LEARNING MADE EASY



2nd Edition

Drums

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Explore techniques that
develop your rhythm

Learn the tips and tricks of
different drumming styles

Follow the steps to set up
and tune a drum kit

Jeff Strong

Professional drummer and instructor

Drums

**for
dummies[®]**
A Wiley Brand



Drums

2nd Edition

by Jeff Strong

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dummies[®]
A Wiley Brand

Drums For Dummies®, 2nd Edition

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Introduction

All the drummers I've ever met (and I've met quite a few) started out by tapping or pounding on just about anything they could get their hands on. Chances are that if you picked up this book, you fit into this category as well. So, even if you've never played an actual drum or studied drumming in any formal sense, you're a drummer.

With drumming, you've chosen the world's oldest and most popular musical instrument. There isn't a place on this planet that doesn't have some sort of drumming tradition. In fact, as you'll discover in the following pages, playing drums is a universal pastime that anyone can enjoy, regardless of his or her taste in music.

My purpose with this book is to introduce you to as many types of drums and drumming styles as I can in 384 pages. If you're like me, you can find joy in each of them. And by knowing a variety of playing techniques, you can end up being a much better and more versatile drummer.

About This Book

This book allows the drumset player to develop all the skills needed to play a variety of drumming styles from rock to Latin and jazz to R&B. I also expose you to traditional techniques that you can easily incorporate into your drumset playing.

Unlike most drum books, *Drums For Dummies*, 2nd Edition goes beyond the modern drumset and also includes a variety of traditional drums and percussion instruments. For the traditionalist or drum circle enthusiast, *Drums For Dummies*, 2nd Edition includes descriptions of how to play a variety of traditional hand and stick-played drums as well as some common percussion instruments. So, whether you're interested in playing a drumset in popular music or being involved in drumming ensembles using traditional drums and percussion instruments, this book is for you.

Drums For Dummies, 2nd Edition is able to contain all this information because you won't find any exercises that you can't use in real-world situations. The result: You can learn how to actually play the drums much sooner and without learning unnecessary stuff.

This book is also a handy reference for drumming. You can find a variety of drums from around the world that you may not have ever seen or heard of before now. I explain each of these drums, and I describe their technique so that you can play them in the traditional way using traditional rhythms. I also discuss how you can use each of these drums in a musical situation today.

By no means does this book cover all the different drums and percussion instruments played today, but it does cover more than a dozen of the drums that I see most often. And, with the techniques that I describe, you can easily play any drum that I don't present in this book. Just find a drum that looks similar to yours and start there.

Conventions Used in This Book

I use a few conventions in this book to make it easier for you to understand and navigate. Here's a list of those conventions:

- » You'll see many of the rhythms in this book marked with a *track bar* that tells you where to find that rhythm on the book's companion website when you play it as standard music. The website and book together allow you to hear as well as see how to play each rhythm, making the learning process that much quicker. *All* the rhythms are now available as audio files.
- » All the drumset grooves are written for the right-handed player. Well, not exactly right-handed people, but rather people who set up and play their drums in a right-handed way. I do this because it's the most common way to play a drum. Lefties take heart — playing right-handed can actually be better for you. You end up having an advantage because your left hand is as strong as your right (trust me on this one — I'm a lefty who plays right-handed, and so are a lot of other great drummers).
- » The musical notation in this book is written so that you can read drumming music. I don't cover those areas (key signatures, melodies, and so on) that are present in music notation unless they specifically apply to the drum rhythm presented.

What You're Not to Read

If you're pressed for time (for example, you have an audition tomorrow), you don't have to read this entire book word-for-word. I can't promise that you'll nail that audition, but I do make it easy for you to know which parts of this book you can skip. Don't read the following unless you have ample time and a real thirst for drumming knowledge:

- » **Sidebars:** These gray-shaded boxes are filled with fun, interesting information, but it's all nonessential.
- » **Technical stuff:** You can skip any paragraph marked with a Technical Stuff icon (see "Icons Used in This Book" later in this introduction). This information may be too technical the first time you read through this book, but come back to it as you get more comfortable with your drumming — it will only enhance your knowledge of the subject.
- » **Drum history:** Don't worry; I don't give you any quizzes on the history of drumming. If you're one of those rare souls who finds history fascinating, dive right in. If you're like the rest of us, this icon lets you know that you don't have to read these sections.

Foolish Assumptions

I really don't make any assumptions about you, the reader. I don't assume that you're interested in a certain type of drum. I don't assume that you want to play a specific style of music. I don't even assume that you already have a drum or that you know what kind of drumming you want to do. In fact, if you don't know these things, this book can help you decide.

The only assumption I make is that you're reading this book because you want to learn how to turn your aimless tapping into music.

How This Book Is Organized

This book is organized so that you can get the information you want quickly and not be burdened with stuff you don't need or want to know. Each section contains chapters that cover a specific area of drumming.

Part 1: Setting a Solid Foundation

Part 1 contains four chapters that cover the basics of drumming. Chapter 1 introduces you to the world of drums and shows you some of the most common drums used today. Chapter 2 provides you with a vocabulary that allows you to read drumming music quickly (you don't need to read music in order to play the rhythms in this book if you don't want to — you can go to the website and listen to some of the rhythms, or download the audio files and listen to all the rhythms). Chapter 3 introduces you to the proper way to hit the drums with a stick, and Chapter 4 explores many ways that you can play a drum with your hands.

Part 2: Digging into the Drumset

Part 2 explores the modern drumset. In Chapter 5, you discover how to set up your drumset as well as some basic drumset skills that will help you move your limbs independently of one another. Chapter 6 shows you how to play the drumset in the rock style, and Chapter 7 introduces you to blues drumming. Chapter 8 presents the way to drum in the R&B and funk drumming techniques, and Chapter 9 explores jazz and fusion styles. In Chapter 10, you uncover the secrets to playing Latin and Caribbean rhythms. And, in Chapter 11, you can expand on your rock skills by looking at the rhythms of some great drummers.

Part 3: Dressing up Your Drumset Skills

Part 3 helps you express your own personality on the drumset. Chapter 12 examines what makes a rhythm groove and how to put together a beat that fits your musical situation. In Chapter 13, you can explore how to use licks and fills to complement the music and make a personal statement. Chapter 14 gives you some ideas and guidelines to help you solo effectively.

Part 4: Pounding Out the Beat: Traditional Drums and Percussion

Part 4 presents a variety of drums and percussion instruments from around the world. In Chapter 15, you get a chance to discover a bunch of drums that you play with your hands. Chapter 16 explores some drums that you play with either a stick or a combination of a stick and your hand. Chapter 17 presents other percussion

instruments, such as the cowbell and the triangle. Chapter 18 builds on Chapters 15, 16, and 17 and shows you how you can combine these instruments to create polyrhythms.

Part 5: Choosing, Tuning, and Caring for Your Drums

Part 5 provides information to help you choose, tune, and care for your drums. Chapter 19 shows you what to look for when buying a drum or drumset. Chapter 20 explains how to tune and take care of your drums so that they sound their best and last a long time.

Part 6: The Part of Tens

Part 6 is a staple of *For Dummies* books. Chapter 21 shows you ten ways that you can continue on in the world of drumming, and Chapter 22 offers some tips on choosing a private drum instructor.

Appendix

The appendix explains the organization of the website that accompanies this book.

Icons Used in This Book

As with all *For Dummies* books, I use a few icons to help you along your way.



TIP

This icon highlights expert advice that can help you become a better drummer.



WARNING

This icon lets you know ahead of time about those instances when the way you hit a drum can cause damage to the instrument or your ears. You also see this icon when I present you with a technique or rhythm that is challenging to play.



REMEMBER

Certain techniques are very important and stand repeating. This icon gives you those gentle nudges to keep your playing on track.



TECHNICAL
STUFF

Throughout the text, I include some technical background on a specific technique. This icon shows up in those instances so that you know to brace yourself for some less inspiring information.



DRUM
HISTORY

This icon directs you to fun facts about drumming that you can use to impress your friends.

Beyond the Book

In addition to what you're reading right now, this book comes with a free access-anywhere Cheat Sheet. To get this Cheat Sheet, go to www.dummies.com and search for "Bass Guitar For Dummies, 3rd Edition Cheat Sheet" by using the Search box.

Where to Go from Here

Drums For Dummies, 2nd Edition is set up so that you can either read it from cover to cover and progressively build your drumming knowledge, or you can jump around and read only the parts that interest you. I recommend that either way, you check out Chapters 2 and 3 first. These chapters lay the foundation from which all drumming is built. Knowing this stuff allows you to understand the information in all the other chapters faster and easier.

After you look over Chapters 2 and 3, you can either go to Part 2 if you're interested in the drumset or you can jump to Part 4 to learn about traditional drums.

If you don't have a drum but know what you want, you can find out how to buy one in Part 5. If you don't know what kind of drum you want to buy (well, besides a drumset), start with Part 4 for some ideas.

1

Setting a Solid Foundation

IN THIS PART . . .

At last, you've discovered that you're a drummer at heart. Now you want to move beyond those kitchen utensils to an actual drum. Well, this part introduces you to the world of drums and drumming. In Chapter 1, you find out what makes a drum a drum and you get a glimpse of the most common styles available. Chapter 2 gives you a foundation from which to develop your drumming skills by showing you how easy it is to read music. Chapter 3 introduces you to the myriad of ways to hit a drum with a stick and shows you the fundamentals of all drumming: the rudiments (well, a few anyway — the complete list is on the Cheat Sheet). Chapter 4 helps you get a handle on hitting the drums with your hands in case you want to move beyond the drumset to more traditional drums.

- » Understanding what a drum is
- » Discovering how a drum makes its sound
- » Identifying the parts of a drum
- » Recognizing the modern drumset and traditional drums

Chapter 1

Drum Basics

Drums are members of the *membraphone* family of musical instruments and are considered one of the world's oldest, dating back thousands of years . . . yawn. Bottom line, a drum is a musical instrument that creates a sound when you hit it. What distinguishes a drum from, say, a soup pot, is a membrane (I call it a *head* from now on) strung across a hollow chamber (called the *shell*).

Don't get me wrong. I have nothing against soup pots. Or garbage cans or matchboxes or any other improvised drum for that matter. They can be just as fun to play and listen to as a regular drum — just look at the rhythm group Stomp; now *they* have fun. Face it though, a soup pot may be satisfying to hit for a little while, but sooner or later you're gonna want a more refined sound. Enter the drum. A well-made and well-tuned drum can produce all the subtle dynamic textures of a finely crafted violin and create a variety of pleasing sounds, whereas a soup pot only clanks when you hit it.

In this chapter I introduce you to some drums, both the modern drumset and traditional styles. I also show you the difference between a drum and those kitchen appliances that you've probably been banging on for a while now. (It's okay to admit it. Most drummers spend their careers exploring the rhythmic possibilities of household objects — I'm tapping on my computer mouse right now.) I also explain why a drum sounds better than a cardboard box, and I let you know when you should use your hands, or when arming yourself with sticks works better.

Picking a Drum Apart from Head to Shell

Like pots, pans, and garbage cans, drums come in all shapes and sizes. Most are round, but some are octagonal. Some are shallow and others are deep. Some are shaped like bowls or cylinders, others like goblets or an hourglass. Some you beat with sticks, while others you strike with hands or fingers. (See Figure 1-1 for a few drum shapes and sizes.) But, regardless of their shape or size, all drums consist of three basic components:

- » The head (the membrane strung across the shell)
- » The shell (the body of the drum)
- » The hardware (the stuff that holds the other two parts together)

The look of drum hardware can vary in a lot of ways. The hardware can be as simple as tacks nailed through the head into the shell, or it can be as elaborate as gold-plated cast metal rims with bolts that are tightened to precise torque tolerances (try saying that ten times fast). Either way, they all do the same thing: They create tension on the head so that it can vibrate freely against the edge of the shell. Check out Figure 1-2 for a few hardware styles.



FIGURE 1-1:
Drums come
in all shapes
and sizes.



DRUM
HISTORY

THE POWER OF ONE

Here's a story of a Vietnamese village that was about to be attacked by an enemy: The village had no soldiers available, so one man, a drummer, gathered the entire village's drums and began pounding them all as loud and fast as he could, making a huge ruckus. The attackers retreated and fled figuring that the village's army had to be very large and powerful to have command of such a group of drummers.

Exploring How Drums Create Sound

When you hit a drum, the head vibrates much the same way as a guitar string vibrates when you pluck it. And like the electric guitar when it's not plugged into an amp, not a lot of sound comes out of the head itself, which is where the shell comes in handy. The shell acts like the amplifier that your friend uses with his or her guitar — only you don't need to plug it in. So, you hit the drum, the head vibrates, and the sound bounces around inside the shell. This motion makes the shell vibrate too. All the sound is then projected out of the opening in the drum and, *voilà!* The result is the sound of sweet music. Amazingly enough, this action all happens in a fraction of a second.

How the drum sounds depends on the circumference of the head, how tightly it's tuned, and the size, shape, and hardness of the shell. All these factors determine why drums can sound so many different ways and still be just a head, a shell, and some hardware. Without getting too technical, the size and tension of the head dictates the drum's *pitch* (how high or low the drum's tone is) while the size, shape, and hardness of the shell control the volume and timbre of the drum. *Timbre* is a fancy word for the quality of sound produced by an instrument. This timbre is why not all acoustic guitars or violins cost the same amount. For these instruments, the better the timbre, the higher the price. Luckily, this idea isn't necessarily true for drums. (To find out more about the relationship between a drum's timbre and its cost, go to Chapter 19.)

I can go on and on about how the relationship between the head and the size and shape of the shell creates particular sounds, but doing so won't help you play the darn thing. So, the important thing to remember here is that the larger the diameter of drum, the deeper the sound, and the longer the shell, the louder the sound. As always, some exceptions exist, but for the most part you can count on this idea being true.

FIGURE 1-2:
A variety of
hardware styles.



Deconstructing the Drumset

Once upon a time, you played drums one at a time. Each drummer played only one drum, and in order to make bigger and better noise — er, music — more drummers were needed. Then somewhere along the way, innovative drummers started putting groups of drums together and beating them all at once. Today's drumsets consist of the following (see Figure 1-3):

- A. Bass drum.** The bass drum usually sits on its side on the floor and is played by stepping on a pedal with the right foot. This drum is generally between 18 and 24 inches in diameter and between 14 and 18 inches deep. Its sound is the foundation of the rhythm of a band, often pounding out the basic pulse of the music or playing along with the bass player's rhythm.
- B. Snare drum.** The snare drum is a shallow drum (typically between 5 and 7 inches deep) that's 14 inches in diameter and has a series of metal wires (called *snare*s, hence the name *snare drum*) stretched against the bottom head. When you strike the drum, the bottom head vibrates against the snares. What you hear is a hissing sound. The snare drum creates the *backbeat* (the driving rhythm that you hear in most popular music; you can find out more about backbeats in Chapter 6) of the music and is what makes you want to dance.
- C. Tom-tom.** The tom-toms are pitched drums that are usually between 9 and 18 inches in diameter. A drumset commonly has at least two, if not three, of them (some drummers, such as Neil Peart from the 1970s rock band Rush, have dozens of tom-toms, so go wild if you want to). Generally, the largest tom-tom (called a *floor tom*) is set up on the floor with legs that are attached