

The Rolling-Triplet Shuffle

by Ed Breckenfeld

MUSIC KEY

H.H.	X
S.D.	●
B.D.	●

Ghost Note

The backbeat shuffle is a classic and compelling groove. With its origins in the blues, and applications in rock, jazz, and country drumming, the shuffle is played by every drummer at some point in his or her career. Yet many players never go much further than the most basic version:

further than the most basic version:

Basic backbeat shuffle notation showing a 4-measure pattern in common time. The cymbal (H.H.) plays a triplet of eighth notes on beats 1, 2, and 4. The snare drum (S.D.) plays a backbeat on beats 2 and 4. The bass drum (B.D.) plays a quarter note on beats 1 and 3. The pattern is: 1 (cymbal), 2 (cymbal, snare), 3 (bass drum), 4 (cymbal, snare).

The following exercises build on the basic shuffle by adding “ghosted” snare drum notes. These notes should be played at a greatly reduced volume, contrasting dramatically with the heavy backbeats on 2 and 4. By playing the “ghost” notes quietly, they’ll blend more into the cymbal and bass drum rhythm. This adds an underlying, compelling triplet effect to the shuffle.

Play the following beats on a closed hi-hat and also on a ride cymbal with a 2-and-4 or quarter-note hi-hat:

Two exercises showing the basic shuffle with ghosted snare notes. In the first, ghost notes are on the downbeats (1 and 3). In the second, ghost notes are on the upbeats (between 1-2 and 3-4).

The rock shuffle changes the bass drum to follow the cymbal for a more driving feel:

Rock shuffle notation where the bass drum follows the cymbal. The cymbal plays triplets on 1, 2, and 4. The snare plays backbeats on 2 and 4. The bass drum plays quarter notes on 1 and 3, matching the cymbal's downbeats.

Here the ghost notes blend with the bass drum for a continuous rolling-triplet effect:

Notation showing ghost notes on the downbeats (1 and 3) which blend with the bass drum notes, creating a continuous rolling-triplet effect.

By removing the bass drum notes from the downbeats, the off-beats in the shuffle can be emphasized:

Notation showing the removal of bass drum notes from the downbeats, with brackets under the off-beats to show they are emphasized.

Another variation of the emphasized off-beats notation, showing different ghost note placements.

Another variation of the emphasized off-beats notation.

Another variation of the emphasized off-beats notation.

Another variation of the emphasized off-beats notation.

In the next lesson, we will take this concept to the next level: the half-time rolling-triplet shuffle!

See the December 2000 Modern Drummer for the complete lesson.