

Excerpt from: The Art of Drumming

In my article on the mental aspect of drumming, I talked about the myriad of material out there for drummers to learn from – DVD's, videos, online lessons, books, clinics, and so on. In this piece, I hope to allay your frustration at trying to figure out what methods to learn, to guide you through the maze of decision making when it comes to technique and provide a few words of advice that will help you decide on, well the subject of advice!

Dave Weckl put it very well when addressing an Australian audience at a clinic a couple of years ago – he made a very strong point that drumming is NOT a sport – it is an art (Ed. Despite what guitarists tell you). Your expression on the kit comes from within you, from your creative soul – so what in hell's name has speed and volume and athleticism remotely got to do with drumming? Dave states you need three things to be a good player – good time-keeping, as this is our primary role, dynamic contrast, and tonal contrast.

And this is the hub of my advice. If you look at the obtaining of these three golden qualities, as indeed you should, then the microscopic examination and choice of the techniques you use to achieve this become far less important. Allow me to explain, with all those choices of material I mentioned above, many of us get lost in trying to figure out which techniques to learn and use. Some of us spend years learning one thing one way, see a DVD and start re-learning it another way.

When we do this, we totally lose sight of WHY we are learning this technique – to express our art, NOT for the sake of the technique itself. This is an all too often mistake, a process many drummers become obsessed with, and can indeed be costly in terms of musical development. So, okay – that's what often goes wrong when we are spoilt for choice in terms of learning material. How do we solve that particular problem? Good news – easily!

I've come to believe after thirty years behind the kit, that there really is no such thing as a wrong technique – I know, some of you will be howling abuse at the screen now, but trust me, trust my experience, but most of all trust your own eyes – just LOOK at the huge array of fantastic players out there who DON'T hold their sticks in the 'accepted' way – Keith Carlock, Billy Ward, Carmine Appice, for starters. They fly in the face of technical convention, using a grip that would NEVER have been taught to them by any 'conveyor-belt' tutor - and you know why?

The answer is what this whole article is about – they use a technique that works for them!

And that's your solution – take on board all the material there out there to be had, but don't worry about which is the correct technique – try them all, just for a little while, and adapt them, mould them and use them in a way that works for you, a way that allows you to obtain the time-keeping, dynamic contrast and tonal contrast that will make you a great drummer. Don't feel guilty or technically inadequate just because you've adapted a technique that gets you results. That's okay, that's you expressing yourself – that's the art of drumming – not the sport.

Now, the one caveat I will put on this article is this – if you adapt a technique and this results in pain, discomfort, blisters, calluses, then yes, something is going wrong. Listen to your body, and as with everything, don't take adaptation or technique to the extreme. Everything you do should be done as naturally as you can in terms of the physical. If the way you do something hurts in whatever way the, yes, your body is telling you you're off in the wrong direction. Often the way you'll find yourself adapting technique will be in small ways, but that won't always detract from the improvement you gain.

Dave goes on to say in no uncertain terms, the audience for the main part, don't give a s**t how you're playing something – they get off on how you sound. And that's what it is all about.