

## **Syncopation – noun:**

*Displacement of the beats or accents in a rhythm so that strong beats become weak and vice versa.*

# INTRODUCTION

Many drummers have used Ted Reed's, *Progressive Steps to Syncopation for the Modern Drummer*, in their daily practice routines. Most notably, the syncopated etudes on pages 38-45 lend themselves to a wide variety of interpretations and serve as an excellent springboard for musical development.

It is essential that you have a copy of Ted Reed's *Syncopation* to maximize the benefit of exploring this book. In this book it is assumed the student has a working knowledge of the rudiments. The international drum rudiments are outlined on the Percussive Arts Society website, [www.pas.org](http://www.pas.org).

*Syncopation Companion* explores numerous ways to use *Syncopation* to build strong rudimental technique on the snare drum and to develop coordination and agility on the drumset. Think of this book as a toolkit for musical expression. I encourage you to bring your imagination to this process and to develop your own exercises to suit your musical interests. Your creativity and musical sensibilities will be the deciding factors in the usefulness of any method book.

One of the challenges of becoming a well-rounded musician is directing our focus, energy and time to technical exercises that will yield positive results. Any work we do on technique should inspire us to think creatively and melodically to become the most musical drummers we can be. While the traditional drum set has a limited number of sound sources, (snare drum, bass drum, toms, cymbals) we can use accents and fill-ins of various densities to create melodic textures and lyrical rhythmic lines to expand the potential of the instrument.

There is a technical hurdle to playing relaxed five-stroke, seven-stroke, nine-stroke rolls, ruffs, flams and buzz rolls fluently with mixed accents. The key to progress is to spend focused time with a metronome mastering all of the rudiments in the context of the studies in this book. I have included suggested metronome markings, but you should make adjustments to tempo as needed, with the primary goal of playing with relaxed hands.

The renowned jazz drummer and educator Alan Dawson spent a great deal of time mastering and teaching the many ways to use *Syncopation*. John Ramsay compiled Alan Dawson's musical concepts in a book called *The Drummer's Complete Vocabulary as Taught by Alan Dawson*, which is an essential book for every serious drum student. I highly recommend that you spend time studying that book for a more complete view of what is possible. In this book we refer to many of Dawson's concepts as a springboard for further variations and study. Section One of this book outlines the ways we can apply rudiments to the *Syncopation* etudes. In Section Two we explore many ways *Syncopation* can be applied to the drumset.

Countless great drummers have contributed to the collective wealth of uses for Ted Reed's *Syncopation*. I encourage you to investigate all of the books and videos available on this subject.

Some of the examples in this book are difficult and you may want to find a teacher who can guide you through these studies to allow you to make the most of the material.

To see videos of each example, visit [www.syncopationcompanion.com](http://www.syncopationcompanion.com)

## **WHY USE THE SYNCOPATION COMPANION?**

This book is useful to the drummer who has had difficulty staying focused while repeating a single rudiment countless times and then, repeating the same routine with the rest of the rudiments. In this book we use an integrated practice routine that thoroughly explores the rudiments in a varied and musical way.

This approach explores most of the common rudiments within the context of rhythmic etudes, which we perform in a continuous fashion through selected pages of *Syncopation*. The goal is to hold our interest, develop strong technique, and to spark creative innovation along the way.

This method is also excellent for developing sight reading skills while interpreting each of the syncopated figures in a variety of different ways. The act of interpreting syncopated phrases is applicable to many styles of music, including jazz combo and big band playing. In fact, the process of reimagining rhythmic phrases is the essence of improvisation.

This is an essential volume for those who want to perfect, and make truly useful, rudiments and technique in general. While I am aware many people will find these exercises quite challenging, positive results are certain if you work with care to internalize the concepts.

We begin on the snare drum and I recommend working on the practice pad before moving to the snare drum. Using the practice pad daily and even practicing on the snare drum quietly will help you develop the control you need to play the instrument musically. When you move to the full drum set you will find you have far more control and ease in playing fills and solos as well as developing a steady pulse for timekeeping.

Think of the exercises in this book as a fun and challenging way to play rudiments, and ultimately as an avenue to reach your potential on the drums.

## **AN IMPORTANT NOTE ON HOW TO USE THIS BOOK**

Each musical example in *Syncopation Companion* features a unique interpretation of a 4 bar syncopated phrase which we call the **Primary Phrase**. Each example illustrates a particular rhythmic treatment of the primary phrase that is marked by accents, the subdivision, the sticking of the rolls and, in some cases different meters. You should practice each exercise *with and without accents*.

Once we're familiar with the formula for each example, we first apply it to the 32 bar etude on the foldout in Appendix B at the end of this book. ***The foldout etude can be seen from all other pages and should be open at all times while using this book.***

Having mastered the 32 bar etude, we then move to Ted Reed's *Syncopation*, (pages 38-45) and apply the same formula to the etudes consecutively.

Practice these exercises with a metronome and pay close attention to the tempo markings. If they are too fast or slow for you, feel free to adjust the metronome. Always keep your hands loose and relaxed. If you ever feel pain, stop playing and take a break.

When we take each sticking and accent formula through the 32 bar etude and then the *Syncopation* pages, we build endurance and control and learn how different rudiments can sound and feel in numerous contexts. The hope is that this process will spark creativity and that we begin to use these concepts musically in performance.

## **FIRST LEARN SYNCOPATION ETUDES AS WRITTEN**

We should first be comfortable playing through the 32 bar syncopated etude in Appendix B as written, using a strict alternating RLRL sticking. Then we move to Ted Reeds' *Syncopation* pages 38-45 and play them as written so we're familiar with all of the material. We should be able to sight read these etudes at all tempos, both as swing 8th notes and straight 8th notes.

As you play through these etudes you can use any of the foot patterns in Appendix A as accompaniment. Begin with easy foot patterns to start, so any challenges of coordination don't interfere with the musical flow of sight reading the etudes. As you become more comfortable with the etudes, you can add more advanced foot patterns.

You may also apply the examples in this book to the *Modern Reading Text in 4/4* (Louis Bellson/Gil Breines) pages 16-25.

Additionally, I recommend also applying these studies to the 8th note syncopations in John Riley's book, *The Art of Bebop Drumming* (pages 18 and 19). The examples are written in two-bar phrases but you can read down the page consecutively.

## INTRODUCING THE PRIMARY PHRASE

The **primary phrase** is a four bar syncopated phrase we use throughout this book to illustrate the numerous ways we can interpret the same pattern. It is the first four bars of the 32 bar etude in the foldout (Appendix B), and is identical to the first four bars of the etude on page 38 of Ted Reed's *Syncopation*.



## SHORT NOTES AND LONG NOTES

In this example, the dots above the notes indicate **short** notes (8th notes) and the dashes indicate **long** notes with a space of a quarter note or longer. *This is an important concept we often refer to as we explore variations of the primary phrase.*

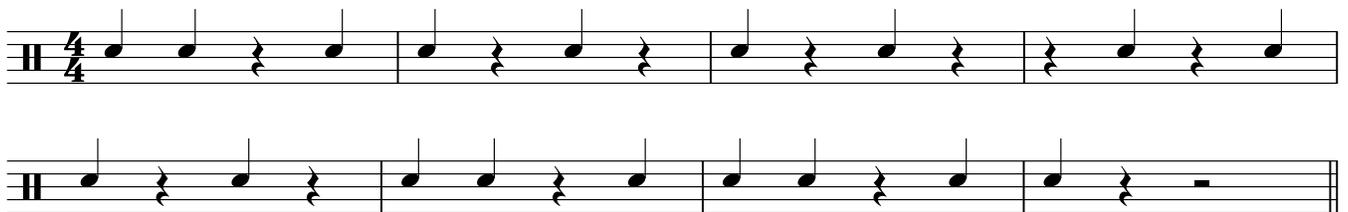


## INTERPRETATIONS OF THE PRIMARY PHRASE

As we explore the numerous ways to use *Syncopation*, we can interpret the **primary phrase** in the following ways.

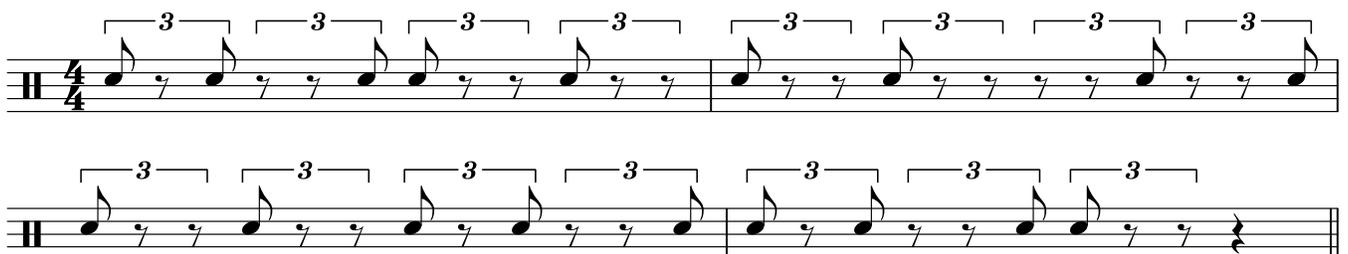
### Quarter Note Interpretation

In this interpretation, we double the value of each 8th note of the primary phrase to make them quarter notes. Notice that two bars in the quarter note interpretation are equal to one bar of the primary phrase. Throughout this book we refer to this as the **quarter note interpretation** of the primary phrase.



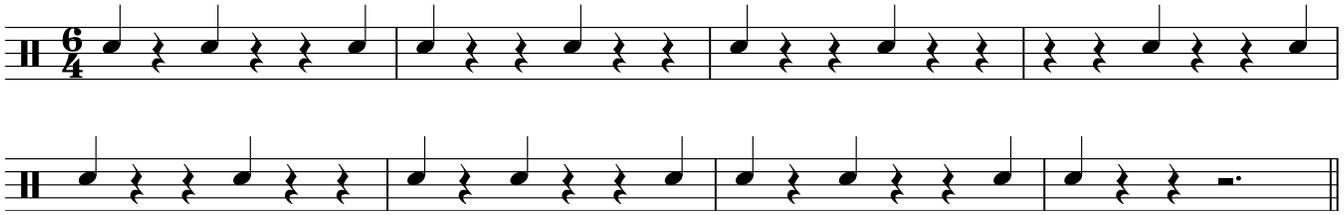
### 8th Note Triplet Interpretation

In this interpretation of the primary phrase we subdivide each quarter note into 8th note triplets. This gives us a swing interpretation of the syncopated 8th notes. We refer to this as the **8th note triplet interpretation** of the primary phrase.



### 6/4 Interpretation

Doubling the value of each 8th note triplet from the 8th note triplet interpretation, we arrive the 6/4 interpretation. Four bars of 6/4 are equal to one 4/4 bar in the 8th note interpretation. We refer to this as the **6/4 interpretation** of the primary phrase.



### 12/8 Interpretation

Here we interpret the primary phrase with 12 even 8th notes. This interpretation sounds the same as the 8th note triplet interpretation, but is a useful notation for some applications of *Syncopation*. This will be referred to as the **12/8 interpretation** of the primary phrase.



## RECAP FOR HOW TO USE SYNCOPATION COMPANION

1. First we learn the sticking formula, or set of rules, within each written example.
2. Apply the sticking formula, and rules for each example to the 32 bar etude on the foldout in Appendix B on the last page of this book. *You can view the foldout etude from any other page and it should be open during your practice session.*
3. Then, we apply the same formula to Ted Reed's *Syncopation* pages 38-45 and play all eight pages consecutively. Each example is a long routine, so be mindful of the tempo markings and, if needed, slow the metronome down with the goal of keeping the hands light and loose throughout the exercise.

We can use any of the foot patterns from Appendix A as appropriate while working through the snare drum portion of this book. I suggest starting with simple accompaniments until you have mastered the stickings.

The small staff above all the examples is included to show the relationship of the primary phrase (and its various interpretations) to each variation. *Only play the bottom staff.*