

The Bonham/Gadd/Smith Lick

By John Xepoleas

I was blown away when I first heard Led Zeppelin's drummer, John Bonham, play his incredible licks at the end of "Moby Dick" and his classic fill in "Stairway to Heaven". Then, a few years later, I heard both Steve Gadd and Steve Smith play the same lick. Gadd, in a jazz setting with Chic Corea, Smith, in a rock setting on Journey's "Separate Ways". Check it out, I'm sure you'll dig this lick.

Start out by slowly playing the basic pattern using the snare and bass drum.

Basic Pattern

1.

R L R R L R R L R R R L R

Now move your left hand to the hi tom and play the right hand part between the snare and the lo tom.

2.

R L R R L R R L R R R L R

Now let's play the lick as a fill from a simple rock beat. In this context, it's played as 32nd notes.

♩ = 80 - 100

3.

x x x x x x x x [Lick pattern]

The above fill is played as a "4 over 3" polyrhythm. See how it aligns with the accented 16th note pattern below. There are 4 accented notes played evenly over 3 beats.

R L R L R L R L R L R L R

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♩ = 80

Practice this two bar phrase to get a good feel for the lick rhythm.

4.

Musical notation for exercise 4, consisting of two staves. The first staff shows a two-bar phrase with accented 16th notes. The second staff shows the same phrase with a different rhythmic pattern.

Now play one bar of a simple rock beat into the accented 16th note pattern followed by another bar of a simple rock beat into the fill.

♩ = 80 - 100

5.

Musical notation for exercise 5, consisting of two staves. The first staff shows a two-bar phrase with accented 16th notes and a simple rock beat. The second staff shows the same phrase with a different rhythmic pattern.

Now play move the right hand snare accent to your medium tom.

6.

Med Tom Med Tom Med Tom Med Tom

Musical notation for exercise 6, consisting of two staves. The first staff shows a two-bar phrase with accented 16th notes and a simple rock beat. The second staff shows the same phrase with a different rhythmic pattern.

In this example the right hand accent is played on the snare then on the medium tom.

7.

Snare Med Tom Snare Med Tom

Musical notation for exercise 7, consisting of two staves. The first staff shows a two-bar phrase with accented 16th notes and a simple rock beat. The second staff shows the same phrase with a different rhythmic pattern.

Now practice both of the above examples from a beat as in example #3.