

A New Approach to the Single-Stroke Roll

BY GORDY KNUDTSON

I'd like to share an exciting, new, and practically effortless method I have discovered of playing a single-stroke roll. I happened to stumble upon this new way of synchronizing the hands several years ago when trying to apply an old technique in a new and different way.

The basic premise of the old technique was to make the drumstick produce more than one note during one down/up cycle of the hand. While I'm not sure if there is an official name for this technique, I have occasionally heard it referred to as the open/close technique because of the open/close motion of the hand.

The basic strokes used in the open/close technique are named for the number of notes the stick produces during one down/up cycle of the hand. This article will focus on the Two-Note stroke.

While this technique is ideal for the matched grip, it can also be applied to the traditional grip. Unfortunately, I haven't pursued this due to a wrist injury that made me a permanent matched-grip player. I do know of two traditional grip examples that exist on videos: *Steve Gadd—Up Close*, during the samba section, and *Buddy Rich: Jazz Legend—Part 2* during the cymbal solo that follows the Armand Zildjian/Lenny DiMuzio segment.

We will start by looking at each part of the Two-Note Stroke individually. Ultimately, the stroke should be played as one smooth, continuous motion.

OPEN

Figure 1 shows the correct starting position with the wrist bent back and the fingers closed around the stick.

Figure 1

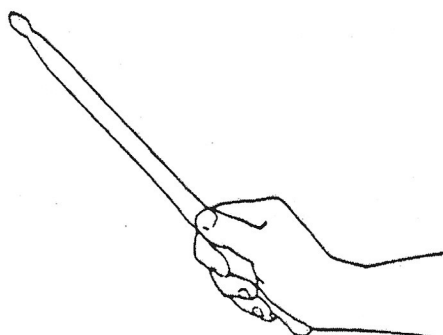


Figure 2 shows the hand traveling downward so that the stick strikes the drumhead.

Figure 2

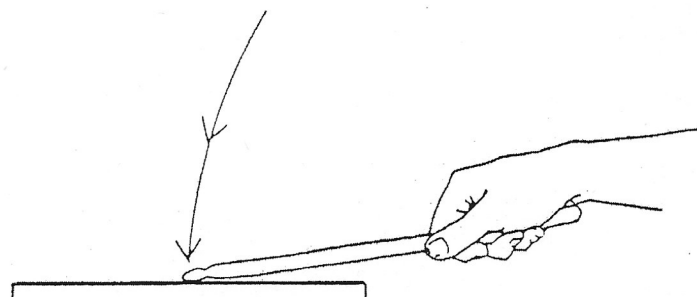
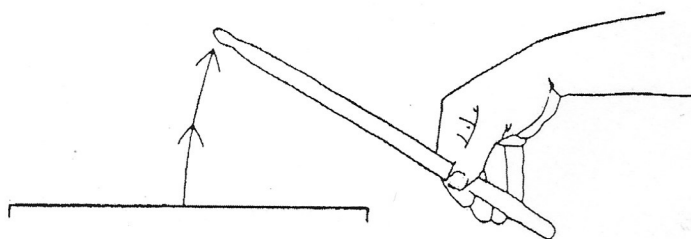


Figure 3 shows the fingers opening up to allow the stick to rebound off the drumhead, while the hand remains down.

Figure 3

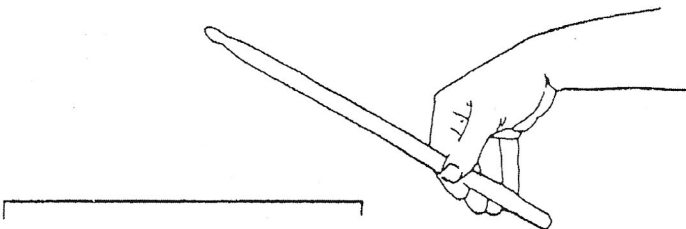


It is important to know that Figures 2 and 3 represent one motion; there is no pause between them. You must hold the stick loosely enough that it can rebound off the drumhead. Although the fingers open up to allow the rebound, you should keep your fingertips on the stick at all times.

CLOSE

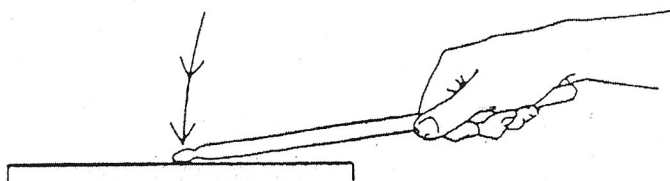
Figure 4 shows the correct starting position. The wrist is down, the fingers are open (but the fingertips are on the stick), and the stick is off the drumhead.

Figure 4



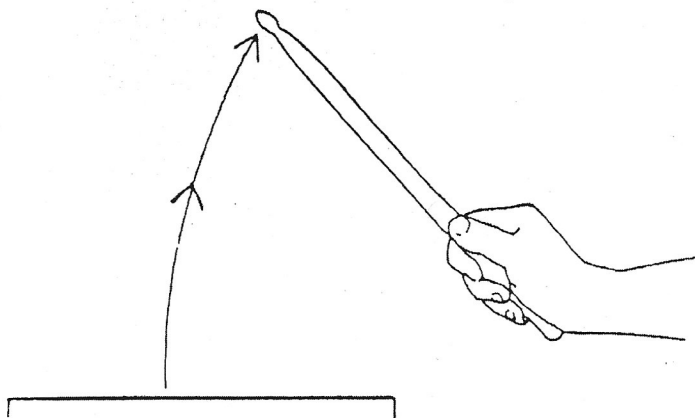
In Figure 5, the fingers close, which snaps the stick back down onto the drumhead.

Figure 5



In Figure 6, the wrist lifts the stick off the drumhead, returning to the start position of the open stroke.

Figure 6

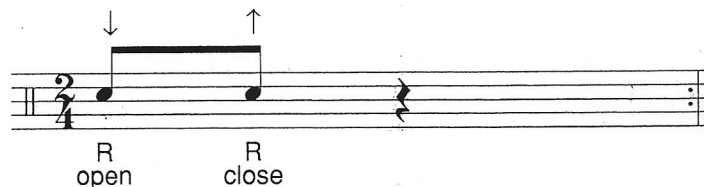


COMBINING STROKES

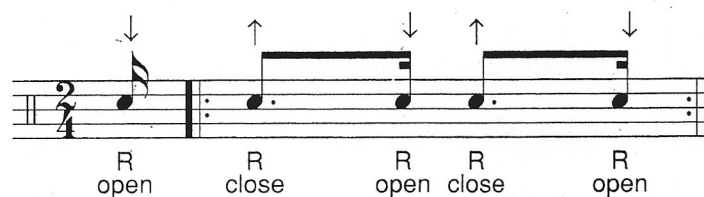
Figures 5 and 6 represent one motion, and there is no pause between them. Once you have control of both the Open and Close strokes, try playing them with one, smooth motion, with no pause between them.

The Close stroke has more power and volume than the Open stroke, so you must learn to adjust how hard you close your fingers so that the volume of the Open and Close stroke are equal.

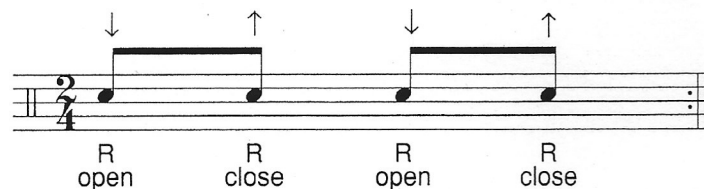
Let's combine the two strokes. The "down" arrow represents the Open stroke, and the "up" arrow represents the Close stroke. Start with the right hand, leaving a space after each Open/Close cycle.



This technique is commonly used to play the shuffle rhythm.



Now try the technique with straight eighth notes, maintaining equal spacing to produce a continuous flow of notes.



Now repeat the exercises with the left hand.

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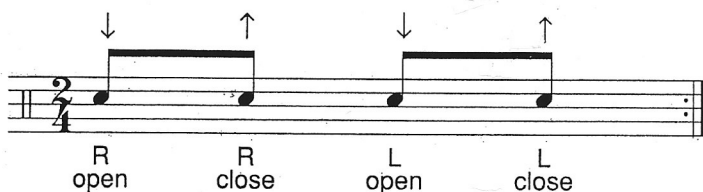
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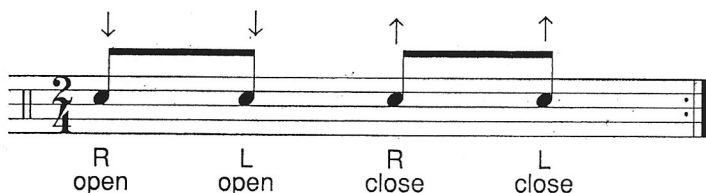
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SYNCHRONIZING THE HANDS

The next example illustrates a traditional double-stroke roll, using the Open/Close technique.



By "overlapping" the strokes, we arrive at a single-stroke roll.



Even though the concept of this new single-stroke roll is simple, it takes time and patience to master. The difficulty is two-fold. The first problem is learning how to use gravity and the natural rebound energy to its fullest by staying out of the way of the stick's momentum. You'll know when you've succeeded when the sticks start to feel like they are playing themselves. It's truly a "letting go of" or "riding along with" type of

feeling. Here's a tip: use heavy sticks. More mass = more rebound energy!

The second problem is mastering the unique synchronization of the hands. While this synchronization is foreign to most drummers who play with sticks, it's comparable to the heel/toe roll used by conga drum players.

Why should you bother learning this single stroke roll? For me, it has been the single most amazing technical breakthrough I've experienced in my thirty years of playing drums! It's helped me to play things I thought I would never be able to play, and play them in a more relaxed manner than I believed possible! For instance, on a good day, going downhill with a tailwind, I can now play a single-stroke roll as thirty-second notes at a metronome marking of quarter note = 120 in 4/4 time for sixteen bars!

I'll even state that this new single-stroke roll feels so natural that once you GET IT, you'll never stop using it. It's so organic, I believe it could become as much a part of basic drumming fundamentals as the double-stroke roll!

Gordy Knudtson is the Drum Department Head of Music Tech in Minneapolis, the drummer for the Steve Miller Band, and the inventor of *DrumPhones* and *Superphones* hearing-protection stereo headphones for drummers. He will have a book and video based upon the Two-Note Stroke technique released in 1999. Visit his web site at: www.gk.music.com.



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