



# YAMAHA

## Educator Series

PERCUSSION



Dan Moore

Dan Moore is percussion area head at the University of Iowa. A "total percussionist," his experience in the many aspects of percussion — keyboard, drumset, ethnic, multi and electronic — ranges from concert to marching and from jazz to classical. Moore has performed throughout the United States, and in Japan and China. His interest in electronic percussion led to his development of the MIDI-marimba, which augments the acoustic marimba with electronically-triggered sounds. In 1985 he formed the Britain/Moore Duo with Nashville-based steel drummer and percussionist Mat Britain. The BMD performs their eclectic mix of acoustic and electronic percussion throughout the country. Moore is a national performing artist for Yamaha Corporation of America, Innovative Percussion and Sabian Ltd. He serves on the Latin Percussion Music Group (LP) Educational Advisory Board. His music is published by Cricket City Music, Innovative Percussion and Creative Music.

## Marimba Grooves

By Dan Moore

As I was heading off to college in the summer of 1976, the pop duo Starbuck had a hit tune which featured a very cool marimba solo. I must have listened to the marimba on "Moonlight Feels Right" a hundred times. As a drum set player and rudimental snare drummer in high school, I didn't have much use for keyboard percussion, but that solo sparked my interest in the marimba.

In 1979, another "Top 40" tune featured a marimba solo that fanned the flame of my interest in the instrument. This time it was a bar band from Buffalo, Spyro Gyra, and a tune called "Morning Dance," with marimbist Dave Samuels. By the time I entered graduate school, the marimba had become my instrument of choice. I wanted to carve out my own niche with it. That opportunity arose in 1985 when I formed the Britain/Moore Duo with steel drummer/percussionist Mat Britain.

From the start, Mat and I shared the concept of the duo's ideal sound: a thick contrapuntal texture that sounded like more than two performers. But the nature of our two instruments — the pan with its limited range and the marimba with its quick decay time — made realization of that sound much more difficult than we anticipated. It took a change in my approach to the marimba to make this pairing work. The change did not necessarily involve new techniques as much as different ways of employing existing techniques.

My paradigm shift started by throwing out everything I had learned about playing jazz chord changes on a keyboard percussion instrument. On the vibes I had learned to look at a C7 chord and think of every note to play except the root and fifth — notes normally left to the bass player. In a duo with no bass player, I needed to play these very notes so the harmonies would make sense. To thicken the texture, I began constructing my parts with bass lines that also contained comping patterns and occasional melodies or obligato lines thrown in for good measure. I listened to recordings and live performances from a new perspective to develop lines on the marimba that would likely be played by a bass player, and comping patterns that would be played by a guitarist or pianist. The result when I put it all together was a self-contained marimba groove.

This approach works very well for the marimba in a duo or a solo setting. I use it with duo partners ranging from vocalists to violinists, as well as with percussionists, drum set players, and of course, pan players.

The following exercises are designed to give you some ideas about the process of developing grooves for the marimba. Work through them with the goal of establishing a solid groove. Learning notes is usually much less of a problem than perfecting the feel-finding that deep groove and locking into it. These exercises are all based on a single rhythmic motive expressed with two contrasting bass lines. There are many other grooves from which to choose, but the next few exercises are enough to give you an understanding of the concept.



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Play the exercises around the circle of fifths, starting slowly and using a metronome or drum machine. The first four chords of the sequence are written out for you; just keep transposing the exercise up a perfect fifth until you get back to the A-minor chord, using the lowest octave possible for your bass notes. Play each measure until the groove is very comfortable before moving to the next chord. Once you are comfortable in all twelve keys, decrease the amount of time you play each chord.

4X's each

4X's each

4X's each

4X's each

Now you can put these ideas to work in the context of an arrangement. Example 1 shows a simple chord progression with a slightly different bass line in the left hand and the right hand outlining the rhythmic motive on a single repeated note common to both chords.

Example 1

Dm7(b5) G7 Dm7(b5) G7

Once the basic idea of the bass line and the rhythmic feel is established, you can start to add chord tones with the right hand and the inside left-hand mallet, thinking now as a guitar, keyboard, or vibes player. Be careful how much you add: a part that is too busy will sound cluttered and will cancel out the contrapuntal effect you are trying to achieve.



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Example 2 shows a bass line with a chordal accompaniment. Note that all of the chord tones indicated by the changes are heard at some point during the two-beat duration of each chord.

Example 2

Musical notation for Example 2, showing a bass line and chordal accompaniment in 4/4 time with a key signature of two flats. The notation includes chord changes: Dm7(b5), G7, Dm7(b5), and G7.

Example 3 shows the full effect with a bass line, chordal accompaniment, and bits of the melody (the melody is shown on the top line):

Example 3

Musical notation for Example 3, showing a full effect with a bass line, chordal accompaniment, and bits of the melody in 4/4 time with a key signature of two flats. The notation includes chord changes: Dm7(b5), G7, Dm7(b5), and G7.

*(Examples are excerpts from Danger Alley, a marimba/steel pan duet published by Cricket City Music, which can be heard on the Britain/Moore Duo CD Little World of Rhythm. Used by permission.)*

You can also go through the exercises with your duo partner to develop duo playing skills. While one player lays down the groove, the other player can practice soloing. Vary the exercises by moving around the circle of fourths, moving by thirds, or by using any number of standard chord changes. You can also use major chords or add more extensions to make your harmonies thicker. Be creative, and have fun building grooves that lock in and propel themselves along.

