BRUSHES

Sustain Techniques

While studying brush patterns, the student should understand and practice several general techniques that can be used to sustain sounds around the drum set, striving to imply the legato style needed for effortless performance.

1) Using smooth linear brush strokes, curved or straight, on the snare drum or toms (coated heads must be used).
2) Using single-handed, horizontal oscillations of a brush (using motions that remain parallel to the geometric plane of the brushed surface) on a drumhead.
3) Using the same (see #2) single-handed, horizontal oscillations of a brush on top of a cymbal, playing across the concentric ridges lathed into the bowed surface (from bell-to-edge).
4) Using single-handed, vertical oscillations on a cymbal, where the player splits the spread surface of the brush face (positioned at a 90° angle to the face of the cymbal) equally on both the upper and lower sides of the cymbal's edge.
5) Using the circular metal ring end of the brush handle (if available), making a glissando "zing" effect by quickly moving the ring from the cymbal's bell to edge.
6) Using the rubber end of the brush handle (if available), rolling on a cymbal (or the player can use a yarn-covered mallet, or similar implement).
7) Making use of lightly played, foot-activated "crashes" on the hi-hat.
8) Making use of the "sizzle" cymbal (rivets placed in the bow of the cymbal, or simulating this type of cymbal by placing a ball chain—purchased at a hardware store—on the cymbal, stretching from the bell to the edge).

Changing from Brushes to Sticks

Some of the techniques listed above also can be used to "cover" the act of changing from sticks to brushes, or the reverse. One common stick-to-brush technique is the simple striking of a crash cymbal (perhaps a musical, syncopated "kick") coming out of a stick passage, or the crashing of the hi-hat by the foot, or the combination of both. A similar commonly-used "bridge of sound" is playing four or five (or more if needed) soft quarter-note crashes on the hi-hat with the foot while quickly putting down the sticks and picking up the brushes. This same hi-hat crash technique also can be used when going from brushes to sticks. Another "cover" can be achieved by a single striking of a sizzle cymbal, providing a beautifully sustaining "sizzle" effect while changing implements. Lastly, the drummer can change the right hand from brush-to-stick and play on the ride cymbal, while playing circular patterns (or rhythmic "comping" figures) on snare drum with a brush still placed in the left hand; then change the left-hand brush to stick when convenient.

Listening (audio recordings)

One of my favorite CDs for brushes is titled *Overseas*, Tommy Flanagan (pianist) Trio, with Wilber Little on bass and Elvin Jones on drums (Ojc B0000296N8; 1957). In this recording, brushes are used on every tune and the recording balance is drum-heavy, allowing the listener to easily hear the nuances of the brush work quite clearly. The reissue of the John Coltrane Quartet CD (Impulse GRD 156), *Ballads*, with drummer Elvin Jones, can serve as a listening study for young students, too. Six of the eight tracks showcase beautiful, conservative-style brush playing, with the longest of the tunes lasting only a bit over five minutes. Another brush artist, Philly Joe Jones, is featured on a reissue CD of *Relaxin' With The Miles Davis Quintet* (Prestige 7129).