In parts one and two of this series (April and June 2012), we worked with one, two, and three limbs. Before launching into the study of four limbs, I would like to review the process of working with the diagrams. The purpose of each diagram is to help the drummer focus on the flow of energy within the body. The goal is to decondition pathways of reflexive, inappropriate responses, which can appear when energy is not flowing. It is my belief that the drummer who practices these exercises will play more loosely, more accurately, and with more highly developed muscle memory. As a result, there will be less energy blockage, and the musical ideas will flow more freely.

The awareness of internal flow leads directly to a more melodic execution of musical ideas on the drumset. Influenced by t’ai chi ch’uan, this study can be thought of as the organization of movement around a single principle, which then allows for an open and creative response to any given musical situation.

Below is an example, in standard notation, of a four-limb sequence in 2/4 time. Following that is an example of the same sequence using an Inner Drumming diagram. The lines in the diagram show the direction of internal movement from limb to limb. You have the choice of where and how to play the strokes. Standard notation can be very specific, but it doesn’t indicate internal energy flow, even though flow is inherent in any rhythmic sequence. It’s my belief that the study of internal flow can—and should—be part of daily practice.

MAP IT OUT SLOWLY
Feeling the movement of energy inside the body is at the core of these exercises. When working with all four limbs, start with one limb and progress to the others. The following diagrams start with the right foot (blue-circled dot) and proceed through combinations of two, three, and four limbs. As before, take your time and feel the movement of energy through the pathways. The point is to give yourself permission to relax and establish an internal map of the different linear combinations. Speed and musical expression will then flow more freely in your playing.

PLUGGING IN A RHYTHM
The Inner Drumming diagrams allow for the insertion of any rhythm that you choose. Here’s a simple three-note pattern that we’ll plug into the four-limb sequence RF-RH-LH-LF.

Here’s what that three-note rhythm looks like when played with the four-limb sequence. The accents show the beginning of each group of four.

Now repeat the same rhythm and four-limb sequence without reading the notation. Make sure you stay true to both the rhythm and the sequence, and remember to count. This pattern produces an interesting polyrhythmic effect, which could look very complex when written in standard notation but is quite simple to comprehend when using the diagrams. You will have success when the rhythm is allowed to flow internally and the linear movement from limb to limb becomes second nature. Then you can improvise freely, in or out of time, with any rhythm that you choose.
DIFFERENT DOWNBEATS
You should also practice the preceding diagrams starting with the other limbs. This will strengthen your ability to play phrases that begin on different parts of the kit. The following diagrams start with the right hand.

The next set starts with the left hand.

The final set starts with the left foot.

THE JOURNEY CONTINUES
The remaining diagrams show more ways to “sound” through the four limbs. The first two are the reverse of one another. By now you should be able to read the diagrams without the labels for each limb.

FOUR-LIMB PENDULUM RUDIMENT
The next diagram is a four-limb pendulum rudiment that’s created by alternating between the two previous diagrams. Before playing this one, make sure to work with the other two separately. Take your time and experiment by playing them with different pulses and rhythms. Then work slowly with the pendulum rudiment until it’s internalized.
When you feel ready, plug the three-note rhythm into the four-limb pendulum rudiment. This can seem strange at first, but if you make sure you’re staying true to the sequence, you will be surprised by how easy it is. Try different rhythms, and see what you can come up with.

Here’s what the combined four-limb pendulum diagram and three-note rhythm looks like when expressed in standard notation. As you can see, things are getting more complex.

**UNISONS CAN IMPROVE ACCURACY**
Before playing all four limbs in unison, start with the first diagram below. Alternate between the right foot and the unison combination of the right and left hand. (The single hit is the blue-circled dot.) Work slowly at first, paying attention to the quality of the unison and how energy flows to both limbs simultaneously. This is similar to alternating between two limbs, because the unisons are being treated as one sound. (See part two, in the June 2012 issue). Plug in a rhythm, and let your imagination take over.

Next, play right foot/left foot unisons versus right hand/left hand unisons (as in the second diagram below). This is also similar to alternating between two limbs. The blue-circled dots are always the starting points. Play the bottom two diagrams in a similar way.

In the first diagram below, you’ll be alternating between the right foot and a right hand/left hand/left foot unison combination. The unison of the three limbs is to be felt as one sound. Let the awareness of internal movement travel to all three limbs simultaneously. Finally, work with all four limbs in unison. Feel the energy move from the center of the earth to your lower belly and out through all four limbs simultaneously.

**THE SAME BUT DIFFERENT**
The four-limb pendulum rudiment can have four different starting points. It’s the same sequence, but starting with different limbs.

**FOUR MORE**
Next are four more ways to scan through the four limbs. As before, play the separate four-limb rudiments first before working with them as pendulums. To create the pendulums, alternate between adjacent diagrams, as indicated by the arrows.
MORE THAN FOUR
So far we’ve been scanning from limb to limb, with only one hit on each limb. (Four scans produce four hits.) If we continue the scanning process without repeating the direction of any of the previous scans, we can come up with more than four hits. The limit is reached at eight, after which the scanning directions start to repeat themselves. The following chart shows you how this works. The system starts with a single stroke and adds one more as you proceed to the next diagram. Start at the top and work your way down. I’ve included two diagrams for the five-, six-, seven-, and eight-note sequences. There are many more possibilities to be explored.

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