

Exploring The Swiss Army Triplet, Part 1

by Chet Doboie

Born out of the rich tradition of Basel drumming in Switzerland, the Swiss Army triplet is a flexible and versatile rudiment that is an effective tool for building chops. It's also a great resource for creating exciting syncopation ideas.

The Swiss Army triplet is a cousin to the American flam accent. Both of these rudiments are simply defined as flammed triplets. The difference between them is their sticking assignments. The flam accent is built by flammings alternate-sticked triplets (RLR, LRL, etc.), while the Swiss Army triplet is a combination of a flammed double and a single (RRL, RRL, etc. or LLR, LLR, etc.).

The real strength of the Swiss Army triplet's sticking pattern is that it enables the performer to develop the rudiment to a fast, roll-like effect, whereas the flam accent is far more limited for developing speed. The Swiss Army triplet also presents a flowing and "drummer friendly" pattern. It's particularly effective when voiced on multiple surfaces.

I find it helpful to view the Swiss Army triplet from several

perspectives. First, this rudiment can simply be thought of as a flam tap combined with a tap. We can also conceptualize it as an "out of sync" roll (LRLLRRL). To better understand this concept, notice how the grace notes come into play. (Check out the notation for the Swiss Army triplet below.) The first grace note is a single left, and thereafter the Swiss Army triplet (including the remaining grace notes) is built on doubles (RLLRRL). The timing of the grace notes is what makes the roll stutter or seem "out of sync." So the good news is, if you have a happening double-stroke roll, you should be able to easily adjust the timing of your doubles and get your Swiss Army triplet really cranking.

To perform the Swiss Army triplet, play a flam and tap with your lead hand—in other words, play a flam tap rudiment. (The key here is to create the tap from the rebound off the flam. Keep movement as tension-free as possible.) Then add a tap with your other hand. Voila! A Swiss Army triplet.

Swiss Army Triplet

Here it is. Work the following measure up from the right and then the left. Start slowly, stressing accuracy and clarity.

Practice tips: 1. Run down the Swiss Army triplet from slow to fast (*accelerando*). 2. Using the metronome, work this rudiment from quarter note = 60 on up. Keep your performance relaxed, and groove from both the right and left sides.

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

Movin' The Swiss

This exercise contains variations on the Swiss Army triplet theme. The rearrangement of notes within a rudiment or pattern is called an invert or permutation. Once you have this exercise happening, shift your orientation to cut time and work at speeding this up to a roll-like effect.

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

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

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

Swiss With Accents

This exercise is one of my favorites. It really highlights the power of the Swiss Army triplet to create some cool syncopated stories. If you're not proficient at accenting the second note of a double (as in the third, eighth, and tenth measures), this could be a challenging yet effective exercise. Important: When repeating this exercise, reverse the sticking assignments. Be patient with this one.

The exercise consists of six staves of music, each with a rhythmic pattern and sticking assignments (R for right hand, L for left hand) written below the notes. The patterns are as follows:

- Staff 1: R R L R R L R R L R R L | R R L R R L R R L R R L
- Staff 2: R R L R R L R R L R R L | R R L R R L R R L R R L
- Staff 3: R L L R L L R L L R L L | R L L R L L R L L R L L
- Staff 4: R L L R L L R L L R L L | R L L R L L R L L R L L
- Staff 5: R L R R L R R L R R L R | R L R R L R R L R R L R
- Staff 6: R L R R L R R L R R L R | R L R R L R R L R R L R

Wrap Up

Once you have a handle on these exercises, the next important step is to create, "cut and paste," and discover how you can put together these ideas to speak with your own voice. Next time we'll explore the Swiss Army triplet in the context of 16th notes.

See the May 2000 Modern Drummer for the complete lesson.