

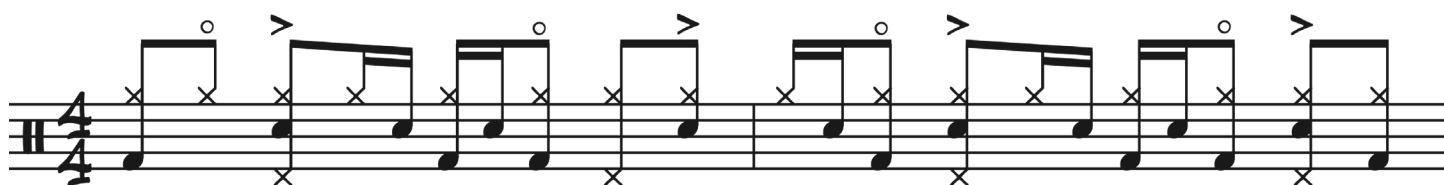
## FIVE FUNK BEATS YOU SHOULD KNOW

I absolutely love playing Funk. I've made my living for 25 years touring the world playing Funk with my band Galactic. I wrote my book, "Groove Alchemy" to be a much deeper dive into the genre and the history of Funk and where it comes from. If you haven't checked out "Groove Alchemy" yet, I suggest you take a look into that book for a much deeper dive into this amazing and challenging genre. This lesson is meant to be a crash course on 5 essential beats every drummer should know if you want to start playing some gigs and making a little money playing the drumset.

Funk to me is rhythmic grooving music that is designed to make people dance. To me it is an under-appreciated and under recognized genre. There are many different approaches to funk. I've chosen these 5 beats because they are some of my favorite, but they will also serve as a good starting point to represent a sampling of some of the different approaches you will encounter when playing Funk. The beats we will cover in this lesson are James Brown's Cold Sweat with Clyde Stubblefield on drums, Soul Power with Jabo Starks on drums, "Funky Drummer" with Clyde Stubblefield on drums, Herbie Hancock "Chameleon" with Harvey Mason on drums and the Meters "Cissy Strut" with Joseph "Zigaboo" Modeliste on drums. I picked these 5 beats specifically for a reason. I feel that if you can convincingly play these five beats, you'll be able to handle most of the funk that comes your way. These beats get referenced often and they are each quite different from each other. I've heard these beats referenced when figuring out what to play in a recording session or when writing new material. And, I've certainly heard most of these songs called out at gigs and Jam sessions.

Let's start off with what I consider to be one of the corner stones of funk. There are so many songs and grooves that are based off of this beat. What makes this beat special is the displaced snare on the & of beat 4 in the first measure and the repeating open hi-hat on the & of beat one and the & of beat 3.

Beat #1 "Cold Sweat" 1967 Clyde Stubblefield on drums. Around 112 bpm



The things to keep in mind when practicing and learning "Cold Sweat" are to keep the grace notes (the unaccented notes) very soft. This beat can start to sound out of whack if the unaccented notes are too loud. Make sure that there is a distinct difference between the accented notes and the unaccented notes. This will help ensure that this beat maintains the slinky-ness that it should.

This next beat is coming from Jabo Starks. This beat is from "Soul Power", but is very similar to what Jabo plays on "Sex Machine" as well. This is a great beat to have in your arsenal of funk beats. What makes this beat interesting is that the right hand is playing a pattern that is very similar to the Jazz ride cymbal pattern. Notice that the left hand is playing all of the notes of beat 2 in unison with the right hand.

Beat #2 "Soul Power" 1971 Jabo Starks on drums. Around 105 bpm



Beat #2 variation 1 "Sex Machine" 1970 Jabo Starks on drums. Around 109 bpm



Beat #2 variation 2



Beat #2 variaiton 3



Beat #2 variation 4



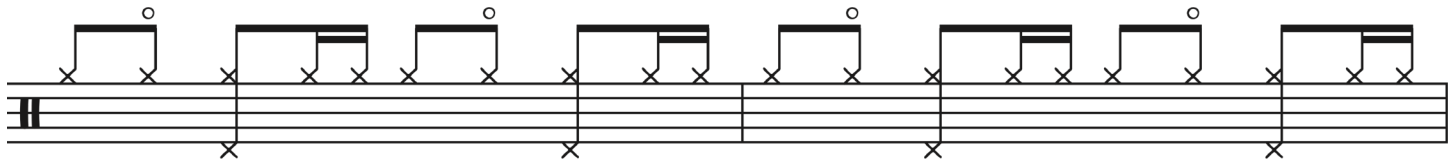
To me, Jabo's right hand pattern is very similar to the Jazz ride cymbal pattern. I had dinner with Jabo one night and got to ask him about this. He confirmed my suspicions and said that his right hand pattern was similar to the ride cymbal pattern and was coming from his experience playing Jazz. Let's take a look at just the right hand pattern. Notice that this is written in 16th notes because we're talking about funk, but if this were written as eighth notes in a Jazz context, the skip beat would beat happening on beat 4 but not on beat 2.

Jabo's right hand pattern on the ride cymbal



Now if we move that over to the hi-hat and open the hi hat on the & of beat 1 and the & of beat 3, this starts to look a lot like the hand pattern that Jabo uses on a lot of his beats.

Jabo's right hand pattern on hi-hat



Now we're going to take a look at how Jabo is approaching his ghost notes in the left hand. Let's move the right hand back to the ride cymbal for just a minute. Now we'll add in the ghost notes that Jabo plays most often. To me these are similar to what you would play against the ride cymbal in a Jazz independence context. When I asked Jabo about this he said "Aha! You got that, a lot of people don't get that, but you got it!" Let's take a look at what that looks like now.

Jabo's right hand pattern on ride with ghost notes



Now we'll add the 2 and 4 back beat to that.

Jabo's right hand pattern on ride with ghost notes plus back beat



Then we'll move the right hand back to the hi-hat with the openings on the & of 1 and the & of 3 and we'll have Jabo's goto hand pattern.

Jabo's right hand pattern on the hi-hat with left hand added



Once you have this hand pattern down, you can add the different bass drum patterns underneath. This is an incredibly useful and applicable hand pattern and I play it on the hi-hat or the ride with different bass drum patterns all the time.

This next beat is one of the most sampled beats of all time. Clyde Stubblefield laid down an 8 bar loop that countless producers have looped and used for the basis of tons of songs. Everyone from Public Enemy to George Michael have sampled this beat. It is actually one of the most challenging of our five beats to play. There are a lot of moving parts with this one and I highly recommend starting slow with a metronome and working on getting all of the notes and intricacies to lay right.

Beat #3 "Funky Drummer" 1969 Clyde Stubblefield on drums. Around 100 bpm



Depending on which measure of the break you've heard sampled, the "ah" of beat 2 or the "e" of beat 2 could be heard as an open hi-hat. We'll look at it the second way now...

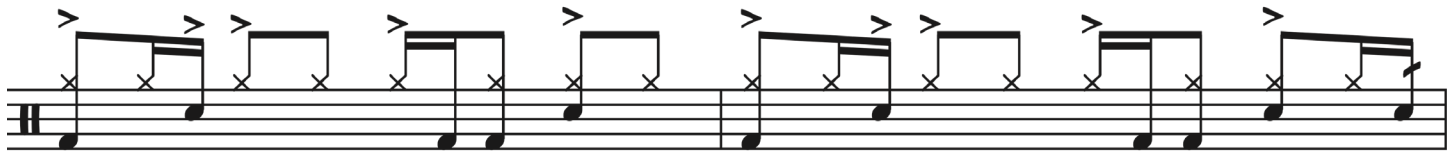
Beat #3 variation 1



Any of the hi-hat shoops that happen in this beat are inadvertent and are a by-product of tapping your left heel on the base of the hi-hat in order to keep time. What happens is the heel may come up just a bit while tapping eighth notes and then the "e" or "ah" 16th note shoops happen almost as an accident. The key to remember when adding these in is to "let" them happen instead of trying to "make" them happen. Don't try to accent them or make them jump out. Your right hand motion should stay the same through out and the hi-hat openings should happen on their own without you making too much of a big deal about them.

Now let's take a look at Harvey Mason's beat to the Herbie Hancock song "Chameleon". I've been on countless gigs and jam sessions where this song has been called. It's not a complicated beat, but it'll very helpful for you to know this beat to if called upon to play it. You can add some of your variations but it's good to at least start in this ball park. Notice that this beat is based off of the 3-2 clave.

Beat 4 "Chameleon" Herbie Hancock 1973, Harvey Mason on drums. Around 94 bpm



Notice that Harvey doesn't play the "&" of beat two on the snare or bass drum. For our first variation, we can add in the "&" of beat two on the snare drum. We'll also add in the "&" of beat four in the second measure to help really land that beat one in the first measure when it comes back around.

Beat 4 variation 1



Now, let's add in the "&" of beat two on the bass drum. We'll also add in the "&" of beat four in the second measure again.

Beat 4 variation 2



For fun, here's a slightly souped up version of "Chameleon" where we'll add a little lagniappe to the original beat. See if you can tell where each of these added elements comes from.

Beat 4 variation 4



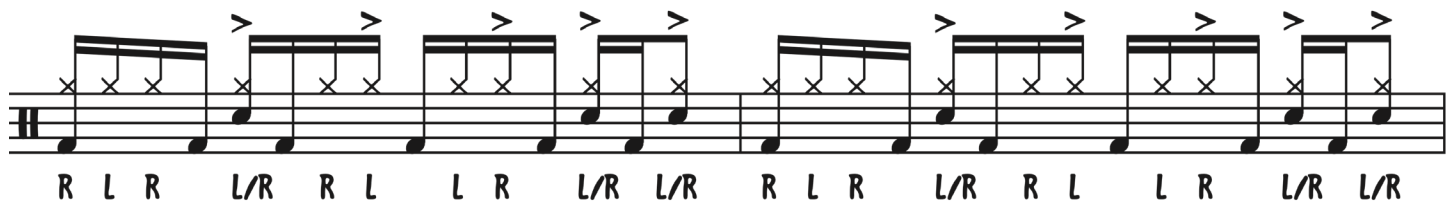
Now for the creme de la creme of Funk beats. I still think this is one of the hippest beats ever created. It is also one of the most mis-understood. For years people thought that Zigaboo Modeliste played the beat to “Cissy Strut” all with his right hand on the hi-hat. You can approximate it that way, but to really get into the soul of this beat and to understand where it is truly coming from, you should learn how to play it like Zig did, with alternating hands (RLRL) on the hi hat. I present a full lesson on this beat and the development of it in Academy Lesson 18 on my Drum Academy, so be sure to check that out if you are interested in doing more of a deep dive on this beat. For the purposes of this lesson though, here is the beat. It is played with a feel that is in-between straight and swing and is a really fun beat to play, especially when you know how Zig was originally playing it. Let’s take a look at the main beat Zig plays in the first A section of the tune after the tune gets going.

Beat 5 “Cissy Strut” The Meters 1969, Zigaboo Modeliste on drums. Around 88 bpm



Notice that the two 16th notes played on the bass drum on beat 3 are quite a challenge to play, especially underneath the LR hi hat sticking. When I play this beat, I often leave out the “e” of beat 3 and even Zig himself tends to leave that out as well. Also you can add in the “&” of beat two on the hi-hat with the right hand. You can also play the hi hat with your left hand when playing the last double back beat on beat four and the “&” of four. This next variation is how Zig often plays this beat nowadays. Check out this YouTube clip where you can clearly see what he is doing. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZvsPlGqG0Bc>

Beat 5 variation 1



I hope you’ve enjoyed checking out these important Funk beats. I’ve put together this playlist so you can easily hear all of these classic tunes and you can easily play along to them as well.

<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/2tEDK2sMUW3M5l7xWOtdFO?si=vWyqJ3S-Ry2yvUpuskVIXg>

I highly suggest playing along to the recordings of these songs. That way you’ll hear the original drummer playing with the original feel. You may have to start practicing some of these at a slower tempo along to a metronome to get them to feel comfortable. Once you have them up to the tempo of the song you can play along. If you haven’t yet, please come check out [StantonMooreDrumAcademy.com](http://StantonMooreDrumAcademy.com) where I share my 30 years of drumming experience with my community on an interactive platform. Happy shedding, have fun and stay funky! SM