

## Time Is The Essence

BY PAUL ADAMY

**When you're really keeping good time, it's internalized—the groove comes from within.**



**T**ime. Not the time on the wall clock or your wristwatch, but the ability to keep a steady, rock-solid groove. For me, this concept has been the center of what makes music feel good since I was a student at the University of Bridgeport (UB). At first I didn't quite grasp what all the fuss was about. (What about the notes? So what if it rushes a bit?) In fact, the meaning of good time took a while to fully understand. A few key people and experiences helped me learn this lesson.

I had a great teacher at UB named Neil Slater (Neil left UB to run the world-famous Jazz Department at North Texas State), and I also had the good fortune of being a classmate of drummer extraordinaire Dave Weckl. From day one, Dave came to UB with determination, focus, perseverance—and great time. His practice routine alone was inspiring. We played together with the school's jazz band and in many other musical situations for four years.

Neil's thing was not rushing. He always made a big deal of keeping ballad tempos steady, encouraging us to subdivide in triplets. Neil and Dave were the first ones to teach me about subdividing beats. My ears learned to

find and gravitate toward the musicians in the band with the best time, who were subdividing consistent eighths or 16ths. It could be anyone in the rhythm section. It was so easy to play when I could lock in with Dave's steady foot, which is the foundation of his groove. (If a drummer's foot is not strong and steady, there's no way he or she can build a solid groove.)

Time is high on Dave's priority list. He is very sensitive to everyone's time, and it made me stop and consider why it was so important to him. He taught me the importance of recording yourself playing in any and all situations, an invaluable suggestion. (In fact, I'm still doing it today with my Sony MiniDisc recorder. Listen and learn!) While riding to and from gigs we'd listen to our performances, make suggestions, figure out what we should keep or lose, and most important, how was the time, the groove. Dave would also watch my tapping foot, and if my *foot* wasn't precisely with the music, he'd point that out!

Years later while subbing on the Broadway show *Smokey Joe's Café*, my foot would teach me another lesson. Louis St. Louis, the conductor on that show, was notorious for being hard on all the bass and drum subs. In fact, probably 15 or 20 of New York's best players were not asked back by Louis. Now, subbing on Broadway is tough enough, because you never get a rehearsal. You come in, check out what the regular guy plays, watch the conductor for cues, make a recording, get a copy of the book, and then go home and do your homework. You can come in and watch the show as many times as you need, but the first time you play, it's for real! So, there I was, for my first show sitting directly behind Louis, my adrenaline pumping. (Louis's good-luck wishes before the show consisted of, "Don't fuck up." Very reassuring!) As we got into the first number, my foot was tapping away with nervous energy and I was thinking, Okay, I'm playing well—so far, so good.

Well, my tapping foot sent waves through the shaky platform and right up Louis's chair into his body. He reached around, firmly grabbed my guilty leg, and yelled, "Stop tapping your \*!?!@ foot!" It wasn't that I was tapping out of time, it was that I was disturbing his groove. He wanted to feel the time from within, not from my foot. Also, Broadway shows don't always follow strict metronomic tempos (the conductor is always adjusting to the singers and dancers), and Louis couldn't find his own tempo with my foot acting like a click traveling through his body.

After that inauspicious start, I nailed the rest of the show—sans foot-tapping—and went on to sub for the rest of the show's Broadway run. But I learned a good lesson that day. Why should I tap my foot at all and try to follow *it* like it's some sort of metronome? When you're really keeping good time, it's internalized—the groove comes from within.

Feel the beat?

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