

# The Sideways Shuffle Rhythm

*An earnest attempt to name a familiar phrase*

There exists this ubiquitous, recognizable rhythmic phrase – you've all heard it. Sometimes it's a drum fill, a solo figure or an ensemble riff. It's certainly popular enough to warrant a name - but there isn't a name! Why isn't there a name? Don't all great concepts have a name? For instance:

..."Inertia" is the tendency of an object to keep the same velocity unless it is acted upon by an outside force.

..."Chicken soup" is a simmered chicken broth with chunks of chicken, and sometimes noodles and vegetables.

And so we have this ubiquitous, recognizable rhythmic phrase that we can only vaguely describe to one another like a bad turn in Pictionary until we say, "You know – that fill from that Phil Collins song!" before the other exclaims, "Oh yeah! That fill...thing..."

What I call the *Sideways Shuffle Rhythm* could be described as a repeated three-count sequence where we play *note-note-(rest)*, or alternatively "short note-long note." When introducing this to students I may conjure the sound of a person running with a limp. Hey – it works.

**It's Catchy:** For those who were present in the 80's when 'In the Air Tonight' by Phil Collins was released to the airwaves, you will recall Mr. Collins rocketing into the final chorus playing his infamous monster fill: *doo-blig doo-blig doo-blig doo-blig flum-flum*. In [Video 1](#) we see that even my *non-drummer* friends can recall this ubiquitous, recognizable rhythm with uncanny accuracy telling this author the nature of this rhythm is very catchy. Even catchy enough for Mike Tyson to pull it off in the movie *The Hangover*.

**It's not a triplet!:** I remember the first time I was asked if I knew *Crosstown Traffic* by Jimi Hendrix. I had certainly heard the song enough times so I figured no problem, however I assumed the intro was merely a *regular* shuffle rhythm. The result was not good. So the Sideways Shuffle Rhythm is not triplet-based as the name might imply, but a grouping that constantly overlaps the quarter-note downbeat grid in different spots.

**Exercise A** shows the shortest resolving version of the Sideways Shuffle Rhythm: a measure of 3/4 with each "3/16" group overlapping the downbeat four times until it resolves back to beat "1". *This is the least you need to know of this entire lesson.*

Before you even pick up the sticks – I very highly recommend you spend time **counting** the rhythm out loud while **clapping** the quarter-note downbeat. I demonstrate this in [Video 2](#). If you can count and clap a rhythm confidently, playing it is considerably easier!

Ultimately you'll want to know this pattern well enough to start it from *any point* in the phrase and be able to anticipate it's resolution by feel, so also be sure to count & clap the permutations in **exercises B & C**. After counting & clapping try playing **exercises A-C** with the SSR on the SD with BD and/or HH closes on the quarter note pulse. This is demonstrated in [Video 3](#), along with a metronome to keep the downbeats clear.

## The Fills

To this day the Sideways Shuffle Rhythm continues to be as relevant as ever and with no threat of an expiration in sight. It appears in the following list of songs as a **drum fill** with practically the exact same rhythmic permutation – the differences lie in how: each drummer plays out the 4<sup>th</sup> beat of the measure; how some use bass drum to *fill in* the empty spaces of the SSR, or use an 8<sup>th</sup> note hi-hat closes underneath. Perhaps one of the first appearances of the SSR as a fill is in a 1965 Motown hit '*Shotgun*' by Junior Walker & the All-Stars (**Ex. 1**).

Here are 10 songs that utilize the Sideways Shuffle Rhythm as a fill:

**Ex. 1** '*Shotgun*' by Junior Walker (Benny Benjamin, dr.) as intro fill and at the turnarounds

**Ex. 2** '*Magic Man*' by Heart (Kat Hendrikse, dr.) at 4:06

**Ex. 3** '*Home Sweet Home*' by Motley Crue (Tommy Lee, dr.) at 1:53

**Ex. 4** '*I'll Wait*' by Van Halen (Alex Van Halen, dr.) at 1:30

**Ex. 5** '*In the Air Tonight*' by Phil Collins at 3:41

**Ex. 6** 'Wheel In the Sky' by Journey (Aynsley Dunbar, dr.) at 2:57

**Ex. 7** 'Satellite' by Suze DeMarchi (Mike Levesque, dr.) at 1:17 & 2:32

**Ex. 8** 'The Distance' by Cake (Todd Roper, dr.) at :45 & 1:51

**Ex. 9** 'Crimson and Clover' by Joan Jett (Lee Crystal, dr.) at :23 & :54

This is a re-make of Tommy James & The Shondells tune from 1968. Not much older than 'Shotgun'!

**Ex. 10/10a** 'Surrender' by Cheap Trick (Bun E. Carlos, dr.) at 1:02 & 2:03 (1-measure phrasing at ) and 2:09 (2-measure phrasing))

## Ensemble Accents

The *SSR* phrasing is also heard as part of the main riff of a tune or as an ensemble accent pattern.

**Ex. 11** 'Back In Black' by AC/DC (Phil Rudd, dr.) begins the SSR on beat 2.

The following two tunes utilize both 1 & 2-measure phrases of the SSR. Remember the two-measure phrasing involves the core 3 beat SSR twice and then 2 beats of another:

**Ex. 12/12a** 'Are You Gonna Go My Way?' by Lenny Kravitz (LK, dr.) takes the SSR rhythm through the entire measure of 4/4 which returns one perfectly back to the beginning of the next measure with the lead hand.

**Ex. 13/13a/13b** 'Crosstown Traffic' by Jimi Hendrix (Mitch Mitchell, dr.) sports the 2-measure variation at the intro & end of the choruses and the 1-measure phrasing at the end of the verses. In the outro, the band alternates the 2 and 1-measure variations.

Here are additional songs where the Sideways Shuffle Rhythm is an ensemble riff *and* drum fill:

**Ex. 14** 'So Into You' by Atlanta Rhythm Section (Robert Nix, dr.) at 1:31 & 1:51

**Ex. 15** 'Dream On' by Aerosmith (Joey Kramer, dr.) at 3:10, between the double chorus.

So we know that four groups of "3/16" fit into a measure of 3/4 with the SSR but let's look at playing the entire 3/4 phrase over the three measures of 4/4! Again, the goal is to be able to play this phrase from any point within and to anticipate it's resolve.

**Exercise D** superimposes the *four* measures of the 3/4 SSR that fit in *three* measures of 4/4. In **Video 4**, I will play three passes of this - each pass using an orchestration borrowed from the prior song examples. In the first pass I will play the SSR down the toms similar to song ex. 1-10; in the next, I will play double-stops a' la *Crosstown Traffic*, and in the final pass I will play the SD/CR & BD splits found in the AC/DC and Kravitz tunes.

## Solo!..

**Ex. 16** How can we forget Ringo's only(?) solo break in 'The End'? He stamps out 8<sup>th</sup> notes on the bass drum underneath using the SSR as the building block for his breaks.

## Not just for drums..

**Ex. 17** 'Ain't No Sunshine When She's Gone' by Bill Withers: This is a great example of the *vocals* using the SSR going over the barline for 5 measures! Bill, you nut!

**Ex. 18** 'Venus' by Shocking Blue – guitar intro at intro and outro (2:33)

In closing, I hope you agree that "Sideways Shuffle Rhythm" is a fair moniker for such an exciting rhythmic phrase and that the collection of real-world applications in one article reinforces it's identity for those of you that it once seemed elusive!

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# The Sideways Shuffle Rhythm



## The Exercises

Not a triplet shuffle!

Ex. A 1 e + a 2 e + a 3 e + a Ex. B 1 e + a 2 e + a 3 e + a Ex. C 1 e + a 2 e + a 3 e + a

[each 3/16 group is a dotted eighth note apart]

## The Fills

Ex. 1 *'Shotgun'* by Junior Walker (Benny Benjamin, dr.)

Ex. 2 *'Magic Man'* by Heart (Kat Hendrikse, dr.)

Ex. 3 *'Home Sweet Home'* by Motley Crue (Tommy Lee, dr.)

Ex. 4 *'I'll Wait'* by Van Halen (Alex Van Halen, dr.)

Ex. 5 *'In the Air Tonight'* by Phil Collins

Ex. 6 *'Wheel In the Sky'* by Journey (Aynsley Dunbar, dr.)

Ex. 7 *'Crimson and Clover'* by Joan Jett (Lee Crystal, dr.)

Ex. 8 *'The Distance'* by Cake (Todd Roper, dr.)

Ex. 9 *'Satellite'* by Suze DeMarchi (Mike Levesque, dr.)

Ex. 10 end 1st & 2nd chorus *'Surrender'* by Cheap Trick (Bun E. Carlos, dr.)

Ex. 10a (2-measure SSR phrasing) end of 2nd chorus

# Ensemble Accents

**Ex. 11** 'Back In Black', by AC/DC (Phil Rudd, dr.)

2 e + a 3 e + a 4 e + a

[starts at beginning]

**Ex. 12** 'Are You Gonna Go My Way?', by Lenny Kravitz (LK, dr.)

1 e + a 2 e + a 3 e + a 4 e + a

[:46]

**Ex. 12a**

count by phrase: 1 e a 2 + a 3 e + 1 e a 2 + a 3 e + 1 e a 2 +  
actual count: 1 e a 2 + a 3 e + 4 e a 1 + a 2 e + 3 e a 4 +

[1:42]

**Ex. 13** 'Crosstown Traffic', by Jimi Hendrix (Mitch Mitchell, dr.)

1 e a 2 + a e + 4 e a 1

[35]

**Ex. 13a** outro

song intro/end of choruses

[1:41]

**Ex. 14** 'So Into You', by Atlanta Rhythm Section (Robert Nix, dr.)

[1:31] [1:51]

**Ex. 15** 'Dream On', by Aerosmith (Joey Kramer, dr.)

[3:10]

