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An Offering Of Some Alternate Ideas

BY BUTCH NORTON

HELLO, MY NAME IS BUTCH and I want to open your mind to some new ways of looking at the kit. I've been experimenting for years, and I'd like to invite you to do the same. It's simple: stop doing the normal things you always do, get out of your rut, and energize and stimulate with new avenues in order to find new ways to do what we think is the same old thing.



1. EXPERIMENT - GO OUT OF YOUR COMFORT ZONE

If you play with rock sticks, try jazz sticks. Go to the opposite extreme. If you like harder hickory sticks pick up a pair of lighter maple sticks, and vice versa.

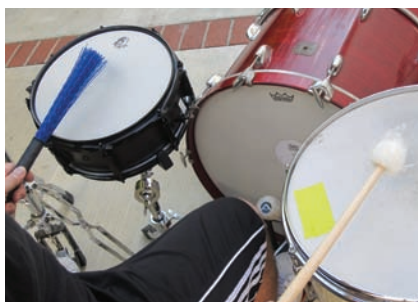
Don't go to the same bin and pick up the same sticks you always play. Take this opportunity to try something "left field." Purchase one pair of something new. I love the sound of my timpani mallets playing a Cajun train beat on the snare (and the comments from producers and concert-goers is always positive).

Look to other styles/genres for new avenues of inspiration. When I go to the drum shop or look at the catalogues, I investigate and "test drive" the latest orchestral, corps, Latin, African, Japanese, experimental, etc.

Play with a 3/8 timbale stick in the left hand and wire brush in the right hand.



Play with a monster brush in your left hand and a timpani mallet in your right hand.



Use a taiko stick in your left hand and a talking drum stick in your right. New combinations will create new feelings and new sounds. Give it a try.



3. FIND, DISCOVER AND CREATE YOUR OWN BEATERS.

Look around you and turn everyday items into useful tools.

I found some wok brushes at Cost Plus. They are heavy and make a WIDE backbeat sound.



Kitchen utensils such as: wooden spoons, wire whips, metal or wooden skewers, chop sticks, and meat pounders can be turned into bass drum beaters or floor tom surdo sticks.



Hardware stores are a natural for finding new stick ideas.

I have a wide assortment of different size and different weight pairs of hammers that I use on various metal pieces that I sometimes put up around my kit.

Be aware of new possibilities when wandering through auto parts stores, toy stores, fabric/sewing stores, etc.



2. TRY ODD COMBINATIONS OF STICKS

Play with a 3S stick in your left hand while you play with a 7A stick in your right hand. Embrace the imbalance. Your normal ingrained chops will be perplexed. Go with this new feeling. Find music and situations that this will work for. Try one of your regular beats with this combination. Listen to the new sound and think about a situation this might fit in.



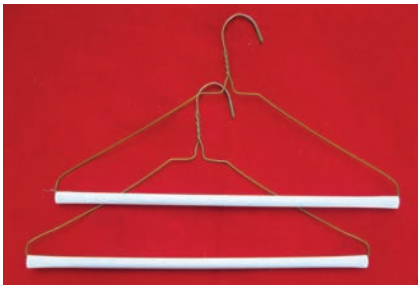
4. RECYCLE, REUSE, RETHINK

I have orange trees in my backyard. So I cut up different lengths of small branches and peeled off the outer bark. They are the size of timbale sticks, with a little more give and whip in them. What kind of trees are near you?



I love “pants hangers.” You can pull out the white cardboard piece and use them as sticks (that was my first pair of sticks). You can also wrap the cardboard sticks with duct/gaffer tape for extra durability and strength.

Then you get out your pliers or heavy duty wire cutters and chop up the wire part of the hanger to make thin triangle or multi-purpose beaters. You can get one pair of really nice eight and a half inch strikers per hanger.



Find some bamboo/rattan (straight pieces) and cut them into 16 1/2” lengths. Great snappy sticks. Bamboo/rattan is very flexible yet sturdy, so you can really get some great whipping action going.



You can turn many broken sticks into new and different kinds of beaters. The multi-dowels in Vater Splash Sticks splinter/shatter and ultimately start to deteriorate. I take a hack saw and make a cut where there is no shattering, making the stick about 3/4 of the original length. It turns it into more of a finger type stick, which is great for quick sharp sounds around the kit.



You know what this is? It’s the shaft and ball from an old Slingerland tom mount that fell apart on me years ago. The ball is super-glued to the shaft, is about 20” long, and is very solid. The “shaft-ball mallet” works great on bass drums, surdos and floor toms.



5. BASS DRUM BEATERS

You must experiment with different beaters on your bass drum. It will mess with your feel, which is a good thing. AGAIN: GET OUT OF YOUR COMFORT ZONE. This will only broaden your awareness and push you to try different techniques to achieve different and NEW results. You already can do what you do. Time to go somewhere else. Remember what it was like when you first played that great groove or lick? It’s time to get out of your rut or routine. Get back to that “first time” feeling of discovery.



A small little case that carries tippers, pencils, homemade steel drum mallets, chop sticks with rubber band wrapping, Chinese wood block mallets, small table gong beaters, wooden spice masher mallets, miniature drum sticks, etc.



Three of my duffle bags that I’ll take to sessions. Bass drum beaters (hand/orch/marching), marimba mallets, vibes mallets, bell mallets, superball skewers, percussion bows, timpani mallets, etc.



These are the seven main stick bags that I’ll bring to a session and sometimes on a gig.



The collecting of mallets and sticks should be ongoing. You will never be done building your arsenal of beating implements.

6. GET A GRIP

Ever heard of the Stevens grip or the Burton grip?

Ever seen someone play a surdo, a talking drum or watched an orchestral percussion section?

How about a drum corp competition or a gamelan ensemble, a berimbau player or experienced a rudimental Swiss drummer?

Have you seen Stomp or Blue Man Group, watched a tavil player or seen a tabla master?

Have you gone to see anything other than the normal drummers you know and admire?

Different styles of percussionists/drummers and the way they hold their sticks, attack their instrument, and create and get sounds from the sources they are beating on are all valuable lessons for us drum set players.

The drum set is a combo platter of all that came before and all that is going on now! Examine other’s unique way of expression and incorporate some of those new ideas into your own style. We all copy and imitate, but it is those who take an idea and put their own spin on it that keep getting the gigs, *and* get the satisfaction of feeling vital and alive. ✨