

ALTITUDE DRUMMING

Volume 10 - Art & Musicianship

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Art & Musicianship

Altitude Drumming – Volume 10

- FREE EXCERPT -

Confident Drummer Series

by Eugenio Ventimiglia

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Art & Musicianship

Are you a drummer or a musician who plays drums?

As drummers, it's easy to get caught up in fast chops, complex rhythms, and flashy licks.

And yes, that stuff is exciting. I love checking out the latest jaw-dropping fill from my favorite players as much as anyone.

But here's the thing: when technical skills start to dictate our musical choices, they stop being a means to an end and become the end itself.

That's when we risk losing something essential. Because playing drums isn't just about being skilled. It's about being musical.

Using the drums as a way to connect, express emotion, and communicate something meaningful.

Playing only what the music needs – not a single note more – in service of the song.

Technique and theory are essential, but they're not the destination. They're just tools to help us express something deeper.

Music isn't just about what we play – it's about how and why we play it. It's about creating art that has an emotional impact.

While some musicians are naturally tuned into this, most of us have to develop it deliberately.

That's why I created this method: to help you grow not only in your technique, but also in your awareness, your artistic identity, and your ability to express yourself musically.

Inside, we'll explore concepts, philosophies, and practical tools that go straight to the heart of your playing - and are often overlooked:

- What it means to play, to create, and to make art with the drums.
- The physical, logical, and emotional sides of drumming.
- Your sound, style, and feel as a drummer.
- Sound exploration and experimentation.
- Self-expression, presence, creativity, and awareness.
- Improvisation, soloing, interplay, and interpretation.
- Realizing your artistic vision.
- How to practice, improve technique, and overcome both technical and creative blocks.
- How to develop musicality and play a song.
- Optimizing your performance.
- Understanding and avoiding different kinds of mistakes.

My goal was to bring together high-quality material that could truly help drummers grow into musicians who happen to play the drums.

The full method includes over 140 pages and covers more than 30 topics. It's not your typical drum book (actually there are no notes in it).

It's for those who feel that these deeper aspects of music really matter.

In this free excerpt, I'd like to share a few selected passages from chapters that are quite different from one another:

- What It Means to Make Art.
- Awareness.
- Overcoming the Artist's Block.
- Soloing
- The Different Kinds of Mistakes.

I arranged these pages to serve as a kind of mini introductory course on the more philosophical aspects of drumming.

As a reference the table of contents of the method is included at the end of this PDF.

To find out more and to buy the method you can visit the dedicated page here:

['Art & Musicianship' - Altitude Drumming - Volume 10](#)

What it Means to Make Art:

Art is a form of expression through which humans give voice to the invisible, revealing what lies beyond the surface, using a specific medium or discipline.

At its core, art creates a meaningful exchange between the creator and the viewer, a communication that goes beyond words.

Ideally, art expresses the unknowable – whatever that may mean to each of us. The artist becomes a vessel, channeling something deeper through spontaneous, unfiltered expression.

In its purest form, art has no agenda. It exists without purpose or goal. It is creation for its own sake, a raw and honest act of expression.

True art arises from a place beyond the mind. It stems from a higher awareness and invites those who engage with it to touch that same inner space.

A work of art captures a specific vision, intuition, emotion, or insight from its creator – and is often infused with profound beauty.

Through the artist's hands, this beauty becomes visible and accessible to others.

It's important to realize that the beauty was already there. The artist simply reveals it – bringing it into focus and awakening in others the awareness of such higher form of beauty which might otherwise go unnoticed.

As musicians, we're offered this same opportunity: to create, capture, and share beauty, emotion, and inspiration.

Often we do this through live performance. Sometimes that performance is recorded – like a photograph of a fleeting moment – and can be revisited and appreciated by listeners over time.

As drummers, our tool for expression is the percussion of drums and cymbals. Our ability to communicate depends on how effectively we shape a musical message – an emotion, an idea, a story - using these elements.

When playing becomes art, it comes from the most authentic, deep, and spontaneous part of the self. Like all true art, it reveals something essential – where beauty resides.

This kind of expression flows in direct proportion to the absence of filters, thoughts, and rational control.

Many of us, and countless artists, have experienced and can confirm this firsthand: when we're truly connected to that inner source, everything flows effortlessly, as if from a pure spring we can't explain but instantly recognize as truth.

When this connection is present, what we play can't help but carry beauty, inspiration, energy, and depth.

In those moments, we're touching what the ancient Greeks called the muses: divine symbols of pure artistic inspiration and ultimate truth.

In fact, the very word "music" comes from these mythological figures.

That's one of the reasons why being a musician is such a unique privilege, a rare opportunity to connect with something within ourselves that would otherwise remain dormant.

Through music, we meet that part of us in real time, in the present moment, expressing it and letting it reach both ourselves and our audience.

And in doing so, we create inspiration, emotion, beauty, and intensity. In a word: art.

Awareness:

It's often said that nothing can truly be enjoyed unless it's experienced in the present moment – summed up perfectly by the phrase “here and now”.

Being present and being aware are concepts that go far beyond the scope of this method, but one of the things I love most about playing drums is how much it teaches us about life.

In many ways, drumming can be seen as a metaphor for life itself.

The challenges to overcome, the discipline required, the pulse of rhythm, the expressiveness, the beauty, the tension and release, the passion and energy, the constant evolution: these are just a few examples of how our instrument mirrors the dynamics we experience in everyday life.

Perhaps the most important lesson of all is this: there is no way to play well - and to live well - other than being fully present.

Think about it: that's part of what makes being on stage so powerful.

You're forced to be completely in the moment. You're in front of an audience, there's no room for distractions, and you're deeply connected to the music and the emotions it carries.

You let it sweep you away.

It's no coincidence that when that level of pressure and immersion is present, we often play at our best – as many musicians will confirm from experience.

Awareness means being fully present, focused, and clear about everything that's happening.

We'll dive deeper into this in the next chapter, and also later when talking about playing with other musicians, but here I'd like to focus on something more specific: awareness of what we're playing, understanding of the part we are performing, and a clear grasp of the song's structure.

Here are a few exercises to develop this kind of awareness:

- Try playing while focusing your attention on just one limb. Play the full groove or pattern, but consciously listen to only one voice in what you're executing.

- Memorize the structure of a song, then play it from memory – no sheet music, no audio track, no external cues, just you and the song. Don't leave out a single detail.

Form, dynamics, transitions – everything should be crystal clear. Not because you're waiting for the vocalist to come in, but because you know the song inside and out.

- Improvise anything – a rhythm, a phrase, an idea – and then try to repeat it exactly as you played it.

Sticking, orchestration, embellishments: note for note, exactly the same. Start with 1-bar phrases, then 2 bars, and if you can, go for 4 or even 8 bars.

These exercises may seem simple, but they're challenging – and incredibly effective.

They'll naturally guide you toward mastering your own level of focus and presence, helping you stay clear and grounded in what you're doing.

This state is known across many fields and disciplines as being in the flow.

And it's one of the most rewarding experiences you can have as a musician.

Overcoming the Artist's Block:

As we have seen, creativity is a deeply personal experience, which comes from within and requires the right mental and emotional space to truly flourish.

One of the biggest challenges many artists face is trying to be creative on demand – especially in professional settings – when we're simply not in the right headspace or lacking inspiration.

Creativity often arrives unexpectedly, like bubbles of insight rising from nowhere. It can feel completely out of our control.

We never really know what will come, how it will come, or when.

Yet we learn to trust it. We've experienced it before, and we know it's in us. We are expressive and creative by nature. Otherwise, we wouldn't be playing music at all.

Still, it's not uncommon to go through periods – sometimes brief, sometimes painfully long – when that connection to our creative source seems lost.

For anyone who lives and breathes art, and who relies on creative expression to feel fully alive - and even make a living - knowing how to face and navigate these blocks is essential.

Even better if we can prevent them altogether.

The first and most powerful thing we can do is reconnect with the deeper reasons we started making music in the first place.

We all remember those early moments: when we fell in love with our instrument, when we knew deep down that music was something we had to pursue with passion.

Those feelings, that need to express, communicate, and create, were our fuel then - and they can be again whenever inspiration fades.

Why do you love playing the drums? The answer to that question holds the key to getting through the hard times.

If you can reconnect to your “why” every time you need it, you’ll never be without direction.

It’s worth taking the time to reflect on the depth of your motivation.

The stronger and more rooted your reasons are – the more meaningful and aligned with who you really are – the more they’ll support and inspire you when challenges arise.

If your reasons are shallow or external, they may not hold up. In fact, if your motivations aren’t anchored in something deeper, you may reach a point of crisis that causes you to question your entire artistic journey or even consider giving it up altogether.

If that happens, don’t panic. It can be a powerful opportunity, a chance to rediscover who you are, get clearer about your path, and strengthen your artistic foundation.

As a matter of fact, the most effective way to overcome creative blocks is actually self-awareness.

On one level, it means learning how to observe your own thoughts and emotions with clarity, so you can recognize when doubts, insecurities, or fatigue are starting to take hold.

On a deeper level, it means knowing who you truly are: your mission, your core values, and the deeper motivations that drive your art and give it meaning.

One of the biggest misconceptions is that we already know ourselves. We assume it’s obvious - but often, it’s not.

Soloing:

The ability to play a solo, while not an essential requirement to be a great musician, carries a unique charm and power that's hard to resist.

Especially for us drummers – since drums tap into something instinctive and ancestral within us – soloing can become the ultimate form of expression, communication, and deep connection with ourselves and with our audience.

And if, as I hope is true for all of us, the reason we make music is to express ourselves, move people, and communicate something meaningful, then soloing is one of the most powerful tools we have to do that.

The main types of drum solo can be summarized as:

- Open: completely free, even from a steady pulse.
- In time: free in phrasing, but played in time.
- Over structure: improvised within a musical form.
- Trading: alternating set numbers of bars with other instruments.
- Vamp: based on repeating figures looped by the band.
- Over figures: based on changing rhythmic figures throughout a longer form.

Regardless of the solo type, there are always two key levels to focus on:

- What we play, and how we play it.

It's essential to have a clear idea of what we're playing – and then pay attention to how we play it: the feel, the subdivision, the dynamics, the intention (ahead or behind the beat), articulation, and orchestration.

That's important, because these are the tools we use to create a specific emotional effect.

The clearer we are about the phrase we're expressing, and the more control we have over these musical elements, the more accurately and powerfully we can convey what we feel.

- Why we play it.

Are we fully present and immersed in the music – as explained: aware, in the flow – so that every note we play has purpose and emotional weight?

Or are we stuck in our head, thinking about how to squeeze in that cool lick we've been practicing?

This principle should always apply, but in solos it's absolutely essential: whatever we play should come from the spontaneity of what we're feeling in that moment, and from what's happening in the music – not from a calculated idea or a "goal" we've attached to our solo.

A solo needs to be a dialogue – with the music, or with ourselves if it's a solo drum piece.

The only goal is to express ourselves, make music, feel something, and move others – serving the music first.

And the only way to do that is by being as instinctive as possible. That's why effective improvisation is so important.

As we mentioned earlier, here's the paradox: in order to be instinctive in a meaningful and musical way, we first need to study and practice systematically – with discipline and logic.

(We'll go deeper into that in the chapter on how to practice)

The key idea for approaching any solo is this: tell a story.

That's the same principle behind any great composition, or work of art in general.

The Different Kinds of Mistakes:

Let's start with an important idea: the only real mistake is playing in a way that lacks musicality.

If there's genuine music in what we're doing, mistakes become irrelevant.

With that in mind, let's dive into this fascinating topic and explore the many layers involved in making mistakes on the drums – and the strategies we can use to deal with them.

For many musicians, making a mistake triggers far too much anxiety.

This often stems from an irrational connection between their sense of self-worth and the idea of flawless performance.

Even when we make an obvious mistake, the most important thing is our attitude: it's not the mistake itself that counts – it's how we handle it.

A lot of drummers obsess over playing perfectly, trying never to miss a single note.

But what they don't realize is that even the most noticeable mistake becomes insignificant if we immediately refocus and dive back into the music with full presence and intention.

In fact, the real issue is often not the mistake itself, but what comes right after: tension, distraction, self-criticism, fear of making more mistakes, fear of judgment, and hesitation caused by all that internal noise.

Just like in other performance-related fields, we often become our own worst enemies – without even realizing it.

That one mistake, which probably went unnoticed by most of the audience, gets blown out of proportion by our reaction.

Whether it shows on our face or in our playing, the reaction draws attention to the mistake and makes it bigger than it really was – creating exactly the kind of disappointment we were trying to avoid.

Ironically, the real mistake is often not the initial slip, but our uncontrolled response to it.

One thing I've learned from the greatest drummers (yes, they make mistakes too) is to simply ignore it.

Don't give the mistake any power. Don't let it drag you into a negative spiral – which can be especially dangerous in the middle of a performance.

This shows the power of belief and mindset.

If we make a mistake but stay completely calm and composed, the people listening – and even the musicians playing with us – will probably think they misheard it, or at least they'll admire the way we stayed balanced and unshaken.

On the flip side, if we're anxious, tense, or overly concerned, even the smallest hesitation – even if we don't actually make a mistake – will be perceived as one.

Ultimately, it all comes down to where we choose to place our focus.

As mentioned earlier, it's not about playing perfectly. What really matters is how much music we're putting into what we play.

If the music is alive, imperfections lose their weight. In fact, within reasonable limits, imperfections can actually add character to a performance, make it more interesting, and help express our unique voice.

But if the music isn't there, no level of technical perfection will ever make up for that.

Playing flawlessly, in that case, becomes meaningless – aside from the satisfaction of showing technical control.

Now let's take a look at the different kinds of mistakes – from the most obvious to the more subtle ones that we may not have even recognized as mistakes until now.

Here's a complete list:

- Technical execution mistake.
- Rhythmic mistake.
- Song form mistake.
- Dynamics mistake.
- Timing mistake.
- Intention mistake.
- Feel mistake.
- Musicality mistake.
- Stylistic mistake.
- Sound choice mistake.
- Dropping a stick.
- Perception mistake.

Using the physical/logical/emotional model we've discussed, I encourage you to identify which of these errors fall into each category.

Let's now explore each one in more detail.

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