

The African *Ewe Gadzo Ganugbagba*

An ancient rhythm with modern applications

It is a popular belief that Jazz is the merging of African rhythm and European harmonic concepts, which are filtered through the blues and the African American church tradition. Even if that is only partly true, it is still reasonable that the study and application of African rhythmic schemes deepens the rhythmic foundation of jazz musicians at *every* level. The complete study of African rhythm is a deep well indeed and far more expansive than this space (and my knowledge) will allow. I have chosen one rhythm that has a direct application to the jazz musician. This rhythm is called *Ewe Gadzo Ganugbagba*. Some readers may be familiar with this same rhythm as the *bell* or *hoe blade* part to the Afro-Cuban folkloric rhythm *Bembé*.

The *Gadzo Ganugbagba* is written:

Example 1-A



If one were to conceive of this in 4/4 time it would be:

Example 1-B



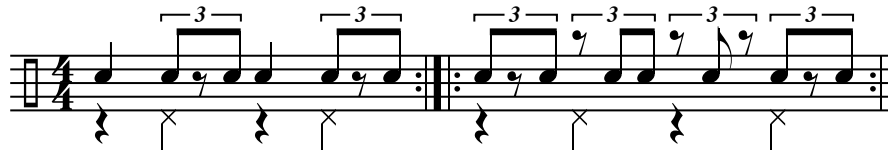
Jazz eighth notes at medium tempo are basically the first and third partial of a triplet. The traditional jazz cymbal pattern is notated:

Example 1-C



Try going back and forth between the cymbal pattern and the *Gadzo Ganugbagba* while one hand or hi-hat foot taps 2 and 4.

Example 2-A



Now make this an 8-bar phrase by repeating each measure four times. My personal experience and that of my students has shown that this simple 8-bar exercise repeated several minutes deepens one's time and sense of swing. Let's look why. One reason is that with the *Gadzo Ganugbagba* on beats 2 and 3 we are now responsible for the second partial of the triplet as opposed to only the first and third partials representing swung eighth notes.

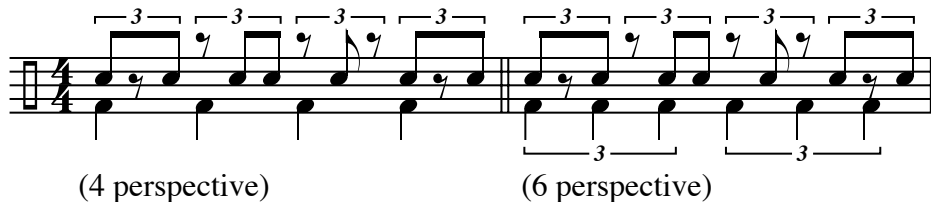
Another interesting aspect of the *Gadzo Ganugbagba* is the duality of pulse from a duple and triple perspective. I have previously presented the *Gadzo Ganugbagba* from the duple perspective of 4/4. But it can also be perceived in a triple perspective of 6/4 as follows:

Example 2-B



A good way to develop the ability for dual perspective is to alternate as follows:

Example 2-C



Notice how in the 6 perspective the first three quarter-note triplets fall with the notes of the *Gadzo Ganugbagba*, and in the last three quarter-note triplets the *Gadzo Ganugbagba* falls behind one eighth-note triplet partial. I find it fascinating how a one-measure rhythm can have so much depth and complexity.

So now we can look at the possibility of using the *Gadzo Ganugbagba* as a “ride pattern” ostinato with other rhythms. First let’s take two swung eighth notes beginning with each beat of the *Gadzo Ganugbagba*.

Example 3



Example 3-A



Example 3-B



Example 3-C



Example 3-D



Making use of space on the down beats adds even more interest.

Example 3-E



Drum set players who have used Ted Reed's, *Progressive Steps to Syncopation* book can add a lot of variety to their practice by simply substituting the traditional ride pattern on the cymbal with the *Gadzo Ganugbagba*. All of the exercises made famous by Alan Dawson and preserved in John Ramsey's *Alan Dawson Method* book will be freshened by simply substituting the ride cymbal beat with the *Gadzo Ganugbagba*.

(Exercise as originally in Ted Reed:)



A few examples of Ted Reed's Syncopation on page 38 (or page 37 for we more mature drummers) are as follows:

Example 4-A

Now the written quarter notes are played on the bass drum while the eighths are played on the snare drum.

Example 4-B

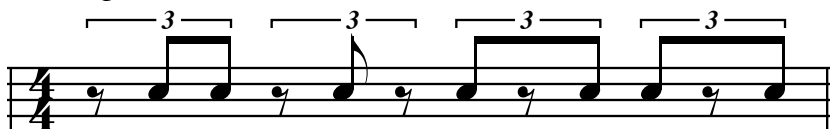
Anyone familiar with these original exercises can apply this concept to the dozens of exercises that have been in the drummers' practice canon for years. This will completely transform the exercises. If you are practicing these for the first time I urge you to start on pages 4 and 5 where the lines are just quarter notes. You will be surprised how hip the quarter-note lines sound when combined with the *Gadzo Ganugbagba*. Then progress to pages 30-32 and finally to pages 34-45. Another interesting idea is to apply this concept to existing tunes that are at least in part defined by their rhythms. Examples of such tunes are Charlie Parker's "Billy's Bounce," Monk's "Straight No Chaser," and many, many more.

In the same way that jazz musicians transpose tunes to different keys it is possible to transpose the *Gadzo Ganugbagba* to 12 different starting positions, one for each triplet partial. I will give examples of starting on each of the downbeats in 4/4 time.

Example 5-A



Example 5-B



Example 5-C



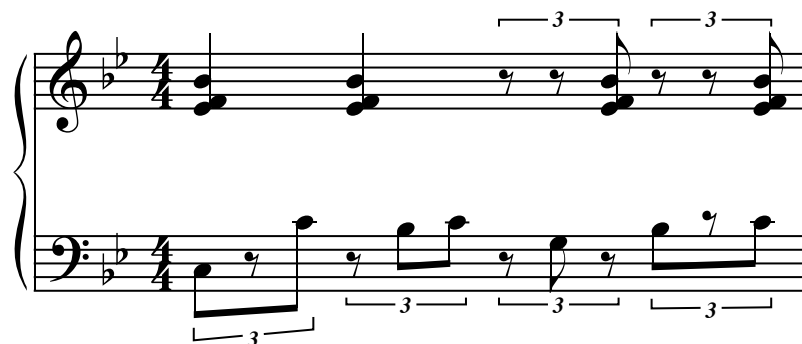
Example 5-D



An interesting coordination exercise would be to play any two of these with both hands. Drummers might want to play all four with all four limbs.

Lastly, I have found that the *Gadzo Ganugbagba* makes an interesting bass line rhythm. Pianists may want to explore the possibility of using some of these coordination exercises with the left hand playing a bass line and the right hand comping. I have found this especially effective in minor modal applications.

Example 6



I hope that his brief exploration of an ancient rhythm is both interesting and useful. I have only scratched the surface of the possibilities and look forward to hearing your comments and any new variations you may come up with.

Tom Teasley is Chair of percussion at Levine School of Music. He is also on the faculty of the University of the District of Columbia. He presents solo percussion concerts throughout the U.S. and Europe. He is also percussionist/composer for Word-Beat with Charles Williams. He is an active endorser/clinician for Vic Firth, Sabian, Remo, Latin Percussion and Yamaha Concert Percussion. He can be reached at tom@tomteasley.com.

Special thanks to Judith Korey and the UDC Music program for help with music notation for this article.