

CHAPTER 5

Execute the Beat

“It’s a great thing about being a musician; you don’t stop until the day you die, you can improve. So it’s a wonderful thing to do.”

Marcus Miller

When approaching the drums, first and foremost, I want to make sure my time is rock solid. Whether I’m entertaining in a relaxed atmosphere like the one at Fat-Kat’s in Houston, or in the studio with the legendary Yo-Yo Ma, no matter what style or setting, my focus remains the same. If I’m not predicting the right feel and applying the right groove pulse rhythms, I cannot execute a solid beat. If I’m entertaining or laying down tracks in a studio environment, I always approach the music with a high level of integrity and encourage my students to do the same. Remember, playing a good solid beat is the key to being an excellent drummer.

Changes in the music are your clues to start the four-question checklist over again.

1. Can I identify the time signature?
2. Can I predict the feel?
3. How do I decide what groove pulse rhythm to play?
4. Can I execute the beat?

It’s useful to ask yourself these questions as well:

1. Am I supporting the other band members and honoring the music?
2. Am I responding to changes within the music, or am I trying to force a change in it?

The latter should be treated with great care. If you’re the type of person on the bandstand who is constantly steamrolling over everyone else and trying to force the band to make changes, chances are you are curbing, smothering, or even worse, suffocating the other musicians on stage. Make sure you are not overplaying. When in doubt leave it out!