

# **Study Guide for Funk Style Drumming**

Funk is a style of music that began in the 1960's with the music of James Brown (and his two main drummers, Clyde Stubblefield and John "Jabo" Starks) and the band, Sly and the Family Stone, and continued to evolve with the help of bands such as Kool and the Gang, Parliament Funkadelic, The Meters, Tower of Power, and many others. Funk is a very diverse style of music, encompassing elements of Jazz, Soul, R&B, and even Punk and Rap in later years.

For a more detailed look into this genre of music:

<https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Funk>

## **Drumming/ Rhythmic Basics**

The foundation of Funk is the 8th or 16th note pulse, which is usually played on the Hihats or Ride cymbal. The Beats (Grooves) in this style are characterized by consistent and repetitive patterns. This is what makes the music so danceable! There is often a lot of syncopation used (especially in the bass drum parts), while the snare drum plays a "Backbeat" on beats 2 and 4, along with sometimes including softer (Ghosted) notes in addition to the accented Backbeats.

Some funk grooves utilize a displaced backbeat. A couple examples are the songs "Chameleon" and the All-State Jazz audition song, "Computer". They both feature a backbeat on the last 16th note of beat "1" (the "Ta" or "A", depending on how you count 16th notes), which replaces the normal backbeat on beat "2". The backbeat on beat "4" is unchanged.

The use of syncopation, "busier" patterns and beats, and often slower tempos, are the main differences between Funk and Rock drumming.

When playing funk music, focus on keeping the groove/ beat very repetitive. The music is usually phrased in multiples of 4 measures. It's common for a verse, chorus, or other song section to be 8 or 16 measures long. Fills should be incorporated musically and not overplayed. They are usually included at the end of a musical section, to help link the music to the next section, for example... a fill that helps lift the music from the end of a verse into the chorus.

## **Dynamic Considerations**

From a standpoint of dynamic balance on the drumset, Funk and Rock are similar.

The bass drum and snare backbeats should be the loudest and most dominant voices on the drumset. The groove of this style of music really depends on the low end frequencies of the bass drum and the solid backbeat on the snare drum. The backbeat on the snare drum is often played as a rimshot.

The cymbals and toms (when used for fills) should be considerably softer, usually a dynamic level, or more, below the bass and snare. “Ghosted” notes on the snare drum should be played even softer than that, maybe 2 dynamic levels softer than the bass drum and snare backbeats.

## **Listening Examples**

### **Spotify**

**<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/5STTRFvIYjo2aFK0KeekIL?si=OKmFxRvFSdOINodMPB6TqQ>**

**“Funky Drummer- Pt. 1 & 2”**- James Brown, with Clyde Stubblefield on drums. This is one of the most sample drum beats of all time. The beat is played with continuous single-hand 16th notes on the hihat. The actual sampled drum breakdown happens around the 5:21 mark of the song.

**“Chameleon”**- Herbie Hancock, with Harvey Mason on drums. This is one of the earliest and most important incorporations of funk into jazz music. Coincidentally, the beat for this song is similar to the All-State audition song, “Computer”.

**“Pass the Peas”**- James Brown, with Jabo Starks on drums. This is a famous groove of Jabo’s. The beat has a slight swung 16th note feel to the ghost notes on the snare drum. This kind of feel is often called “Swunky”. Swing and funk combined...

**“Cissy Strut”**- The Meters, with Joseph “Zigaboo” Modeliste on drums. This is a groundbreaking song and groove that epitomizes New Orleans style Funk. The feel of the song, along with a lot of New Orleans music, is in-between straight and swung.

**“Fire on the Bayou”**- The Meters, with Zigaboo on drums. This song has a straighter feel to it, and features a displaced, syncopated backbeat on the “and” or “te” of beat “4”. Also, the cowbell part, played by percussionist Cyril Neville, is super funky!!

**“Don't Change Horses (In the Middle of a Stream)”**- Tower of Power, with David Garibaldi on drums. “T.O.P” is one of the main funk bands to come out of the 1970’s. A big part of their sound is their horn section, along with David’s innovative drumming.

This song features a more straight ahead funk groove. But, be sure to check out other songs of theirs, including the famous “What is Hip?”. That song is very representative of his use of “linear drumming” and rudiments in the context of beats.

## **Starting Points for Exploring on Youtube**

### **James Brown- “Cold Sweat”**



This is a famous song by James Brown and groove by Clyde Stubblefield. The video is a great look at the “force of nature” that these guys were. Also, be sure to catch the drum solo. The “lead up” to it starts at around the 6:00 mark. James was famous for calling for drum solos by saying “Let’s give the drummer some!”

## Lil' John Roberts breaks down Clyde Stubblefield's "Funky Drummer"



Lil' John Roberts is one of the most well-known contemporary Pop, Funk, and Hip-Hop drummers. Here he sheds some light on Clyde Stubblefield's and John "Jabo" Starks' drumming.

**Next we'll learn some of these grooves, and start creating our own!!**