



The Spivack/Wilson Approach to Technique

Part 4: Advanced Concepts

by Richard Martinez and Kevin Crabb

As you've seen throughout this series of articles, technique is built on learning a series of small, progressive steps that become more and more complex. First we discussed how to hold the sticks and how to make the basic wrist-turn stroke. Then we presented a common language to describe drumming technique using a lever system (force, resistance, lever arm, and fulcrum).

Using those principles, we presented Murray Spivack's seven basic strokes, which we then applied to the rolls and various rudiments. We showed how different strokes can be taught sequentially, in what Spivack called continuity and Richard Wilson referred to as chronological order. As Spivack explained, "It makes the whole thing much simpler, because one stroke leads you into the next, so they don't get anywhere near as complicated as you would imagine. It's a much simpler way to understand what's going on."

Continuing in our order of development, in this final article we're going to present a few advanced techniques.

WILSON'S THROW

Wilson and Spivack approached the throw (stroke) a bit differently. Though this is not exactly an advanced technique, applying Wilson's method will be useful for some of the material in this article. You can also apply it to what we discussed in the previous installments.

Here's how to execute Wilson's throw. Starting with the stick parallel to the drum and the bead about 1" from the surface, turn your wrist down and—without letting the bead touch the drumhead—allow the wrist to leverage the arm up and the elbow out. Then cock up the wrist and throw the stick toward the head.

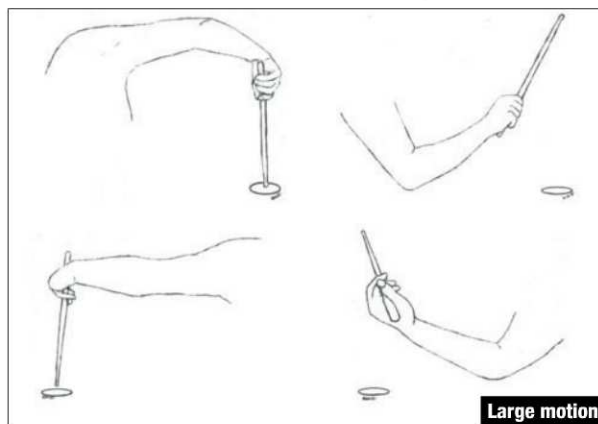
The differences in approach between Wilson and Spivack include:

1. The type of force used to initiate the throw. For Wilson, the force is muscular, while Spivack used gravity (or release) to create force.
 2. The distance you continue to turn the wrist (pronation) before cocking the stick back to throw. Whereas Spivack would bend the wrist and quickly cock the stick, Wilson would continue to turn down the wrist until maximum pronation was achieved. Note that in both cases the elbow or upper arm moves outward from the body.
- To help you feel the "up" motion in Wilson's method, try holding one stick parallel to the playing surface. With the other hand, place your index finger in front of the bead. Imagine that where the stick meets the finger is a fixed

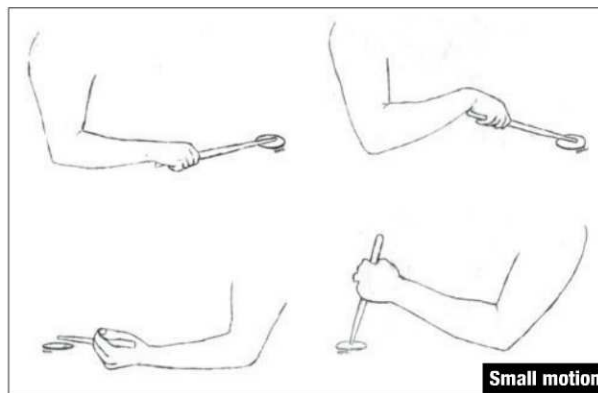
point. As you turn your wrist down and its angle changes, the fixed point remains consistent until you cock back the stick.

The top illustration below is a view of the motion in its largest form. Ultimately the motion can become tiny or, as Wilson described, like a little flick of the wrist (bottom illustration).

Remember that the throw is motivated by the wrist.



Large motion



Small motion

HALF THE EFFORT, TWICE THE SPEED

The three techniques we'll discuss next (one up/one down, two up/two down, and bouncing the wrist on the upstroke) are methods where you can play with half the effort but twice the speed.

ONE UP/ONE DOWN

For this technique we're looking to play unaccented, continuous notes. There are two ways to approach this:

1. Allow the stick to fall to the surface from parallel (force equals gravity or release), followed by a very slight throw.

It's like a single stroke—as described in part one of this series—without the accent.

2. Turn the wrist using Wilson's throw (force equals muscular effort) from parallel to the surface. Much like playing a single stroke, when you turn the wrist, the wrist begins to go up. This time, however, you're not going to throw the stick; you're going to turn down the wrist to strike. This is like a single stroke, except you don't cock the wrist.

Note: It's important that the downward force is equal to the upward force, because force in this case equals volume.

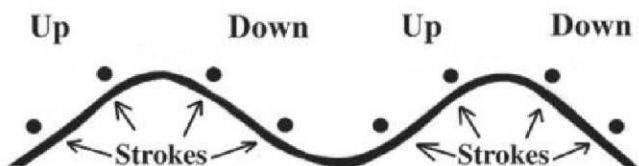
TWO UP/TWO DOWN

Playing "two up/two down" is very much like playing "one up/one down" except that we allow the stick to rebound to achieve two notes on the way up and two notes on the way down.

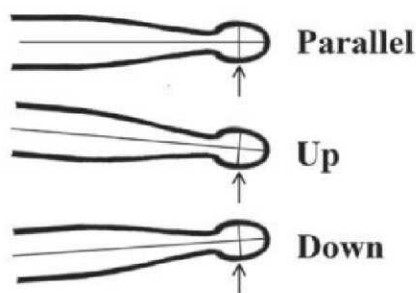
Allow the stick to fall to the surface from parallel (force equals gravity or release) and rebound for two notes. Then execute a very slight throw that rebounds for two notes.

Turn the wrist from parallel, as in Wilson's throw (force equals muscular effort), and let it rebound for two notes to a down position. This is like a single stroke, except you don't cock the wrist.

To make "two up/two down" sound as smooth as possible, consider the timing of the motion and the rebounds. The notes must be properly spaced as you move up and down. The combination of the motion and the rebounds can be thought of as a wave.



One way to get a feel for "one up/one down" and "two up/two down" is to consider the motion of the bead of the stick (see illustration). When you play these motions, you want to think of striking the surface with the middle part of the bead, although you're actually playing slightly off-center.



BOUNCING THE WRIST ON THE UPSTROKE

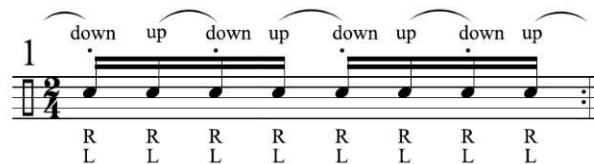
Bouncing the wrist on the upstroke means you're adding a bit more force (muscular) as you turn to the surface to go up. As with "one up/one down" and "two up/two down," it's impor-

tant to consider the kind of force (gravity or muscular) used to turn the stick to the surface. In this case, the force to the surface is muscular, as in Wilson's throw.

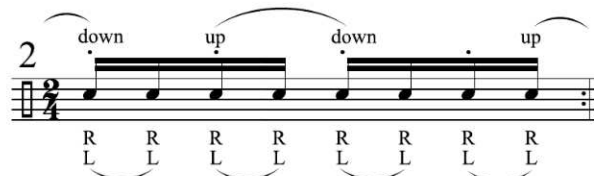
This technique can be used with "one up/one down" and "two up/two down," as well as for singles and doubles.

As you play the following exercises, note that the upward force is like Wilson's muscular throw. The dots above the notes are in place of accents, which Wilson would use to indicate a louder stroke but not an accent. Remember: The "down" motion is not a throw. These exercises can also be played using Spivack's "up" motion following a slight throw.

Exercise 1 contains a series of one-handed notes, or concurrent single strokes, without accents.



In Exercise 2, one hand plays concurrent singles, with the first half of the single stroke played as a rebound double and the second half played in a "down" position for two notes.



CRESCENDO STROKES

The last two strokes that Wilson introduced to students were what he called crescendo doubles and crescendo singles. He would introduce crescendo doubles when the student was able to play rebounds and roll strokes at 192 beats per minute, and then he would discuss crescendo singles when the student could play crescendo doubles and roll strokes consistently at 208 beats per minute. Wilson observed that when students were able to play at those tempos, they were turning their wrist and the stick was rocking evenly over the fulcrum as their fingers opened and closed naturally.

Crescendo strokes demand as much relaxation as possible. If Wilson observed that the student was becoming tight or stiff, he would slow down the tempo considerably or stop working on the stroke altogether, until the student was able to play comfortably at the marker tempos.

To play crescendo doubles, start at 192 bpm and play pianissimo (extremely quiet) doubles. Slowly increase the volume (turn higher) until you reach your maximum wrist turn. At that point, change the rhythm to five against two, which will make the pulse of the roll more transparent.

Now you'll start playing rebounds with the arms, but the wrists should not be held tightly or rigidly. Employ some wrist movement, like in an up/down motion. Turn higher (add more force) until you're playing with the arms and

shoulders only (no wrists) at approximately 10" above the surface, using a flat stroke for the ultimate power and speed.

max. wrist

mf ————— *f*

arms

ff

arms and shoulders

fff

To practice crescendo singles, start by playing 16th notes at 60 bpm. (You'll ultimately want to be able to play this exercise at 208 bpm.) While playing 16th notes, slowly increase the volume (turn higher) until you reach your maximum wrist stroke.

At this point, you're going to start playing singles with the arms, but don't hold your wrists tightly or rigidly. Turn higher (add more force) until you're playing with the arms and shoulders only (no wrists) at approximately 10" above the surface, using a flat stroke for the ultimate power and speed.

max. wrist

mf ————— *f*

arms

ff

arms and shoulders

fff

When you play the louder portion of crescendo rolls, there's more pressure on the fingers, but that force will be offset by the stick rocking over the fulcrum. To raise the volume, increase the amount of force applied—not the amount of tension.

As you turn higher to increase the volume, you'll notice that the stick begins to move away from the palm in matched grip and away from the fourth finger in traditional. But when you move from wrist turns to arm and shoulder strokes, the fulcrum in the fingers remains the same.

Remember that the playing surface provides its own amount of force. So when you strike, let the stick rebound and recoil freely.

What has been described in this article is the end of the fundamentals. Once this material is mastered, as Wilson stated, "the student has ultimate power, speed, endurance, and finesse to play whatever he or she wants."

Richard Martinez has recorded with Julian Lennon, Dan Hill, John Jones, and Rick Nowels. He is also general manager of the Music Is Hope Foundation, which produces music for children's nonprofit organizations. **Kevin Crabb** is a drummer/composer who has performed with Alphonso Johnson, John Beasley, David Garfield, and many others. His recent album *Waltz for Dylan* is available at kevincrabb.com.



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