

MUSIC KEY	
H.H.	C.C.
T.T.	X
S.D.	X
F.T.	X
B.D.	X
	Rim
	Shot

# The Sixlet

## A MULTI-USE HAND/FOOT PATTERN FOR ALL DRUMMERS

by Jim Riley

For the past twenty years, I've made my living as a performing musician. But I've recently gotten back into teaching, which has given me the opportunity to break down and analyze certain aspects of my playing so I can pass them on to my students. In doing so, I came across a lick that has proved to be very useful and versatile. I refer to it as a lick because it's not a rudiment, although, as you'll see, I treat it like one. It sounds great, and best of all, it's not very difficult to play.

The pattern is a six-note combination that I call a sixlet. The sticking is as follows: right, left, right, left, left, kick. Play it slowly at first, making sure every note is of the same length.

1

R L R L L

Once you get comfortable with the sticking, try adding accents on the right-hand notes. Playing the accents as rimshots will help them stand out among the rest of the notes. And if you keep the height of the unaccented notes low, the accents will stand out even more.

2

R L R L L

Once you get the accents popping, move the right-hand accents around the kit.

3

RLRL RLRL RLRL RLRL

I find the sixlet very useful for fills in swing music, blues shuffles, and half-time Jeff Porcaro "Rosanna"-type shuffles. Here's how I might use the lick in the context of a swing beat.

4

RLRL RLRL RLRL RLRL

I use this variation—playing the first two notes on the rack toms—a great deal. It's not as powerful as the previous examples, but once you get it going, it has an amazing flow to it.

5

R L R L L

After you get that working, try moving it to the lower toms.

6

R L R L L R L R L L

This is an example of how you can blend the two previous variations into one solo break.

7

RLRL RLRL RLRL RLRL

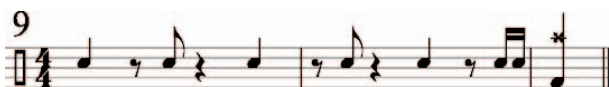
Up to this point, we've used the sixlet in the context of 8th-note and 16th-note triplets. But what about straight 16th notes? Well, the six-note pattern doesn't fit perfectly within a measure of 16ths, but that's actually what I like about it. You just have to work out the math in order to get it to resolve back to the 1.

To do that, spread the 16th-note sixlet over two measures. In 4/4 time, there are sixteen 16th notes per measure, which means there are thirty-two 16th notes in two measures. How many groupings of six 16ths can you fit into that space? The answer is five (six times five equals thirty), with two 16ths left over at the end. That means you can play the sixlet five times in two measures, with two 16ths left over at the end. To get a feel for how this is going to work, try playing singles with an accent pattern that outlines our six-note groupings. Break out your metronome or drum machine, and set it to 120 bpm.

8

R L R L R L R L R L R L R L

If you play just the accents, the phrase will sound like this:



Once you have a handle on where the accents line up within the measure, it's time to return to the sixlet. This example uses the same sticking pattern found in Example 3, but now that we're playing within the context of 16th notes, it will feel quite different.

It can be helpful to alternate between the outline pattern contained in Example 9 and the lick as it plays out in Example 10.



This last example takes the sticking pattern used in Example 6 and applies it in the context of 32nd notes. This may look complicated, but the math we used earlier still applies. With thirty-two 32nd notes in a measure, you can play the six-note pattern five times, with two 32nd notes left over. This is my favorite variation of the bunch.

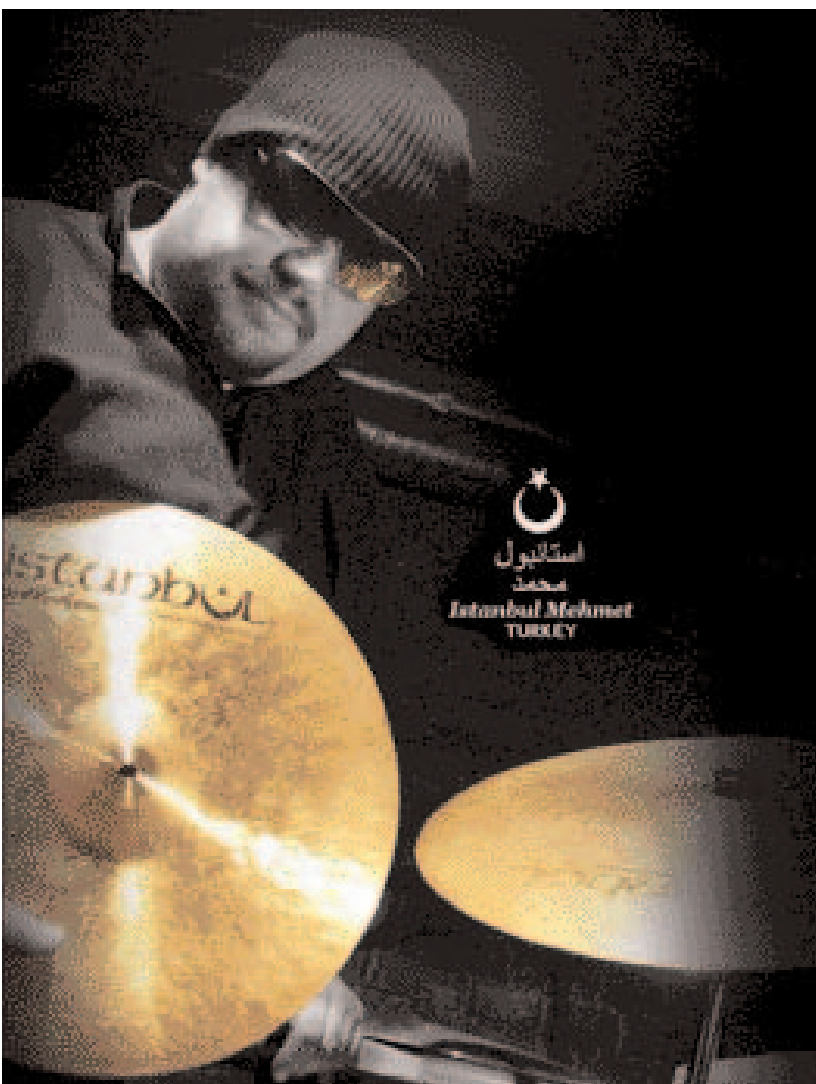


As you're working on these licks, be sure to take it slow. The basic lick is easy, but digging into these variations—plus ones that you come up with for yourself—will take some time. But that extra practice will pay off, giving you another set of musical tools to inspire your creativity.



**Jim Riley** is the drummer and bandleader for Rascal Flatts. In addition to performing drum clinics across the U.S. and Canada, Jim can be found teaching at his percussion studio, the Drum Dojo, in Nashville. You can reach him through his Web site, [jimrileymusic.com](http://jimrileymusic.com).

Go to the Education page at [modern drummer.com](http://modern drummer.com) to check out a video of Jim demonstrating these exercises.



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