

## The Rhythm Banquet

I used to love going to banquets and smorgasbords. (Now that I hit the Middle Ages, I have to keep a more careful eye on the calories.) But if I got in the habit of eating only chicken at a banquet, I would really be missing out. Yet that's what we do in terms of rhythms – we live on a very tight rhythmic diet.

### The Eighth-Note Overdose

The rhythm most likely to be overplayed is the eighth-note. Why? Maybe we're too used to practicing scales and arpeggios with only eighth-notes. Maybe we've heard Coltrane's Giant Steps solo and figure it doesn't get any better than that. Whatever the reason, I hear so many young players (and even some older ones, accomplished studio and big band soloists whom I won't name) stuck in the eighth-note rut. We don't need to banish eighth-notes; we just need to "cook" them differently.

So how do we make eighth-notes more interesting? Here are some suggestions:

- Use offset contours (chapter 2B).
- Use 3-note or 6-note contours (chapter 2D).
- Insert occasional offbeat quarters or eighth-note triplets into a line of eighths.
- Vary articulations, accents, and dynamics.
- Add occasional turns, grace notes, or other embellishments.

### It's New, But It Won't Hurt

If you are an eighth-note junkie, learn some variations like the ones mentioned above. Then dive into the banquet of rhythms:

- Offbeat quarters and half-notes
- Dotted quarters
- An endless assortment of triplets
- An endless assortment of tied values
- Rubato and bracketed groups

When you try these at first, be at least partly aware of which rhythm you're playing at any given time. That will help you use the rhythm as a framework for your motif and a basis for development.

Don't make your audience beg you to try new dishes. Surprise them, surprise yourself – you'll be amazed at how a new rhythmic perspective can be so delicious. Ask any drummer!