

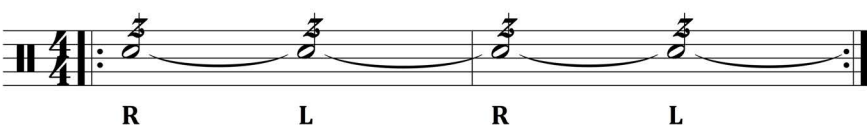
THE SILKY SMOOTH SOFT ROLL

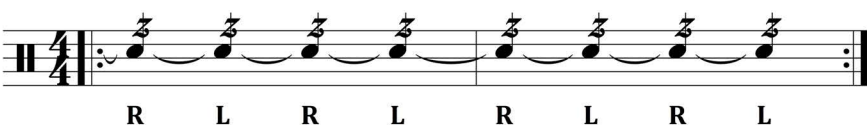
BY PHILLIP O'BANION

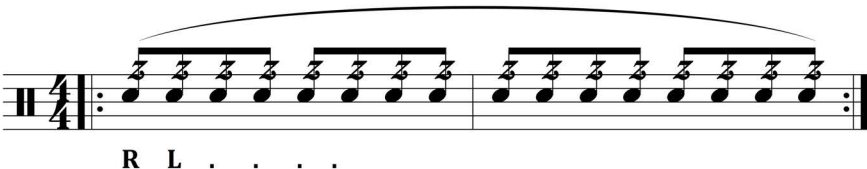
HOT LICKS


These simple exercises, consistently and intelligently applied, will transform your soft concert roll into a thing of unspeakable beauty. They were originally shown to me about twenty years ago by Douglas Howard, principal percussionist of the Dallas Symphony.

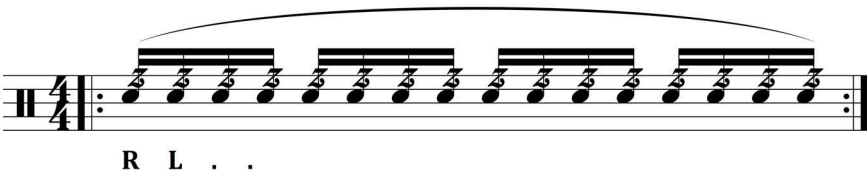
♩ = 52-66


A  repeat ad infinitum

B  slur each note to the next

C  maintain consistency

D  avoid accents

E  each hand identical

F  stay relaxed

For the uninitiated, the orchestral or concert roll is a multiple-bounce roll. The quality of the roll is determined by the number of bounces and the space (or lack thereof) between them. The appropriate number of rebounds is determined primarily by the desired roll volume. For shading rolls of the softest variety, strive for the maximum number of rebounds the stick and head will allow. A larger stick tip with a rounded or elongated bead will provide more natural bounce than a smaller headed stick, but either can work.



Here are your keys to success:

- Think long, smooth strokes.
- Tempo is quarter note = 52–66.
- Repeat Exercise A for at least five minutes, constantly trying to lengthen the time each hand stays in contact with the head (literally increasing the number of rebounds). You may not achieve filling the entire half note at this slow tempo, but that is the goal.
- Try starting at a comfortable *piano* dynamic (stick height of about half an inch), then gradually lower your stick tips over the course of time by increasingly smaller increments.
- Your grip should be very loose, with minimal skin contact from the first three fingers only (thumb, index, middle fingers).

Once you successfully begin to lengthen each motion, focus on the following three elements to ensure a perfectly smooth roll:

1. **ATTACK:** The attack is the beginning of the sound—that first sound you hear when the stick initially makes contact with the head. The trick here is that both hands should match in every aspect: stick height, stroke weight, and pressure.
2. **TEXTURE:** Texture is another name for roll density. Listen not only to the number of bounces after the initial attack, but also to the space between them. If you start with the stick tip very close to the head, you should be able to blend the bounces and the space between them in such a way that the individual rebounds are indiscernible to the ear and impossible to count. If there is significant space between the first two or three bounces, either you are starting too far from the drumhead, or you need to apply the slightest pressure to squeeze the rebounds a bit closer together. Strive for one long sound!
3. **DURATION:** The length of each R and L stroke needs to match. If one hand plays a sound consistently longer or shorter, the roll will sound uneven, like it's limping. Try practicing with the snares off to hear every tonal nuance. Once the length of both hands are in the ballpark, listen for an exactly similar final taper and decay.

As you progress to Exercises B through F (or beyond to faster note values), each stroke should actually overlap the entrance of the next note in the opposite hand. This is the only way to achieve a continuous sound as each hand retakes. Don't stop the R motion just because the L hand must now begin; you don't need to lift the R hand from the head until just prior to its next entrance. Finally, remember to start with the left hand occasionally, too!

Try these exercises daily over a period of weeks, 10 to 15 minutes per day. It's certainly okay to do longer sessions on some days to give your muscles time to fully relax, your fingers to gel with the stick and head feedback, and to build endurance. But the best way to ensure long-term success is to revisit these skills on a regular basis. You'll be on your way to a silky, smooth, incredibly soft roll in no time.

Phillip O'Banion is Associate Professor and Director of Percussion Studies at Temple University in Philadelphia. He has performed for the past decade as an extra percussionist with the Philadelphia Orchestra and numerous other orchestras and new music groups on the East Coast. His solo debut album, *Digital Divide*, was released in 2016 and features new works for percussion and electronics. He serves as co-chair of the PAS Symphonic committee, and has appeared at numerous PASICs as clinician, performer, and conductor. **RIS**

