

# The Purdie Shuffle

Revisiting A Classic by Jim Payne

MUSIC KEY	
open	○ R.C.
H.H.	⊗
S.D.	●
B.D.	⊗
H.H.	⊗
w/ foot	⊗
	Ghost note

This article contains my personal step-by-step process for learning the super-funky Purdie shuffle, which was made famous by the legendary R&B drummer Bernard Purdie. The exercises outlined here—which were devised over an eight-day practice routine where I studied Bernard’s signature beat on Steely Dan’s “Home At Last,” from the *Aja* album—are designed to take the mystery out of this classic half-time shuffle groove.

## FIRST SESSION

The Purdie shuffle demands strong chops, so I began by practicing exercises derived from the challenging book *4-Way Coordination*. The beat also requires steady notes with the foot on the hi-hat, so I incorporated that into the exercises. I put a quarter-note rest at the end of each four-bar phrase in order to relax and regroup before repeating the exercise. Concentrate on crisp execution with no flams between the limbs, while also letting your body flow with the pulse. It’s important to avoid being stiff.

The Purdie shuffle is a half-time groove, so I thought the best way to write it was as 8th-note triplets with the backbeat on 3. Here’s the basic hi-hat and snare drum pattern.

Adding the bass drum gives you a basic half-time shuffle—a great groove in itself.

I usually keep both heads on the kick to get an open jazz/funk sound with a distinct pitch. But for straight-ahead funk or pop/funk, you need more of a boxing-glove *thud*. So I took off the front head, put in a nice fuzzy blanket, and topped it off with a good-size rock to keep the blanket in place and get an even heavier sound. With this setup, I could bury the beater in the head without getting double hits. I also increased the tension on the pedal to get more action from it, since this groove requires quick double strokes.

Next, I practiced filling in the triplets with the snare. It’s important to play the hi-hat and snare very softly and at the same volume. (Soft snare hits are called ghost notes.)

Now try putting the backbeat on 3.

## SECOND SESSION

I began my second session with ten minutes of coordination exercises to loosen up. Then I worked on combining the half-time shuffle in Example 2 with the filled-in triplets from Example 4.

Bernard came to my gig one night at the North Sea Jazz Festival. I asked him to sit in, and as he went up he said, “You’ve got to put a little more bass drum in your shuffle.” He got on the stand and proceeded to demonstrate on the next



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## SIXTH SESSION

I started this session by playing the shuffle for five minutes, stopping, and then doing something else for half an hour. Then I played the beat for another five minutes.

I hadn't seen any results for a few days, which caused me to start judging myself too quickly. That was a mistake. I had to be confident that eventually my muscles would learn to play the groove correctly.

## SEVENTH SESSION

I decided that if I really wanted to nail the Purdie shuffle, I should learn the entire chart to "Home At Last." It's one thing to learn a beat, but it's another thing to memorize the structure, the figures, and the dynamics of a complete tune.

Purdie's performance on "Home At Last" is brilliant. His groove is flawless, even when he's catching ensemble hits. He also throws in some tasty accents and fills, and he plays with incredible dynamics.

I wrote out a drum chart and started seriously listening and playing along to the song. Then I recorded myself on video playing the tune. On the first take, I looked awkward and shaky, and the groove was weak. There was clearly more work to do. Here's the chart:

Drums  
Intro/Piano

A Horns enter  
mf

B Voice enters  
Fill last X  
Ensemble  
Fill

C  
mp

D Horns  
Fill last X  
Ensemble  
mf

E  
f

Fill

Coda  
D.S. al Coda

Ride Out - Fade

## EIGHTH SESSION

For my final day of practicing the Purdie shuffle, I started a routine where I'd play "Home At Last" two or three times during each session. I ended up using the heel-down technique on the hi-hat. A week had gone by, and I now felt good enough to record myself playing the song again. You can see videos of all the examples and the final result of my playing along with Purdie on [moderndrummer.com](http://moderndrummer.com) and in the digital edition of *MD*.

**Jim Payne** has played with Maceo Parker and the J.B. Horns and has produced records for Medeski Martin & Wood. He teaches in New York City and online. His new book/DVD, *Advanced Funk Drumming*, was recently released by Modern Drummer Publications. For more on Jim, visit [funkydrummer.com](http://funkydrummer.com).



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