

Drumming And Running

Your Feet Aren't Just For Playing Pedals

by Jeremy Hummel

Drummers play the most aerobically demanding instrument there is. Whether a performance consists of an intense ninety minutes of rock or three sets of jazz, we must have a certain level of endurance.

A few years ago, I returned from a vacation in Mexico. Upon viewing the vacation photos, I realized that I'd become somewhat out of shape. I was about to spend the next two months in Los Angeles making a record, so I decided it was the perfect time to get active again.

Running has always been one of the best (and most inexpensive) ways to get in shape. So I started doing a few laps around the block, usually topping out at around ten to fifteen minutes.

As the days and weeks went by, the extra baggage really started to come off. Since then, I've become an avid runner, including competing in 5K, 8K, and 10K races.

Over the past few years I've come to realize that there are other benefits to running than just being in shape. I began noticing an interesting relationship between running and drumming. Other drummers I've met have made the same connection.

This article offers some of the benefits of running that I have discovered—along with insights from running/drumming comrades Daniel Adair of Nickelback and Mike Malinin of The Goo Goo Dolls. Hopefully some of these concepts will help you become not only a healthier person, but also a better performer and musician.

Getting Started

The other drummers I talked to about running got into it for the same reason I did: to get back in shape. Daniel Adair says, "When I started to get ultra-serious about my career seven years ago, I started taking *everything* seriously, including my health. I had never worked out before. I started by going for a five- or seven-minute jog around the block. Then I felt that 'runner's high.' I felt good about myself and about what I had accomplished. I wanted more of it."

Running and performing are similar, in that the hardest part is often the beginning. Whether it's getting through the first two songs or the first five to ten minutes of a run, the key is finding a rhythm (once you've warmed up). Daniel says, "There is definitely a pulse and technique involved with running. Everything has to work together and in time. Initially there's the practice involved with getting the form right, then not thinking about it and letting the flow happen. Then you have to develop the discipline and perseverance to get through it. Sounds like drumming to me!"

These days, Daniel's regimen consists of three miles on a treadmill, four or five times a week. And he recently began incorporating interval training. "I'll start at 7.5 mph and run at that pace for a minute and a half," he says. "Then I'll kick it up to 9.5 or 10 for a minute, then back down again." The advantage of interval training is that it doesn't allow the heart rate to reside in a certain zone for too long, ultimately burning lots of calories and shocking the metabolism.

Daniel tours with Nickelback nearly year-round, and he's found running to be beneficial to his performance in more ways than one. "Because I'm playing hard rock and I'm an aggressive drummer," he says, "the cardio development is essential to me. I don't run out of breath like I used to when I didn't run."

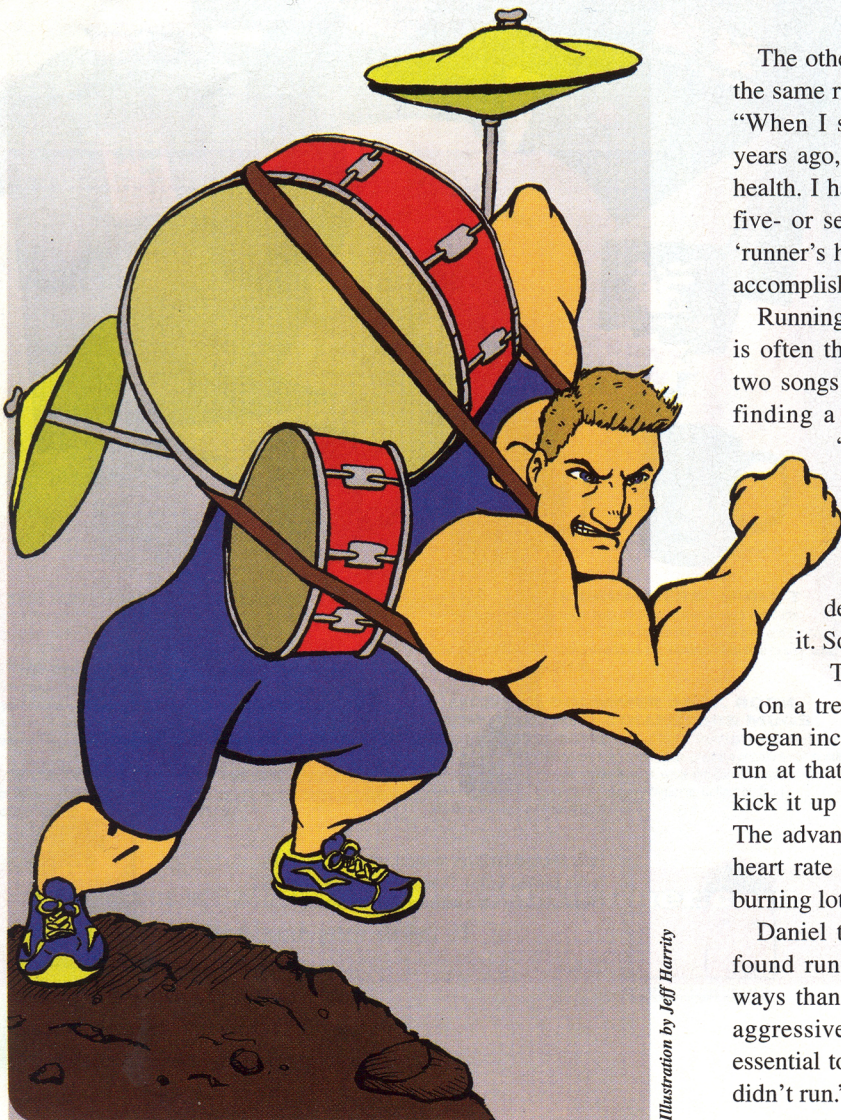


Illustration by Jeff Herring

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Daniel also sings backup for the Canadian rockers, and says that running has aided his vocal technique. "Since I began singing all of the harmonies," he enthuses, "getting oxygen into every breath makes a world of difference."

Goo Goo Gone

Mike Malinin caught the running bug for the second time in his life after watching the 1994 Los Angeles Marathon. He had run cross-country in high school, but he didn't get serious about running until later on. "I wanted to get in better shape," says Mike, "and I figured, all you need is a pair of sneakers and off you go."

Mike has since taken running and drumming to another level. In addition to running for pleasure (and to keep his sanity throughout a heavy touring schedule), he took up extreme distance running. Mike now competes in races of 100 miles or more. This past summer, while on tour, he decided to test his limits by training for the Angeles Crest 100-mile race.

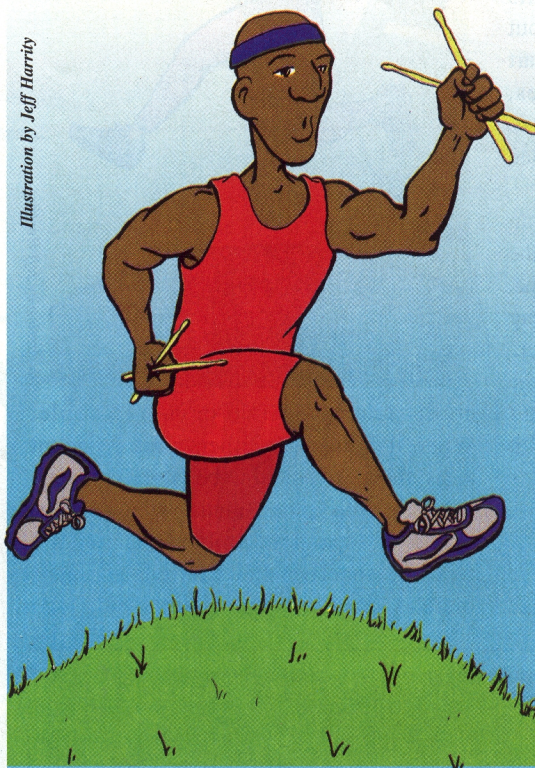
"All of the guys in the band thought I was crazy," Mike recalls. "I was using Google quite a bit to search for spots to run in the different cities we visited. When I ultimately ran the race, I finished 45th out of 113 people who started. I had placed 16th the year before. The main difference was that most of the spots I found to train on tour were on flat land, and that didn't translate well to the hills of the ACS 100.

"I was really proud of myself, though," says Mike. "I'm not some amazing athlete. It takes a lot of dedication to train for races of that distance. With our touring schedule, it would have been really easy for me to wake up and make the decision to not run ten to twenty miles that day."

Getting The Kinks Out

I enjoy running on the day of a show—especially when it's a highly anticipated

Illustration by Jeff Herring



gig. I think it's safe to assume that nearly all of us experience some nervous energy prior to a performance. While this energy is not entirely negative, heightened levels of excitement can hinder our main role as drummers, which is to provide the proper tempo or pulse for the song.

When I run on the day of a show, I've already achieved maximum heart rate, so the adrenaline rush I feel when hitting the stage isn't such a shock to my system. It allows me to be more relaxed, which makes for better tempos and more fluidity in my playing.

On one occasion I did an experiment to simulate the adrenaline rush of going onstage, and then starting the show with a tune that had a slower groove. I was out for a run and thinking about drummers who really "sit back" on the groove or play slightly behind the beat, such as Eric Kretz of Stone Temple Pilots or Brad Wilk of Audioslave. I decided that when I finished my run, I'd go home and immediately sit behind my drums and attempt to play

Audioslave's "Cochise" off their debut record. All I can say is, *wow*. Talk about two contrasting feelings!

Granted, this may have been a somewhat extreme simulation. Nevertheless, I wouldn't want to open a show with a song like that.

Depth Perception

We often hear people refer to exercising as a drug: a release of endorphins that produces a sense of euphoria at some point. With running, this is achieved through reaching maximum heart rate.

When we listen to music, our senses are generally focused on one or two of the obvious parts of a song, such as drums and vocals. But when the blood is flowing, our perception enters another realm. I rarely run without my iPod. By listening to music while at a maximum heart rate and being in a rhythm, I've heard many new things in songs that I hadn't been tuned into before. Usually it's ear candy, such as an acoustic guitar buried in the mix, subtle effects on the instruments, or background vocals.

Sound Or Solace?

I've also found running with music to be quite a useful tool in my career as a musician. I work with a variety of musicians, playing everything from heavy rock to blues and jazz. I sometimes have to learn new material in a short amount of time. If I load the songs into my iPod and listen while running, I can kill two birds with one stone by getting exercise *and* sinking my teeth into the music.

Music is also good motivation. There may be times when I feel I've had enough of my workout and need a little extra boost to keep going. All it takes is getting to that next song or finding the tune that propels me to another level. For running, I prefer upbeat rock or groove-oriented music, like Crystal Method or Massive Attack.

Mike Malinin, on the other hand, prefers

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the tranquility of silence. "I've never understood why people run with music," says Mike. "I think it defeats the purpose. Running takes me out of my normal element. I play music for a living. Running is a separate activity."

I asked Mike how he gets through twenty-eight hours of nonstop running—his time in the most recent ACS 100—without some source of external motivation. "I start out having some thoughts," he replies, "noticing my heart rate and things like that. But after a while I just get into this zone where the rhythm carries me."

Speaking of rhythm, drummers have an advantage when it comes to running, in the sense that we're used to doing things in time. "One time," Mike Malinin relates, "a training partner said to me, 'You run like a drummer.' When I asked him what he meant, he told me that all of my steps were very even, and that I ran with a certain rhythm. I never realized it before, but he was right."

Stress Management

Let's face it: We can all use a stress reducer in our lives. Being in a band is like



Illustration by Jeff Harrity

being married to two or more people. When dealing with others on a frequent basis, there are bound to be issues or differences at some point. Running is a therapeutic way to deal with problems and gain a fresh perspective. For example, perhaps there is some tension within your group

regarding a big decision that needs to be made. Going for a run is a great way to sort things out and return with a rational mind-set.

If an issue in my life has become all-consuming, or something is making me angry, I'll try to get out for a run. It's nearly impossible to be angry or upset when you've completed a workout. Similarly, if you need to have a serious talk with someone, go for a run first. While running, you can think about how to touch only on the important things, and how to do it in a relaxed and (hopefully) tactful manner. Running helps to make the task or problem at hand not as large as it may seem.

Time? What Time?

You may be thinking, "This running stuff sounds all well and good, but I'm not on tour and I don't have all the time in the world. I've got a full-time job, kids, and gigs on weekends. When am I going to find the time to run?"

I admit it can be tough. I spend my mornings and afternoons with my two-year-old son, juggle three musical projects, teach several nights a week, and do session work. With this hectic schedule, if I can run two or three times a week for at least twenty minutes, I'm happy.

The main thing to keep in mind is that you don't need to go to extremes to find success. Fit your runs in when you can. It may take some planning. For example, you could try Tuesday, Thursday, and Sunday. That way there are some breaks in between. If you know you'll have a busy day on Tuesday, maybe wake up a little earlier in order to put in your twenty minutes. Do whatever works for you.

I'm not suggesting that all drummers should become workout freaks. But I can say that running has greatly enriched my life, in more ways than one. I'm confident that it can do the same for you.



Jeremy Hummel was an original member of Breaking Benjamin. He helped that group achieve platinum status with their second release, *We Are Not Alone*. He has since turned his efforts to session work and drum instruction in Pennsylvania. Jeremy can be reached at his Web site, www.jeremyhummel.com.

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