

Take Care of Yourself

To be great, you'll need to be charged up to 110%, and be alert. But this has to be a relaxed concentration, not just some "unbridled aggression". Great karate instructors say that you should be able to make a tight fist without tensing your wrist. Likewise, you should be able to maintain a firm grip on your sticks without tensing up your wrists. To play in a fluid way, loose wrists are absolutely necessary.

If you watch any great drummer play dynamically and with texture, (using a variety of sounds) you'll notice that there's a LOT of body motion. You might even think that some of it looks silly, as though they're making "weird gestures". Of course, some people are acting. But often, this is simply what it looks like when you really PLAY the drums. You're trying to make great *sounds*, not *images*, right ?

To get the maximum number of sounds out of any instrument requires changes in your playing position. You might play a drum loud or soft, at the edges or the center, loosely or stiffly, etc.. It just can't be done, using a rigid playing position. However you accomplish it, you've got to be as relaxed behind your drums as you are in your favorite easy chair. You can't, for example, worry about how your "funny gestures" look. If a movement helps you make the sound you want to make, and you're not hurting yourself, do it!

Spend a few moments by yourself, to get ready to perform. Take a few deep breaths, relax, and "get hot"! Visualize what you're about to do, and warm up mentally and physically before you play! You'll find that this habit eventually lets you "get hot" by just *thinking* about playing. Your body reacts to your thoughts as a "get ready" signal, and will start to "get hot", before you even start to play. Buddy Rich has said "If you ain't sweatin', it ain't happenin'!"

You don't have to be a health fanatic, but you do need to be sensible, if you really aspire to excellence. You need to eat reasonable food, exercise, get enough sleep, and take care of yourself, in general. Avoid a lot of alcohol, caffeine, and any other chemicals that will affect your performance. You'll be more relaxed. Believe it. It's a fact.

Take care of your hands! Playing the drums should NEVER hurt ! (except for the little errors we all make when we bang our hands into something) If you're playing correctly, you should be able to play your entire life without developing any repetitive stress injuries or "syndromes".

Be aware that callouses aren't required to play great and powerful drums. You can use one of the "pumice stone" products available for foot and hand care, and, in the shower, remove callouses that you may develop. They are a sign that you're putting too much stress on that part of your hands, and you should learn from that. Observe what you do to cause the callous, and figure out a less damaging way to make the same sound. You'll then be more relaxed.