BASIC PERCUSSION IN THE CONTEXT OF WORSHIP

Gerard

INTRODUCTION:

The percussionist can be a huge asset to any worship leader. He can add sugar and spice and everything nice, i.e. color and texture to the worship mix. The percussionist can also present problems and frustration to a worship leader as well as other members in the rhythm section because he lacks understanding of how to position his instruments relative to the drummer. Sometimes arrogance and pride can be the root of a problem.

This information was designed to gain a perspective on the role of the percussionist in the context of live worship. The information contained in this book has been collected from many sources to include years of personal experiences, interviews with professionals, friends and peers, and photographs from the Internet for use as examples in relation to a variety of percussive instruments for discussion.

If you are a worship leader who would like to add or incorporate a percussive related sound to your worship mix or wish to gain information for other members of your group to enhance the dynamic sound of your music, or if you just have unanswered questions pertaining to percussive methods and auxiliary percussion instruments, then I welcome you to come explore this information, and see what God may have in store for you and your music ministry.

Gerard

Gerard is known in the worship community as G. He is a worship leader at the Community Bible Church in San Diego, and has been solely committed to Christian and gospel music for the past fourteen years.

He began to play the drums at the age of seven. When he was thirteen, the self- taught drummer was playing in local jazz clubs in Baltimore, Maryland. He has played all types of music including rhythm and blues, gospel soul, and funk until he graduated from high school.

Upon his discharged from military service, he moved to California. He began attending Calvary Chapel San Diego and wanted to join the worship team as a drummer. But the drums were electric. Being a left handed player would require the drums to be turned around in the opposite direction, which presented a problem due to spacing and positioning of the set. Determined to join the group, he switched from playing drums to playing percussion and became a member of the worship team.

G later joined the worship team, at Mission Valley Christian Fellowship in San Diego. He was extremely active in worship team activities at Mission Valley Christian Fellowship including performing at stadium events and assisting in conducting foundational drumming workshops at worship conferences throughout the country.

The producer of Night Fire Records heard of G's songwriting talents and offered to record his music. The result is a collection of eclectic music, which reflects himself through his music to his Lord, Jesus Christ.

THE 3 FACTORS:

I think to be a successful percussionist to lead the congregation in worship to the Throne Room of God; there are three factors to consider.

#1 Humble your self when invited to be the instrument used by God to lead His people in worship.

Philippians 2: 3 ***Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.***

#2. Be open and teachable. Respect and submit to the authority of the Worship Leader. Be willing to accept criticism graciously. God has placed him in that position. We are not to argue with God's decision…

1 Peter 2:18 ***Servants be submissive to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh.***

#3. Grow continuously and seek to expand your horizons. Philippians 1: 9-11 ***That your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and discernment; that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere… being filled with the fruits of righteousness…***

Do's and Don't

- **Show up on time & come prepared.**
- **Quiet your instruments.**
  When the leader is communicating with other members
- **Come along side of your worship leader and lift him up.**
  He has an awesome responsibility
- **Do what you are asked to do**
  Not necessarily what you want to do
- **Accept criticism graciously.**
  Hear criticism or coaching as, "I have a sound in mind so This is what I want you to play to make it happen".

- **Be coach-able.**
  Invite feedback. Ask the leader what is he looking for from you.
  Mold your attitude & style to fit his vision

- **Test different styles and hand instruments.** See what style or hand instrument works best.

- **Listen to the drummer.**
  See what the drummer is doing.
  Do not duplicate what he is trying to do.
  Don't try to compete with the drummer.

- **Listen to the vocals.** Look for brakes and spaces in songs to add fills. When vocals and solos are performed, play sparsely.

- **Fit in. Don't stick out.** Support the team around you
  Don't over play.
- **Open yourself to many influences.** Listen to everything. Use discernment, and borrow and adapt what is useful to worship.

- **Record your playing and then listen critically.**

- **Practice a lot**
  Practice at a speed that you can play correctly. More speed will come. Steady and even is better than fast - practice a lot.

AUXILIARY PERCUSSION

So what is Percussion?

Percussion is classified as any 2 surfaces coming in contact to produce a sound. Thus hand clapping, or foot stamping can be classified as percussion, or percussive actions. Musically percussion is derived from either the rhythm of the slapping effects through rhythms or repetition of periodic sequences.

A piano can also be classified as a percussion instrument, because as you press a key, the mechanisms ensures a mallet attached to that key to strike on the wires pre-tuned to a certain frequency (based on the thickness and tension of the wire).

Various Percussion Instruments:

Besides the more commonly found drum-sets and tambourines, the family of percussion instruments can range up to infinity. Orchestras playing classical music will usually not require as much percussion instruments whereas bands playing modern contemporary works will require more percussion instrumentation. In this presentation we will concentrate on what I call toys or hand instruments also known as Auxiliary Percussion.

Auxiliary Percussion includes:

Triangles Castanets Wood Blocks

Tambourines

Agogo Bells

Cowbells

Cabasa

Maracas

Guiros

Chimes

Shakers

Claves

Bongos

Congas

Timbales

Auxiliary Percussion Use and Description

Agogo Bells: 2 metallic bells in certain perfect interval in pitch apart

Bongos: One of the most recognizable of the Latin drums because of their soft sound and high pitch. You can find their sound in all styles of music

Cabasa: Designed to create rhythmic scraping sounds and patterns. The beads can be manipulated against the textured steel or the instrument can be spun or shaken for varying sounds, the likes of which can be heard in music all over the world. The larger models produce louder fuller sounds, while the smaller models provide more control and softer volumes. This instrument should be included in every percussionist's arsenal.

Chimes: A tuned instrument consisting of a set of 12 to 18 metal tubes hung from a metal frame. The metal tubes range from 1 to 2 ½ inches in diameter and from 4 to 6 feet in length. The chimes, or tubular bells, are struck with a mallet and sound like church bells when played. The longer the length of the tube, the lower the pitch that is created.

Congas: Quinto, is the smallest drum, and is commonly used for solos.
Conga, the middle size drum is used to answer patterns played on a tumbadora.
Tumbadora, the largest of the three drums is used to lay down the foundation of the specific rhythm being played.

Cowbells: Usually employed fixed to the timbales for players to strike on the on beat or straight beat

Claves: 2 wooden short fat rods to produce a bright wooden “clang” sound, used for syncopation

Guiro: A washing board effect created with tapered end of thin stick rubbing along grooves.

Maracas: Are rattle-like instruments traditionally made from a round or oval shaped vessel derived from gourds, wood or rawhide. A hole is made in the cylindrical portion and then filled with beads, seeds, pits, stones or buckshot. Finally a wood handle is attached through the canister portion.

Shakers: A 'container' with sand, beads (or whatever in there) to create the 'chi-chi' effect when 'shaken about'

Tambourines: Complements the snare drum of the drum-set for back beats

Timbales: Metallic sounding “toms” (without bottom skin) with both edges and skin utilized (usually together with cowbell attached), (equivalent of the drum-set for Latin music)

HAND INSTRUMENTS

It would be save to say that almost every praise or worship song I play, I am using some sort of hand instrument. The following is a list of my favorites. Sometimes I use them individually and sometimes collectively to achieve a particular sound.

Maracas

Making a sound on the maracas appears quite easy, but to play correctly and achieve a clean sound can be quite difficult to the novice. The sound of the maraca is obtained by griping and shaking the handles with specific movements to derive a precise sound. Maracas are usually played in pairs and may require different movements by each hand depending on the rhythmical pattern.

The maracas add flavor and character to the music. Maracas are extremely portable and can be practiced almost anywhere. They have numerous applications in most music styles. Maracas have been manufactured from metal or plastic and come in a variety of shapes and sizes.

I encourage you to explore the fascinating art of the maracas and most of all to have fun. It is imperative that the serious student should listen to recordings and acquire the assistance of a teacher to learn the true art of the maracas.

Tambourine

There are two kinds of tambourines: skin and skinless. Skinless tambourines are preferred in most bands to support the 2 & 4 backbeats. To perform the stroking method, hold the instrument vertically with one hand while swinging it with the forearm/wrists to the other hand, while striking the edge of it with the butt of the palm with the other hand.

For trilling/rolling of the instrument, the most conventional method would be to hold the instrument in a vertical plane, and twisting the wrist to and fro to 'jiggle' the 'tiny cymbals'. If properly executed, this method produces a very nice smooth trill.

The next method commonly used for tambourines with skins would be to rub the moist finger/thumb likely across the skin with the instrument in a horizontal orientation, such that the friction between the skin and finger/thumb will 'jerk' the 'tiny cymbals' from their equilibrium positions to produce trilling.

Cabasa

Designed to create rhythmic scraping sounds and patterns. The beads can be manipulated against the textured steel or the instrument can be spun or shaken for varying sounds, the likes of which can be heard in music all over the world. The larger models produce louder, fuller sounds while the smaller models provide more control and softer volumes. This instrument should be included in every percussionist's arsenal.

Shakers A cylinder shape container with sand, beads or whatever in there to create the 'chi-chi' effect when shaken about. The shaker also adds flavor and character to the music. I sometimes use it as filler and for accents. There are various types of shakers: The studio shaker usually made of plastic and produces a softer sound than the regular metal type shaker. There are also egg and fruit shakers that produce an even softer tone than the studio shaker…. personally I don’t do food shakers.

CHOOSING DRUMSTICKS

Drumsticks are like car keys - without the right match, you're not getting that car started. Make sure you get it right by following these steps.

1. Find a store with a good assortment of drumstick brands to choose from. Calling different stores ahead of time is always a good idea.

2. Decide what size stick you want to use. For a beginning rock drummer, a 5A would be a good size to start with. For a jazz-style drummer, you might want to stick with a smaller 7A. Larger sticks (3A and lower) should be used for concert/marching percussion playing only.

3. Find a brand of sticks that you like the most. Some brands have softer handles while others have a rougher hickory for a firmer grip.

4. Find a matching pair - this is the most crucial step. Some companies sell pairs of sticks together. If this option is not available, strike the sticks down on a hard surface such as a countertop. When you find two that share the same-sounding pitch, purchase them.

TIPS

If you are happy with the pair of sticks you bought, buy several pairs. Unfortunately, drumsticks break fairly often.

WARNING

Do not pay more than $10 for a pair of drumsticks. If they cost more than that, you're being ripped off.

Even if the sticks come as a pair, they aren't necessarily matched. Place the stick next to your ear and tap the stick lightly. Do the same with the other stick. Make sure that they are the exact same pitch. If they are just a tiny bit off, it can make a big difference.

Aluminum sticks
The aluminum sticks are more durable, but they don't absorb the shock. This means the shock is going into your hands.

Here is a list that you can refer to when selecting drumsticks:

7A
Tear drop tip. Perfect for light jazz and combo.
L=15 1/2", Dia.=.540"

8D
Like the 7A, with a bit more reach.
L=16", Dia.=.540"

85A
Combines the dimensions of an 8D and 5A. A great jazz stick.
L=16", Dia.=.550"

5A
Tear drop tip for rich cymbal sounds. Light and fast for jazz, orchestral and pit work.
L=16", Dia.=.565"

Extreme 5A (X5A)
For the 5A player who wants more power and reach.
L=16 1/2", Dia.=.580"

55A
Combines the dimensions of a 5A and 5B. A great choice when a 5B is just a little more stick than required.
L=16", Dia.=.580"

5B
Tear drop tip. Ideal for rock, band and practice.
L=16", Dia.=.595"

Extreme 5B (X5B)
Like the 5B, with more power and reach.
L=16 1/2", Dia.=.595"

F1
Medium round tip with a short tapered neck. Great for fusion or electric jazz.
L=16 3/16", Dia.=.580"

3A
Barrel tip produces bright, articulate cymbal sounds. Great for light rock and fusion.
L=16 3/16", Dia.=.580"

1A
Extra long with a "Taj Mahal" tip. Powerful, fast and responsive.
L=16 13/16", Dia.=.580"

2B
Tear drop tip. Ideal for heavy rock, band and practice.
L=16 1/4", Dia.=.630"

ROCK
Oval tip for a full sound. Great for rock and band.
L=16 5/8", Dia.=.630"

Metal (CM)
Oval tip. Offers extra reach and power.
L=17", Dia.=.635"

HD4 (HD4)
Vic's original SD4 design, but in hickory. For a light touch and great feel around the drums.
L = 15 7/8", Dia. =.530"

HD9 (HD9)
The SD9, in hickory. A favorite of players who love the 5B but want a little more weight and length.
L = 16 1/4 ", Dia. =.610"

NYLON TIP DRUMSTICKS

7AN
Tear drop tip. Perfect for light jazz and combo.
L=15 1/2", Dia.=.540"

8DN
Like the 7A, with a bit more reach.
L=16", Dia.=.540"

5AN
Tear drop tip for rich cymbal sounds. Light and fast for jazz, orchestral and pit work.
L=16", Dia.=.565"

Extreme 5AN (X5AN)
For the 5A player who wants more power and reach.
L=16 1/2", Dia.=.580"

5BN
Tear drop tip. Ideal for rock, band and practice.
L=16", Dia.=.595"

Extreme 5BN (X5BN)
Like the 5B, with more power and reach.
L=16 1/2", Dia.=.595"

3AN
Barrel tip produces bright, articulate cymbal sounds. Great for light rock and fusion.
L=16 3/16", Dia.=.580"

2BN
Tear drop tip. Ideal for heavy rock, band and practice.
L=16 1/4", Dia.=.630"

ROCKN
Oval tip for a full sound. Great for rock and band.
L=16 5/8", Dia.=.630"

Metal N (CMN)
Oval tip. Offers extra reach and power.
L=17", Dia.=.635"

TIMBALE BASICS

Genesis1: 1 ***In the beginning God created heaven and earth.*** And the timbale consisted of only two drums on a stand. In the 1930's the small cowbell was added to the set up for use in the more modern rhythm sections of the time.

Today the timbale player in a typical rhythm section utilizes larger timbale drums with more accessories attached such as; mambo bell, cha-cha bell the wood block and a cymbal on a stand.

The job of the timbale player in a Latin band is similar to that of the drummer in a band. He is responsible for setting up breaks and driving the band as a trap drummer would. Most worship music is usually not composed in Latin rhythm style. That doesn't mean you can't use timbales. I've played rock style worship music, gospel and others using timbales, and you can too. The timbale player plays various parts of the timbale. The Cascara (shell) the large drum (Hembra), and the small drum or (Macho).

In the musician's approach, the larger drum serves as a tom - tom or bass drum and the small drum serves as a snare drum. Most of the riding is done on the Mambo or Cha-cha bells depending on the rhythm that is being played. The cymbal is used more for punches with the band. I frequently ride the cymbal bell when the drummer is focused on his high hat.

Patterns are generally played with one hand, while the other hand might be playing a counter rhythm on the large timbale or another bell pattern simultaneously.

There are many different patterns that are played on the timbales, which come from the different styles such as Mambo, Mozambique and Guajira to name a few.

PART 2

HAND DRUMS

DJEMBE

BONGOS

CONGAS

THE TECHNIQUES OF HAND CARE

The techniques of hand care are as varied as the players themselves. Everyone has his or her own preferences and opinions. To give you more options, I've decided not only to include my own personal preferences, but also the techniques of my peers and friends.

Getting Started

If you are a beginner and just starting to find the voice in your drum, you should not be so concerned about hand care at this point. Just be sure and get off on the right "hand" by finding a teacher who is well versed in Afro-Cuban playing. It is important to learn proper hand technique in the beginning. Once this is achieved, you will find yourself practicing more and more. At this point, you should begin to pay attention to the care of your hands.

No Pain No Gain!

Sooner or later you'll start to develop calluses. They will help you develop good open tone and a nice crisp slap. Once you are able to slap with both hands, you will want to play all the time! But the more you play the more sensitive your hands become.

If you are serious about playing, you will develop blisters! DO NOT pop your blisters. DO NOT put tape over them. Take a little time off and let the blisters drain naturally. Once the blisters have drained, go ahead and start playing, but don't over do it.

The old school Cuban players would use their own urine to help the healing process. Today this is called the "Me Method" and should NOT be used unless you have been taught the proper techniques. Instead of urine, salt water works just fine. The water should be warm and as salty as the sea. Soak your blister for 5 to 10 minutes, several times a day. Be sure to keep you hands clean and uncovered, exposing the blister to open air.

Some Notions on Lotion and Potions

Once you develop calluses, it is very important to keep them soft. There are several ways to do this. Some players myself included, use hand lotion. The brand does not matter as much as the contents. Look for lotions that contain Vitamin E, Vitamin A, and Aloe Vera, or a combination. Other players prefer oil. The most popular oil for this is palm oil. Made from palm trees, this oil is high in Vitamin A, it is often used for cooking.

There are also players who prefer plain old Vaseline. You will need to experiment to find out what works best for your skin. Whatever works best, apply it during the waking hours when you are not playing and at bedtime.

Calluses also need to be groomed. Some players use a pumice stone after a shower or bath to file down their calluses. Others prefer an emery board. What you use is not important. What is important, is keeping your calluses under control. Pay close attention to the calluses, especially the ones at the first knuckle on your index fingers. You will need to keep these calluses filed down close to the skin otherwise they will be a big source of pain!

Another problem with calluses is they can split. The splits are like paper cuts and they can be quite painful. Besides the lotions and oils, you can also use Neosporin ointment to help them heal. Until they heal, you will need to protect them. That brings us up to the next subject, the art of using tape on your hands.

Tips on Tape

Some players tape their fingers only when they are injured, others use tape as a preventative measure. There are several types of tape to use. The first is white medical tape. The other is sports tape it comes in a one-inch roll. This allows you to trim the tape for a custom fit.

When using either one, wrap the tape around your finger 2 or 3 times. Make sure the end of the tape is at the top of your finger, near your fingernail. This will help prevent the drum or others fingers from coming in contact with it and peeling it off.

Some players prefer not to tape-over the knuckle joints. Keeping the knuckle joint exposed is important if the percussionist plays a variety of instruments. Percussionist who play with force often like to use a Band-Aid under the white tape. Most prefer to use it with the cushion on the palm side of the finger.

Another technique is to use adhesive bandages instead of tape. There are several favorite types, sheer and flexible cloth varieties. A great bandage for this is the Extreme Links by Cured. This cloth bandage is 50% longer than normal bandages with a very strong adhesive. The method for applying the adhesive bandages also varies. Some players like to cover the whole finger, while others prefer to cover just the sore spots. Also, some choose to have cushion on the fingernail side while others prefer to apply to the palm side.

Whether you use adhesive bandages or tape, it is important not to tape your fingers too tight. It is also important to warm your hands up after taping them. Always warm up before a performance. This does not mean you need to start out playing hard. Warm-up easy! It is important to remember not to use oil or lotion before taping your fingers. Oil and lotion prevents the tape from sticking.

I hope this gives you the groundwork for taking care of your hands. As with most things in life you must experiment and find out what works best for you. Enjoy yourself, keep practicing and playing.

REMEMBER TO LOVE THY NEIGHBOR AND THY HANDS

HOW TO PLAY THE DJEMBE DRUM

The djembe drum originated in Guinee, West Africa several hundred years ago. It is considered a magical drum with powers to transport people into other worlds when played well. The drum is played traditionally throughout West Africa today in countries such as Guinee, Mali, Ivory Coast, and Senegal. It is referred to as a healing drum in many societies because of its powers when played by master drummers.

The djembe is always hand-carved from a solid piece of wood and headed with a goatskin. Originally, materials like cane, leather, and wood were used for the rings and ropes, which are now made from iron rods and synthetic rope. This allows for precise tuning and very high tension on the goatskin, which gives the drum its characteristic high and low, pitches. These drums are made from linke wood, a plentiful hardwood with beautiful grain and great resonance.

To play, sit on the edge of a chair with ankles crossed, the top of the drum fitting neatly between the knees as the base of the drum rests behind the heels. This way the drum is angled away from the body. Sitting up straight with hands resting on the drum's playing surface, wrists should become flat and this allows the position to create the standard djembe sounds. Djembes produce three basic sounds: bass, tone, and slap.

BASS: With the hand flat and fingers together, place the hand at the dimension of two fists above the center of the playing surface. Allow the hand to strike and bounce back to the original position above the center.

TONE: This is the high-pitched sound produced by striking the top surface nearest the edge with firmly placed fingers.

SLAP: Strike the playing surface's edge first with the heel of your hand, and then allow your fingers to naturally bounce down towards the drum's center.

The tone is a medium high-pitched, round, "matt" sound while the slap is a high-pitched, open, sharp whiplash-like sound and the bass is a low, round sound. The tone and slap are played on the edge of the drumhead, the bass in the center.

How to do it

Tone

Where to strike: The fingers meet the edge of the drumhead simultaneously covering as large an area as possible. The part of the fingers that touch the edge of the drum extend up to the bend at the root of the proximal phalanx (first finger bone) of the middle finger, but no further towards the palm.

From the player's perspective the tone looks like this at the time when the hand hits the drumhead:

Technique: Try clapping one hand against the other to find out how the tone is played; the feel on the drumhead is very near to this. Keep your fingers together without squeezing. Point your thumbs slightly upwards to prevent them from hitting the rim. You may use substantial force in producing the sound.

Slap

Where to strike: In the slap, the hand hits the centre of the drumhead 1-1.5 cm closer than in the tone. The edge of the drum should be hit with the fleshy part of your palm, which is on the same level as your knuckles on the other side of your palm. The bones in your hand arch just the opposite way than the edge of the drum, but try to do it so that as much of the fleshy part of your palm as possible can receive support from the rim. Fingers are free to move and whip the skin even when the palm movement stops.

From the player's perspective the slap looks like this at the time when the hand hits the drumhead:

Technique: Even though the slap sounds louder, the feel should be lighter than in producing the tone. Do not press your fingers together, but allow the fingers to relax into a slight curve. Do not spread your fingers too wide apart or straighten them because this makes them too tense. Keep your wrist in a slightly lower position than in the tone to allow a slightly wider angle where your fingers and the drumhead meet. Remember to keep your thumbs up.

Take care that you do not draw your hand too far away from the drumhead, because doing this makes your hand land on the rim with the area between the knuckle and the first joint of your finger. Although you may find playing the slap easier when the fingertips hit nearer to the edge, it will hurt your hand and forces your hand and fingers to partially cancel out each other. The edge of the drum will force your finger upwards just when it should be moving downwards.

Do not move your hand too far towards the centre of the drum. This focuses the weight on the fingertips and the slap loses sharpness. This also strains the last joints of your fingers.

Avoid making an active movement with your fingers, in other words, snapping the drumhead surface. You should try to find an ideal tension: not too stiff which prevents the fingers from touching the drumhead, but not overly loose either.

Bass

Where to strike: The best sound is produced right in the centre, but it is often practical to hit where both hands have room for quick repetition of bass strokes.

Technique: Keep your palm stiff and flat and try to make the entire drumhead vibrate so that even the lowest frequencies can be heard. Strike firmly but avoid overdoing it: the volume will not grow endlessly by increasing the striking power. Do not leave your palm resting on the drumhead as in the conga technique; your hand should immediately bounce off allowing the head to keep vibrating.

PLAYING POSTURE: SEATED

You may either let the drum rest on the floor or you may also support it with your feet allowing it to move along with your body. Keep the drum tilted or lift it off the floor, as it dampens the bass sounds coming from the tube.

Keep your back slightly arched, push your chest forward, keep your neck upright and shoulders low and make sure that the drum is properly tilted away from you. Remind yourself of the good sitting posture every now and then by looking straight ahead, slightly upwards.

If you are playing for a long time and need to change your posture, you may lower the drum so that it rests on the lower part of your legs and bend forward your upper body. Or you are free to use any posture between these two extremes.

Take care that the drum is not in too vertical a position. If the drum is too upright, the bass sounds will become muted and you have to crouch in order to lower your arms, which will obstruct your arm movements.

PLAYING POSTURE: STANDING

While standing you are able to move with the drum more freely. Pass a wide strap (4.5 m in length) as illustrated in the picture. Find the right spot for the knot by experimenting.

THE ARM MOVEMENT

Avoid tensing your arms so that your upper arms become rigid and only your forearms move vertically. A more economic way of playing is keeping your elbows clearly apart from your sides with the elbows and palms moving almost in opposite directions. When the palm moves up and down to the whole extent, the elbow moves in the opposite direction some 5 cm.

The arm rotates around an imagined axle that starts from the shoulder and runs through the forearm at a point, which is some 5 cm from the elbow towards the palm. In the opposite sides of the axle, the arm masses balance each other during the movement, which makes the movement lighter but maintains the speed of the palm movement.

TUNING YOUR DJEMBE

When you buy your djembe drum, it should be close to the proper tuning, but it may be slightly low or high in pitch. This is especially affected by the climate you and your drum are in. To increase or decrease the pitch of your drum, follow these simple steps and refer to the diagrams below. Extra tuning rope is usually wrapped around the stem of the drum; so first unwrap the extra rope. Also, your drum may be tuned exactly opposite to the diagram, but don't be confused.

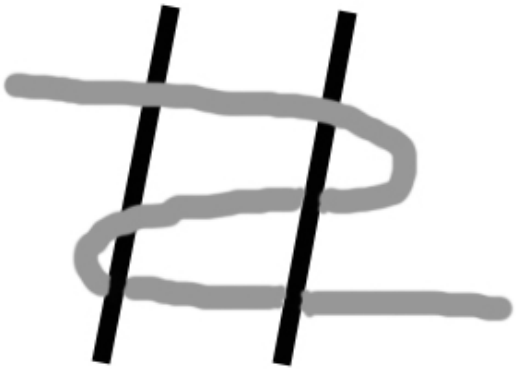
1. Notice the last tuning stitch (or "diamond" as they are sometimes called), which is left loose so you can learn the weave. Study the stitch. I call this the "teaching stitch".

2. Starting from the previous tightened stitch, you can see in our "teaching stitch" that the tuning rope is brought under the next two vertical ropes, then up over the second vertical rope and back around under the first vertical to form a "z" of sorts. This is the whole stitch! From this point, you merely pull the end of the rope tight, which will "flip" the two vertical ropes and form another diamond.

3. Without removing the loose "teaching stitch" (so you have it to refer to still), try to weave your own stitch. Once you get it right, you can remove the stitch. Now pull the "teaching stitch" tight to flip the verticals and create a diamond.

4. Usually, only a few diamonds are necessary to properly tune the djembe, but this can vary depending on the temperature and/or humidity. *Always be careful not to tune your drum too tightly - you can break the goatskin head!*

5. If your drum is too tight and you prefer a lower pitch, you can remove a diamond or two. There is no special technique for this, but you can work the tuning rope loose with your fingers and thereby release the diamond. Then, remove the tuning rope from between the two vertical ropes. When in doubt, ask someone who knows about djembes.



HOW TO ROPE TUNE A DJEMBE DRUM

PULL OUT EXCESS ROPE (FIGURE 1)

USING TWO ROPES TO THE RIGHT OF THE PREVIOUS SET OF CROSSED ROPES (SHOWN IN FIGURE 1)

START THE WEAVE PATTERN UNTIL YOU HAVE CREATED AN S SHAPE.

TO DO THIS WEAVE THE EXCESS ROPE OVER 1&2 UNDER 2, OVER 1 UNDER 1&2 (FIGURE 2)

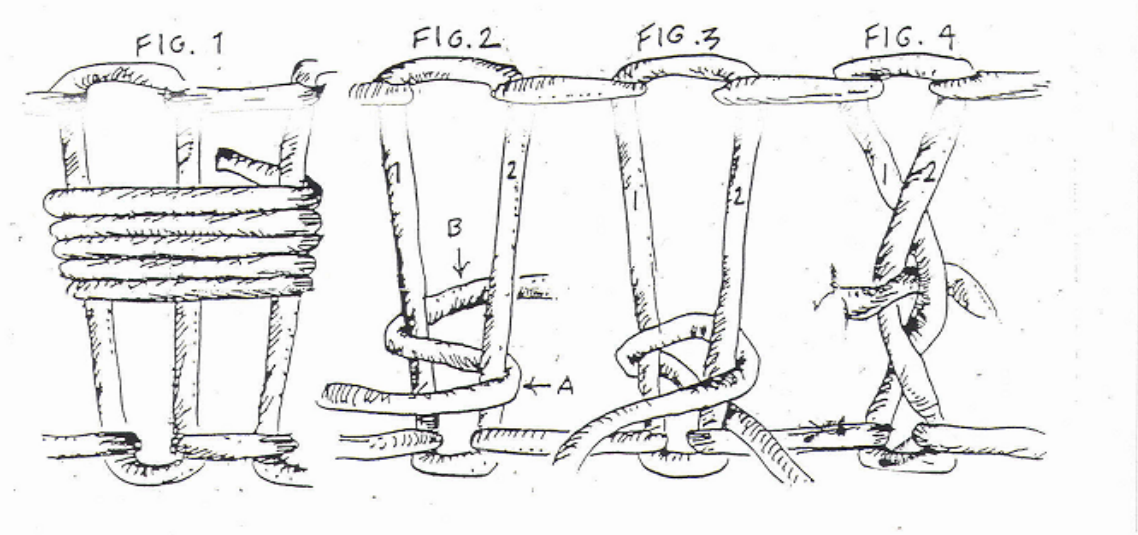
NOW FLIP THE S BY HOLDING THE BOTTOM (A) LOOP OF THE S AND PULL DOWN THE TOP (B) LOOP OF THE S (FIGURE 3)

PULL THE SLACK ROPE OUT AND SLIDE THE FLIPPED S DOWN SNUG TOWARDS THE BOTTOM OF THE DRUM (FIGURE 3)

NOW <u>PULL HARD</u> TO CROSS THE TWO ROPES SO THEY HOLD (FIGURE 4)

MOVE TO THE RIGHT AND REPEAT THE PROCEDURE WITH THE NEXT TWO ROPES UNTIL YOUR DRUM SOUNDS GREAT!

TUNING DIAGRAM



BONGO BASICS

When someone mentions *bongos*, you probably can't help but think of a beatnik poet dressed in black, or a toy. The bongos hail from Cuba and were originally the only drums used in Son (African and Spanish music) from the eastern part of Cuba.

The bongos are made from oak or mahogany, with metal lugs and rims. Most bongos are constructed from wood, but some companies manufacture fiberglass models. Bongo heads are usually made from the skins of cow, calf, mule, goat, or kangaroo. I prefer natural-skin heads and wood drums both for sound and aesthetics. When purchasing bongos, choose an instrument that meets your needs. For the price, the best beginner bongos I have seen are the LP Aspire bongos. It is made of Siam Oak, have fairly durable hardware, and are lightweight.

Today the bongos are one of the most recognizable of the Latin drums, and you can find their sound in all styles of music.

PLAYING POSITION

The first step is to learn to hold the bongo in its traditional form. In a seated position hold the bongos between your legs make sure you have a seat that is not too high. Position yourself at the edge of the seat comfortably with your legs at an approximate 90degree angle. Place the macho (male-small drum) above your left knee. Now place the hembra (female or large drum) below your right knee and hold firmly. (Note that this technique is for right-handed players. If you are left-handed, just reverse the instructions. Your back should be straight, with your forearms resting on your thighs and with your feet positioned flat on the floor. Once you are in this position you are ready to begin.

The bongo uses mostly the fingers and thumb in contrast with the conga, which uses more of the full hand. In contemporary music, the bongos are often mounted on a stand next to the conga drums to provide easier movement between various percussion instruments. Bongos are played as an accent to the main conga beat and as a solo instrument. Timbale sticks may be used instead of hands to obtain a varied tone and greater volume.

FOUR BASIC BONGO STROKES

- **The open tone:** Hit the edge of the drum with the knuckle part of your palm and let your fingers bounce off the head. Experiment by moving your fingers about 4 inches in from the center of the drum and see how the sound changes. You want a rich, clear sound without any overtones (those annoying ringing sounds that get in the way of a clear tone).

- **The slap:** Cup your fingers slightly as you strike the head to create an accent (louder) note that adds color to your drumming. After your hand contacts the drum, relax your fingers and let them bounce off the head. The slap stroke makes a "pop" sound of a higher pitch than the open tone stroke.

- **The heel-tip movement:** Rest your hand on the head and rock from the heel of your palm to the tip of your fingers. Remember to always keep your hand in contact with the head when you play this stroke.

- **The basic muted tone:** Strike the drum in the open tone fashion, but allow your fingers to rest on the head after you strike it. Keep your hands relaxed and barely move them. All you really hear with a muted tone is a light touch of your fingers against the head. Traditionally, your left hand does a heel-tip rocking movement, but most modern players choose the basic muted tone instead.

BASIC PATTERNS

In order to play the bongo you must develop the technique necessary for the execution of the main bongo pattern called the "martillo or hammer". It is essential that this pattern be learned well. This rhythm has been used in various styles of music including Latin, jazz, rock, and folk. Practice these patterns slowly concentrating on the hand movements and sounds. As the accuracy becomes more consistent increase your speed.

I also suggest that you listen to as many of the great players of this instrument as possible, such as Armando Peraza, Jose mangual Sr. Roberto Roena, Rolito Soto and others.

CONGA BASICS

DA DRUMS

A conga is a group dance of African roots popular in many Latin American countries. The rhythm for the dance is also called conga and is commonly played and danced during Carnivals. The drums played with the dance are commonly referred to as "conga" drums but the actual name for the drums in Spanish is "tumbadora" (toom-bah-DOR-ah). But in English we usually just use the term "conga drums".

CONGA DRUMS COME IS THREE BASIC SIZES:

1) Quinto, is the smallest drum, and is commonly used for solos.
2) Conga, the middle size drum is used to answer patterns played on a tumbadora.
3) Tumbadora, the largest of the three drums is used to lay down the foundation of the specific rhythm being played.

You can sometimes find an even smaller solo drum referred to as a "requinto" and the smallest conga of all is called a "Ricardo" conga which is played at the player's side suspended from a shoulder strap. It was popularized by Desi Arnaz (Ricky Ricardo) I love Lucy TV show, in the 50s from which the drum got its name.

In order to help you understand some very basic ideas, we will concentrate on the introduction to the conga drums, and some basic patterns. I hope this information will be useful to you in your pursuit of percussion knowledge.

THE VARIOUS DRUM SOUNDS.

The goal of hand-drums comes from the ability to get a wide variety of sounds according to the manner in which the hands strike the head. The true test of any drum "note" is the sound you get out of the drum. If the note sounds great, then you are doing it "right" no matter what anyone says. If you hear some other player getting a great tone that you don't, perhaps you'd better ask how he/she is doing it! The ability to call up the various drum sounds (notes) at will in a pattern is called "tone separation".

TILTING AND LIFTING:

It is very important for the player to understand that the shell of the conga drum forms a low frequency resonant chamber. This particular device was actually discovered and applied in the construction of djembe drums in Africa. Because of this structure, the hole in the bottom of the conga drum, which is an essential part of the resonator, must not be obstructed or the drum will not produce a full rich bass tone.

Conga players often recognize three separate bass tones. The first is where the drum is flat on the floor and the hole actually is obstructed. This note tends to sound flat and weak without deep bass.

The second is where the drum is tilted slightly either to a side or forward or backward which opens up the bottom hole of the drum slightly. Some people put a 4 ft. cloth-covered bungee cord of the type used to tie luggage etc. around their waist and hook it to the tuning bolts to stabilize the drum when it's played in this tilted position. Since the hole is open but partially blocked, this note is deeper in pitch but somewhat softer than the third note where the hole is unobstructed.

For the third bass note the player uses his/her legs to lift the drum completely off the floor providing a totally open resonator hole. This produces the loudest bass note.

I should mention that lifting modern conga drums with your legs could be awkward. If you examine older authentic Cuban congas you will observe that not only are they a somewhat smaller diameter, but also are crappy looking and rough on the outside side as well. However, these features do make them much easier to lift with the legs than heavy, glossy or fiberglass modern congas. Wearing shorts so the bare legs can grab the drum can help in drum lifting. Personally I like conga-stands. It also produces the loudest bass note

The conga shell acoustics also forms a high frequency echo chamber, which modifies the character of open tones, slaps and other notes. It affects the general sound of the drum such as providing the different sound between wood and fiberglass shells. I found that the wood congas produce the best tones in my opinion.

TUNING CONGAS:

Usually a conga is tuned according to the open tone. When playing two drums the conga and a tumba, a typical tuning would be an interval of a 4th (as in "here comes the bride"). And the conga is often tuned to a "C" and the tumba to a "G". However this tuning may vary to fit the keys typical for the music being played. Also some dual conga players prefer an interval of a 3rd rather than a 4th.

Be sure to tilt the conga off the floor when tuning the open note. If you don't you will find the note may be tuned sharp when you play with the drum tilted. While the open tone does change slightly as the bottom opening is obstructed or the drum is lifted, it does not change radically in pitch like the bass tone. This is why the open tone is used for tuning.

THE TONE OR SOUND OF THE CONGA DRUM

There are four basic sounds that are performed with the hands and fingers to produce the conga tones:

The Open Tone - Strike the edge of the drum where your fingers and hand join together. Allow your hand to rebound up which will create an "open Tone"

The Slap - The sound produced is just like described, a slap. This is the hardest stroke to master, so don't be discouraged. The hand should be slightly cupped to create a "sound chamber" between the drumhead and the palm. Strike the drum toward the center with the underneath of the fingertips. Your other hand should be resting on the drumhead, which will help create a dry tone.

Bass Tone - Strike the drum with the palm of your hand toward the center of the drum.

Heel Toe or Finger - strike the drum with the heel of your hand, and then strike the drum with your fingers. These are two separate motions.

OPEN TONES:

The open tone is the characteristic song of the conga. It is the open notes of the conga that most tend to "cut through the mix" and add the conga flavor to the music. An open tone is produced by keeping the fingers close together and bringing the hand down such that the crease where the fingers join the hand comes down on the bearing edge (bend) of the drumhead. The fat pads on the bottoms of the fingers strike the head just inside the rim producing a loud clear melodic tone from the drum.

Since this is the note that "cuts through" it needs to be practiced until is it loud and strong. In this note, however, the hand must be quickly removed from the head to let the note "sing" otherwise the note becomes a "muff" which is different. To get the hand position, it helps to think of making a military salute and then bringing your "salute" down and strike the drumhead as described.

"CLOSED" CONGA SLAP NOTES:

The usual conga slap note is done with the fingers slightly curved and the idea is that the palm comes into the rim of the drum and the fingertips "slap" down against the head. There is a slight "grabbing" action to this as well as a certain wrist motion. In conga slaps (unlike djembe slaps where the fingers bounce back off the head) the fingers stay "stopped" against the drumhead in a style analogous to the bass note. Except with the slap only the fingertips remain touching the head. It takes some practice to get nice slaps easily. The wrist action is like "slapping your little sister's arm when she gets into your toys" The sound should be a single bright "crack" with no ring.

"OPEN" AND MUTED SLAPS:

Open or djembe-style slaps are not common on congas though certain players can be seen using a slap that is slightly more open than that above. Usually they keep the hand quite low to the drum. Open slaps on a conga tend to create a lot of the characteristic open tone pitch in the sound. For this reason open slaps on a conga are usually played muted to kill the open tone ring. In playing this note the one hand is simply laid on the drumhead and an open or closed slap is played as usual with the other hand.

The hand damps the open slap into a more traditional conga slap sound. Beginners often find it easier to get a nice sound with a muted slap first. The advantage of using open slaps with a mute is that executing fast double stroke open slaps is much easier than doing closed slaps, while the mute still insures a traditional conga slap sound. Obviously the "heel-toe" hand can easily play the muting role.

BASS NOTES:

The bass note is the lowest pitched sound you can get from any given drum. The basic move is having the hand and arm held out and then allowing the hand to fall onto the drumhead. The palm of the hand produces the bass sound. Some people teach that the whole hand should fall onto the head this technique only the palm tends to produce the bass note with the fingers perhaps touching but not actually hitting the drumhead. In any case, a conga head is quite strong and thick so that the bass note continues to vibrate even when the hand stays on the head after the strike. This is unlike a thin-headed djembe, for example, where the hand must be immediately lifted or the note is damped out. Since the hand in conga playing is not immediately lifted except in the case of open tones, it is commonly said that one plays "into" a conga drum head.

HEEL FINGER OR HEEL-TOE:

"Heel-toe" This technique is often called *"mano secreta*" which means "Secret of the hands" in English. The basic idea is to use a single hand to produce rapid successive notes. The technique produces rapid patterns that in a sense can simulate the rapid beats of the snare drum.

The first motion of the heel-toe is the "heel". This is a note that simulates a bass tone. The heel of the hand, consisting of the fat pad at the base of the thumb and the pad directly across from that, are forced into the drumhead giving a bass-like note. The second motion is the "toe" in which the fingertips come down in the "touch" note as described below which then lifts the "heel" off the head. There may be a slight pulling backward to accomplish this smoothly.

Once the "heel" is raised, it can again be forced into the head and the cycle repeated. H-T-H-T-H-T etc. The "heel-toe" name refers to the similarity to tapping one's foot by first stomping the heel into the floor and then tapping the toe, which raises the heel.

Heel-Toe is typically played with the player's weak hand, but nevertheless needs to be practiced with both hands. There are two ways to practice. One would be: Heel (strong hand), Toe (strong hand), Heel (weak hand), Toe (weak hand), repeat. The other would be: Heel (Strong hand), Heel (weak hand), Toe (strong hand), Toe (weak hand), repeat. Practice both ways with a metronome starting at a slow tempo and then gradually raising it. Also practice starting with the weak hand.

TOUCH NOTE:

A "touch" is simply where the fingertips are brought down against the head to make a sound. Unlike a slap where the tips are slammed against the head to make a sharp sound, here the fingertips are pressed flatter, with the pressure going further back from the tips. Usually the fingers are together as in an open tone. A "touch" should never produce any open-like tone. If you hear an open tone pitch the note you are playing is a "muff" rather than a "touch". A "touch" is also the "toe" half of the Heel-Toe technique. Whether or not the "heel" of the hand is on the drumhead when a finger "touch" is done will also modify the sound of a "toe" stroke. When a louder "touch" note is desired it is sometimes played by bunching the thumb and four fingers together and then bringing them straight down tips first into the head. Cuban players often do a "touch" with the whole hand quite flat so that it appears to the observer as a bass note, but the palm does not strike the drum, or does so lightly, so the note is actually a "touch" sound rather than a bass note. At other times these players will play a "heel" (see above) where even though the hand appears flat the base of the palm strikes first giving a bass-like tone. One has to listen to determine which note is being played, as both moves can appear quite identical to the eye. The location of the "touch" on the drumhead will help determine the exact sound of the given note.

MUFF TONE:

A "muff" describes a drum note where the hand is pressed into the head after the initial note to damp it out quickly. In conga playing this is typically an open tone in which continued finger pressure damps it out quickly. The key is to regulate the damping of the note to just the right amount. You should always hear the pitch of the open tone but it should damp out quickly. If there is no pitch to the note you have damped it too much. If it rings nearly as long as a normal open tone, you haven't damped it enough. While muff notes are common, they are much less common that the standard bass open and slap notes.

GHOST NOTES:

Ghost notes are very light taps, which are not really to be heard but often played to keep the rhythm of his/her hands going. The Ghost notes played on the metal rim of the conga for "rests" can be a big help when learning a new rhythm. This insures that the drummer "plays the spaces" so that the rhythm does not become rushed.

PITCH BENDING:

As a show-off move for trick solos, the pitch of the open tone can be "bent". To do this play the open note with one hand and using the elbow of the other arm to raise the pitch of the note by pressing on the drumhead. You press with the hard bone at the end of the elbow to keep from damping out the open tone and you place your elbow just inside the rim of the drumhead. You do not place it in the center of the drumhead as is done when pitch bending certain other types of drums. A "bent" tone is not a commonly used tone in patterns.

HEAD BOWING:

Another show-off move called "flash and trash" solos. And by "flash and trash" I mean drum solos designed to bring the audience enthusiastically to their feet by show and chops rather than musical content. Chops is a musician term originally applied to horn players meaning the possession of playing ability in terms of speed, command of techniques and skill.

Usually ultra-fast playing is implied.] "Flash and trash" solos are often characterized by such showmanship as exaggerated arm motions such as raising the hands so high as to be over the player's head after each stroke. Head "bowing" is typically done by wetting the first finger and then placing the thumb and first finger together and running the fleshy pad of the finger diagonally across the drum head in such a manner that a tone is produced. It is similar to the manner in which a violin string produces a tone when rubbed with a bow. It takes some practice, but the sound is always a big hit with the crowd. These two methods should not be used in worship. This draws attention away from God and focuses on the player!

***STICK SOUNDS*:**

Typically Conga drums are never played with two drumsticks in the manner of a drum set. However, in certain African musical styles a single stick is used. (Usually in the strong hand.) For example, this is typical of Senegalese playing. There are three fundamental notes produced by stick playing. The first is a typical drum stroke to the head where the stick is held loosely and allowed to bounce off the head. In the second note, the stick is gripped tightly and is brought down at a high angle into the head and is pressed into the head so as to give a more muted higher pitched note. And finally, there is a "choke tone" where the drum is struck in the usual bouncing note, but with the weak hand laying on the drumhead in the manner of the muted slap. This gives a very damped sharp sound. Usually a timbale stick or a shortened timbale stick is used for stick strokes. The "wrong" end of a common drumstick will also work in a pinch.

TUNING YOUR CONGA DRUMS

1. Tune congas and bongos in a circular movement around the head. It doesn't matter if you go clockwise or counter clockwise as long as you continue in the same direction as you started.
2. Tune each lug to the same pitch so the drums are in tune with itself. Again, learn to listen to and recognize the sounds.
3. Tune each drum to the note that produces the longest sustain when hitting an open tone and eliminates as much of the overtone ring (the high-pitched, "metallic" sound) as possible. Explore each drum's "nature", it's best and worst pitches.
4. Tune up or down in small to moderate increments.
5. Tune the drum down when finished playing for the day. This greatly extends the life of the head, helps prevent the drum from going out of round and allows you to tune your drum up every time you play so that you get to know it even better.

CONCLUSION:

All the information contained in this book was geared to assist individuals who have an interest in percussion instruments and hand drums. I believe anyone who has a desire can play all the instruments that were discussed in the book. It is just a matter of the degree one wants to pursue. The best advise I can give, has already been stated in God's word: Psalms 33: 1-3 *Rejoice in the Lord, O you righteous! For praise from the upright is beautiful. Praise the Lord with the harp; Make melody to Him with an instrument of ten strings. Sing to Him a new song; Play skillfully with a shout of joy.* So play for the Lord… and may God bless you.