

from hand to drum

HAND DRUM TECHNIQUES FROM AROUND THE WORLD



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As Autumn retreats behind a dreary spread of cloud, country meadows and rolling in the hay with fair maidens grow distant. Winter or not, we all need our rolls, and contrary to Ludwig Wittgenstein's hypothesis, 'What can be shown cannot be said,' I will endeavour to say and show you how you can have a roll right now. Whether you like it or not, this roll will be on a drum, namely the bodhran, as covered in the last two articles in this series.

The roll as played on the bodhran involves the use of both ends of the stick. It is based on a triplet configuration and is played in the following manner:

1. Bottom of stick striking downward (Fig. 1).
2. Top of stick striking skin as a direct consequence of the movement of the bottom stick in step one (Fig. 2).
3. Bottom of stick striking upwards and returning to start position (Fig. 3).

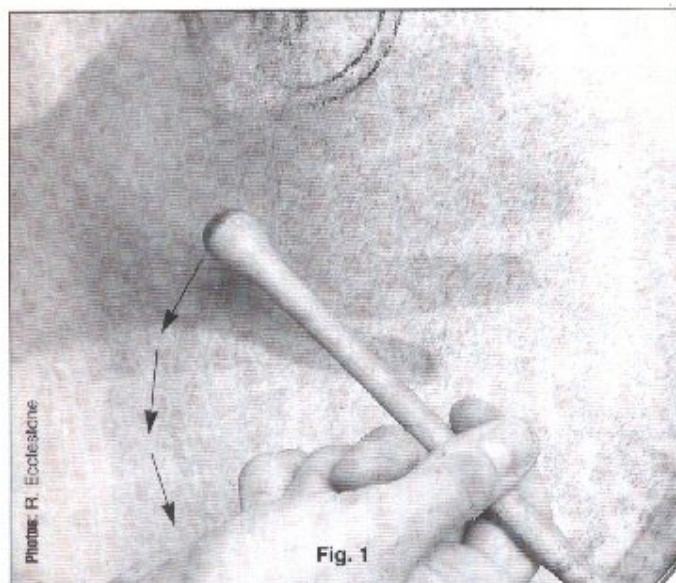


Fig. 1

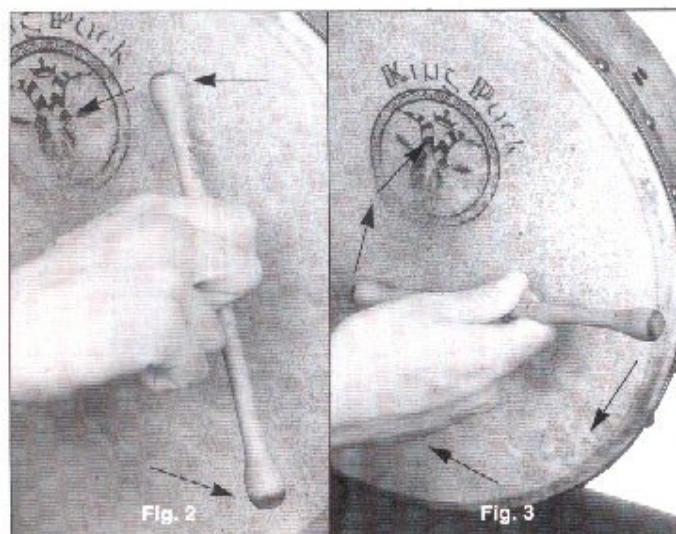


Fig. 2

Fig. 3

This roll will take some time to master and is more difficult at a slower tempo. Try speeding it up once you are clear about what you are trying to achieve. The movement of the hand and wrist is relaxed and is somewhat similar to shaking water from the tips of your fingers. Here we have the basic roll in its triplet form:

KEY

D	U	T	(D)	(U)
(Down)	(Up)	(Tip)	Down Closed	Up Closed

1

Don't be disillusioned if it does not happen straight away. You will stumble across the triplet accidentally every now and then. Slowly you will get more and more control. It really is a knack; keep trying and you'll get it. Here are some examples combining quavers and triplet rolls. Practise these with the hand flat on the inside of the skin so you can concentrate totally on the triplet motion. We will go on to pitch inflections in a while.

2

3

4

5

6

7

The placement of these triplet ornaments within the rhythm is dictated by the ornamental rhythm in the tune itself. You will need to check out some traditional Irish music to really understand this. What we have in the next few examples is some possible combinations of the triplet roll within our reel and jig rhythms as covered last month. One important thing to bear in mind when using the triplet is to not use it too often.

REELS

8

D U D U D T U D U D U D U D T U D U

(O) (C) (O) 2 (C) (O) (C) (O) 3 (C)

D D T U U D T U D D T U D U U T U

(O) (C) 2 (O) (C) 3 (O) (C) 3 (O) (C) 3

D U U T U D T U D U D U D T U D T U D U

(O) (C) 2 (O) 2 (C) (O) (C) 2 (O) 2 (C)

IS

D D U D U D T U D U D U

(O) (C) (C) (C)

D D U D U D T U D D T U D

(O) (C) (C) (C)

D D U D U D T U D T U D U

(O) (C) (C) (C)

D D U D U D T U D T U D T U

(O) (C) (C) (C)

ex 13 involves a double down motion in bar 2

So far, we have only looked at two tones dictated by movement of the hand inside the drum. Anyone who knows bodhran playing will be aware of the fact that there are a lot more tones than this available, depending on the movement up and down and the degree of pressure applied by the hand inside the drum. For example, look at Fig. 4 and notice how



Fig. 4

high the muffling hand is in comparison to last month's position.

Try experimenting and see for yourself the difference it makes. It should be noted that there are many positions for the hand and possible pressure inflections inside the drum. Most reputable bodhran players would use these inflections to the full to give the rhythms more tonal form. Again, it's a case of listening to the music. As our logical friend Ludwig once said, 'What expresses itself in language,

we cannot express by means of language... what can be shown, cannot be said.'

A few good tutor guides worth mentioning are two videos, one by Tommy Hayes and the other by Mel Mercier. There is also a good instruction book written by Silean Hannigan.

Next month, I'm going to begin something extremely putty... Udu drumming. Until then...

