

from hand to drum

HAND DRUM TECHNIQUES

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Traditional Cuban Martillo

Moving on from last month's simplified version of the Cuban Martillo, this month we're going to look at the more intricate method utilising the left hand finger tips and thumb to mute the sounds.

The method I'm going to use is a step by step series of pictures showing the particular manner of the strokes and muting techniques along with close-ups of the positions of the hands.

The basic rhythm spans one bar of eighth notes. To begin with, place the edge of the thumb flat on the head of the small bongo as in Fig. A. The whole of the side of the thumb, right up to its base, should be in contact with the head and should apply a gentle degree of pressure. Notice the exact position of the hand on the head, allowing room for the right hand to strike the drum without hitting the thumb.



Fig. A. Position prior to beat 1

With the thumb in this position, strike the drum with the first finger of the right hand. Hit as near the edge as possible (for basic hitting and playing positions, see last month's article). The sound should be sharp and woodblock-like. Experiment with the position of the thumb and vary the degree of pressure to find the sharpest sound possible. See Fig. 1 for this position.

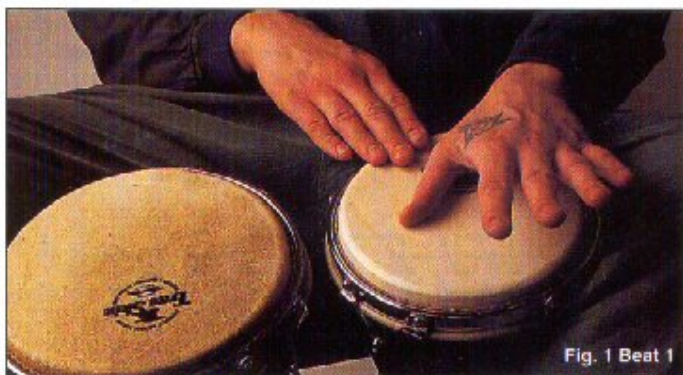


Fig. 1 Beat 1

The second beat of the bar is played with the finger tips as in Fig. 2. Pivot the hand up from the first thumb position to create a cup-like hollow as the fingers strike the head. Only the tips of the fingers should strike and then remain in contact with the head. The sound should be muted, with the fingers not bouncing off after impact. The thumb should remain in position to create the mute for the next right hand stroke.



Fig. 2 Beat 1&

The third stroke of the bar is with the right hand, with the left hand remaining in this position, thus taking the high edge off the mute.



Fig. 3 Beat 2

The fourth stroke sees the left hand thumb returning to the head with a sharp action. The thumb should remain in contact with the head after striking and should not bounce off. The sound should be slightly sharper in tone than the left hand finger stroke.

The next two beats of the bar are identical to the first two. The thumb should remain in position to create the mute for the next right hand stroke.



Fig. 4 Beat 2&



Fig. 5 Beat 3

Identical to Beat 1.

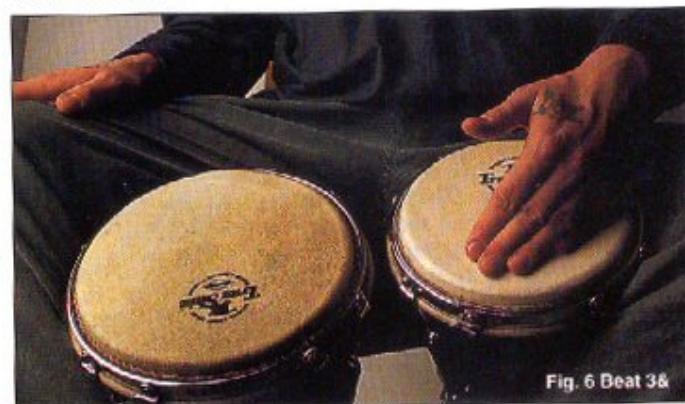


Fig. 6 Beat 3&

Identical to Beat 1&. The seventh stroke of the bar involves an open tone with the first finger on the larger bongo.

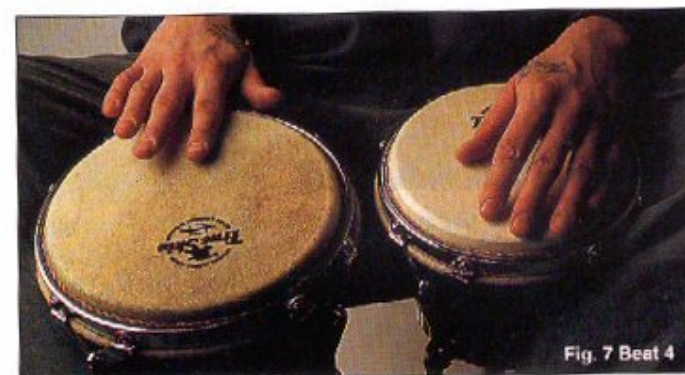


Fig. 7 Beat 4

The last stroke sees the left hand thumb returning to the head with a sharp action. The thumb should remain in contact with the head after striking and should not bounce off. The sound should be slightly sharper in tone than the left hand finger stroke.

That, in a nutshell, is the proper version of the Cuban Martillo. See you next time for a few variations.

Ex 1

FT = Fingertips
 TH = Thumb
 X = Large Bongo