

from hand to drum

HAND DRUM TECHNIQUES FROM AROUND THE WORLD



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This month we're going on to the playing techniques for the dhol drum from the Punjab in North India. For those of you who do not have a dhol, try substituting a floor tom placed on your left for the left hand parts, and a snare (turned off) on the right for the right hand parts. If you have neither a dhol nor a floor tom and a snare, then try a bed and an old saucepan.

For those of you who haven't been following my recent articles on the dhol, here is a brief re-cap. The dhol is a double-ended, barrel shaped drum held around the neck and played with two cane sticks. Traditionally, both heads are made from goat skin laced together over the shell by one piece of rope which is threaded through the edge of both skins. Like many Indian double-ended drums, one head is tuned to generate the bass tones and the other the treble. Sizes range from 12" to 14", but the most favoured head size is 13". The drum is played with two sticks, one on each end; the treble end is played with a thin piece of bendy cane, while the bass end is also played with a piece of cane, but, much thicker and bent at 45 degrees for the last two inches of its 15"-18" length.

The first thing we need to look at is the holding position for the drum. Traditionally, the drum is held around the neck with the bass end to the left and the treble end to the right. The angle of the drum is usually more extreme than the position I've adopted in Fig. 1. It would not be uncommon for the treble end to be much lower than the bass end, but I

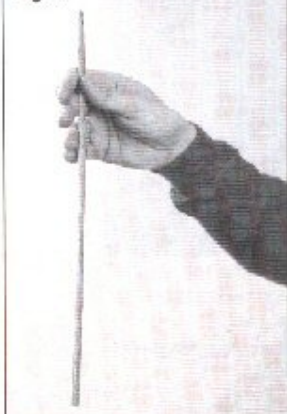
Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



personally do not find this position as comfortable. It's up to you to find the angle which suits you best, whether you wish to look schooled in the idiom or not.

The bass end is played with the larger cane stick, which is held in the manner as in Fig 2. It is the curved bend of the stick which is used to strike the drum, and not the point of the stick as with a talking drum. The drum is hit so hard that this would easily pierce the skin. Notice the fist-like grip in Fig 2.

The right hand holds the thinner stick and plays the treble end of the drum. The grip is as in Fig 3.

Now we can look at the manner in

which we strike the drum. If we look at Fig. 4 and 5, we can see how the left hand prepares for the stroke, and also how it hits the drum (notice the curved edge and where it strikes on the skin). The motion is like a whiplash, and the drum is hit very hard and loudly. It is important to be relaxed and not dig into the drum when you strike with the stick.



Fig. 4

in relation to the outside edge of the shell, and also in relation to its position directly above the drum at twelve o'clock. Look back at Fig. 3 and check that the grip between the thumb and first finger is correct,

allowing the stick to hang down vertically and naturally. To hit, the wrist is twisted in a 'screw-driver' type turning motion. It is the very tip of the stick which hits the drum as near to the edge as possible, causing a rimshot type effect. The stick should hit sharp and fast, causing a high pitched tone. This sound is called 'Na', and sometimes 'Ta'.

Most Indian drums, whether from the North or the South, have distinct similarities within their playing techniques. For example, the bass end sound we've learnt so far is called the 'Ge' sound, as would be



Fig. 5

found on dholak or tabla, the only difference being that you use a stick instead of a hand or a finger.

The treble side, meanwhile, can be compared to the tabla or the mridangam. It has the rim sound called 'Na' which we've covered in this article ('Nam' on the mridangam), as well as the 'Tin' inner ring sound ('Dim' on the mridangam), and the closed 'Te' sound ('Ti' on the mridangam). Admittedly, there is not so much differentiation between the sounds as on the tabla or mridangam, nor is there as

much subtlety, but what I'm saying is that the general starting point of the technique is basically the same. What we can say is that they come from the same root.

The basic building blocks of the drum hinge on these five sounds: 'Na', 'Tin' and 'Te' on the treble side, and 'Ge' and 'Ke' for the bass. (We will cover 'Tin' 'Te' and 'Ke' in next month's article.) We then get compound

Fig. 6



words by playing two sounds simultaneously. These would be thus:

'Na' + 'Ge' = 'Dha'

'Tin' + 'Ge' = 'Dhin'

'Te' + 'Ge' = 'Dhe'

Traditionally, there would be no compound word for the combination of the 'Ke' and 'Na' sounds, but for the sake of these articles we'll use 'Kin' in the same way that Johnny Kalsi of the Dhol Foundation does for his students.

To finish off with this month, here are a few basic rhythms and exercises using the two sounds we have so far. Don't forget, we've got three words because 'Na' + 'Ge' = 'Dha'.

KEY

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

11

SHORT DHA / MUKRAH

11

Variation on 11

Variation on 11

