

# from hand to drum

## HAND DRUM TECHNIQUES

### FROM AROUND THE WORLD



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The ghatam is a spherical clay pot with one hole at the top and no drum head at all. We could describe this pot as 'big bellied' with a large playing area. The bottom half of the pot is completely spherical with the top half having slightly straighter sides.

It is on all these different playing surfaces that the player can create all the different tones of the instrument, striking with his inside wrist, his finger tips, his palms and anything else close at hand. This involves some self-restraint, as the drum is played resting in the lap. One specialist sound on the pot is created by the player submerging their stomach into the hole, causing the drum to change pitch when struck. For this purpose, ghatam players usually perform without a shirt.

Of all the drums I've ever learnt, the ghatam has to be the most painful – so much so that it is actually not always an attractive proposition to sit down and play. I've witnessed many performers with seriously ripped fingers after a show, and heard reports of aches that defy the imagination. It really is an instrument for the most determined of percussionists.

The sound of the ghatam is very sharp and cutting, partly because of the attack of the strokes and partly because the clay of the instrument contains a high portion of iron fillings. Two sorts of ghatam are available, one from the Madras region of India and the other from the Maddai region. The Madras version is much thinner, lighter and easier to play for the beginner, while the Maddai version is extremely

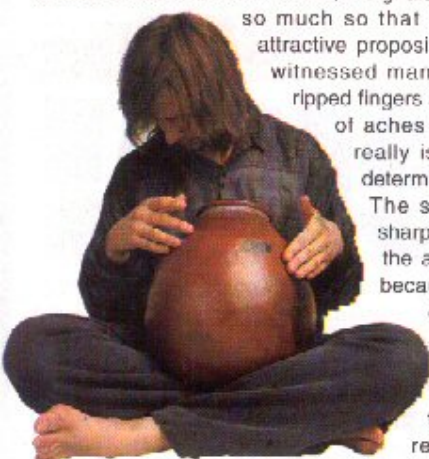


Fig. 1 Basic cross legged playing position

heavy, thick, uncompromising and difficult to play. Professionals usually use the latter because the Madras version is very susceptible to breaking under a player's hand.

We're going to begin by looking at some of the basic sounds on the ghatam. First of all, refer to Fig. 1 for the basic cross-legged playing position:

#### LEFT HAND STROKES

**Bass tone:** This is played by striking the inside of the left wrist on the side of the ghatam. Go gently to begin with because this can become quite painful after a while. If in doubt, then try to find a teacher who can give you some guidance. See Fig. 2 for the positions.

**Staccato tone:** This stroke is played with the finger tips of the left hand on the side of the pot in roughly the same position as the bass tone. See Fig. 3 to see the position the hand ends up in.

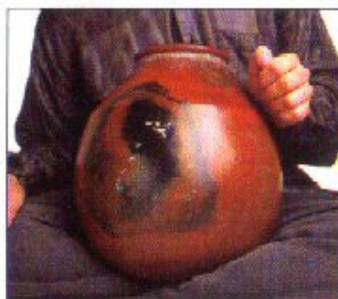


Fig. 2 Left hand bass tone

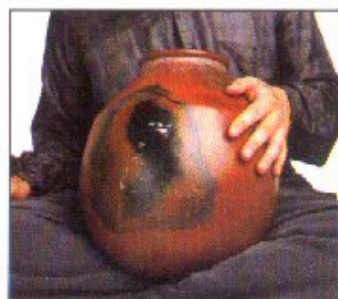


Fig. 3 Left hand staccato tone

#### RIGHT HAND STROKES

**Staccato tone:** This is articulated with the three finger striking unit and the one finger striking unit of the right hand. The hand is split into two striking units as in Fig. 4 and 5. As you can see, the first unit employs the first finger while the second unit involves the other three fingers. The drum is struck with the fingers flat, creating a sharp and staccato sound.



Fig. 4 Three finger striking unit

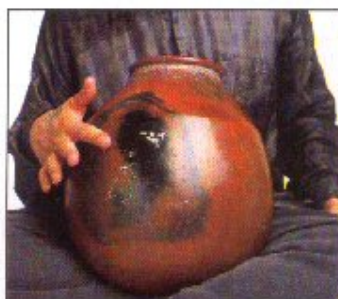


Fig. 5 One finger striking unit

Here are a few rhythmic ideas to get you started on the instrument. There will be a more in-depth rhythmic study next month.

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**KEY:**

Left hand bass tone      Left hand fingertips      Right hand 3-fingered unit      Right hand 1-fingered unit

**Ex 1**

**Ex 4**

**Ex 5**

**Ex 2**

**Ex 3**