

from hand to drum

HAND DRUM TECHNIQUES FROM AROUND THE WORLD



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This month I'll be continuing with a look at the South Indian clay pot called the ghatam. For those of you not familiar with this instrument, it's the pot heard on many of the John McLaughlin recordings with his Shakti ensemble. In the right hands, the ghatam can be an awesome and mind-blowing instrument. T. H. Vinayakram and Shubash Chandran are two particularly noted Indian masters worth looking out for.

Last month we checked out the basic stroke articulations along with a few basic patterns. This month we're going to take a slightly more traditional approach and look at some of the first few basic compositional lessons in South Indian drumming.

The drumming system is taught in a very logical fashion, which gives the student many basic frameworks to use in the construction of rhythmic motifs. There are some compositions that are more 'theme and variation' based in the same way as North Indian Kaida compositions, but on the whole the system focuses more on phrase development within the context of the basic rhythms.

There are many ways in which this is done: lengthening phrases, shortening phrases, adding or subtracting sections from phrases, reversing, rhythmic modulation and many other methods are used. I found this an absolutely indispensable system and can honestly guarantee that any musician would benefit from it. To begin with, it is an extremely intimidating environment because it all appears so impossibly complex; but once you've got your basic footing, everything comes together and builds up quite logically.

The examples in this article show how a basic phrase is introduced into a rhythm and how it is developed. In Ex. 2 and 3 we get to see how it can be used in 5/4 and 7/4. Our first example is in 4/4 and we can see the first introduction of the phrase in the fourth bar. (For explanation of how to play the basic strokes, refer to last month's article.)

Bars one and two present us with the basic eight-beat structure for the rhythm we are using in this example. This rhythm is called 'Adi Thala' or 'Chaturu Sra Jhati Tiraputa Thala' in South Indian circles.

You can see that each bar of the rhythm has notes added on beat one, until we get to the fourth bar, which is where the basic rhythmic motif is introduced into the composition. These get much more interesting as the compositions get more advanced.

After this four bar pattern is repeated, the motif is played every other bar until we get to the corvay section, which is the rhythmic cadence that brings the composition to a close. In this case the motif is repeated three times and does so in such a way as to end on the first beat of the time cycle. This is a very common way for percussionists in the Indian tradition to end a rhythmic exploration.

Ex. 2 and 3 are variations on the same theme. Notice how the rhythm and motif are manipulated to adapt them into the different time signature.

See you next month for Part 3 of our ghatam study and some more motifs.

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KEY

LEFT HAND BASS TONE LEFT HAND FINGERTIPS RIGHT HAND 3 FINGERED UNIT RIGHT HAND 1 FINGERED UNIT

Ex 1

TA DIM UIM NA TA TA DIM DIM NA
KI DA TA KA DIM DIM NA TA TA KU KU TA KA DI NA
TA DIM DIM NA TA TA KU KU TA KA DI NA

CORVAY SECTION

TA TA KU KU TA KA DI NA TUM TA TA KU KU
TA KA DI NA TUM TA TA KU KU TA KA DI NA

Ex 2

TA TA KA DIM NA TA TA TA DIM NA
TA KI DA TA KA DIM NA TA TA TA KU KU TA KA DI NA



3 3 1 1 3 3 3 3 3

TA TA KA DIM NA TA TA TA KU KU TA KA DI NA

3 3 1 3 1 1 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3

TA KI DA TA KA DIM DIM NA TA TA TA KU KU TA KA DI NA

CORVAY SECTION

3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3

TA TA KU KU TA KA DI NA TA TA KU KU TA KA DI NA TUM

3 3 1 1 3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3

TA TA DIM DIM NA TA TA TA KU KU TA KA DI NA

3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3

TA TA KU KU TA KA DI NA TUM TA TA KU KU TA KA DI NA

CORVAY SECTION

3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3

TA TA KU KU TA KA DI NA TUM TA TA KU KU

Ex 3

3 3 1 3 3 3 3 3 1 1 3

TA TA DIM DIM NA TA TA TA DIM DIM NA

3 3 3 3 3 3 3 3

TA KA DI NA TUM TA TA KU KU TA KA DI NA