

from hand to drum

HAND DRUM TECHNIQUES FROM AROUND THE WORLD



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This month we'll continue with some techniques for the South Indian frame drum called Kanjira. So far we've learnt two sounds, 'TUM' (open bass sound) and 'THA' (closed slap type sound) – see last month's article for how to play these sounds, playing position etc. We will now add a third sound to our vocabulary, 'RI'. This is played with the first finger in the middle of the head and is a closed sound similar to 'Tha'.



Fig. 1

It is important that the three fingered 'THA' and the one fingered 'RI' both strike in the centre of the head. It is also important to move the three fingers away when the one fingered stroke is played and vice versa when the three fingered stroke is played. The thumb should not touch the head at all; it should be relaxed and not held rigid. The whole hand should move away from the drum for each individual stroke.

Fig. 1 shows the striking position for the one fingered 'RI' stroke.

Now we can play some patterns using all three sounds:

DRUM KEY

Ex 1

As you can see, above this example I've written in the fingering. This will become particularly useful when we get on to the area of ambiguous phonetics. Here are some more phrases:

Ex 2

Ex 3

As I explained last month, a lot of phonetics used in Carnatic (south Indian) music derive from Mridangam (barrel drum) phrases. This means that more complicated strings of words need to be interpreted for use on the Kanjira. This leads to a lot of phonetics which have double meanings and a lot of strokes which can be represented by a number of names. With this in mind, it is useful to think of larger phrases as more of a rhythmic framework than as an explicit instruction. Once one gets to know the music then certain phrases become more obvious than they are at the outset.

These ambiguities occur more in South Indian music than they do in North Indian. For example, I've come across the South Indian phrase 'KIDATAKA TARIKIDA' fingered in two different ways for Mridangam: 'LRRLRLRL' and 'RLRRLRRL'. My teacher assured me that at certain times and in certain compositions it was up to the performer to choose which fingering to play.

Let's get back to the Kanjira and some idiomatic phrases:

Ex 4A Basic Khandam Unit

Ex 4B

Ex 4C

As you can see in Ex. 4A, we have a number of new words. What would be 'THARITHATHATUM' with our three words becomes 'THATIKIDATUM'. It would be this latter phrase that would be commonly used amongst South Indian percussionists. If there is any confusion regarding which strokes to play then all you need do is look at the indicated fingerings (see key for Ex. 1.). Common phrases such as this one would always be played the same. A Kanjira player would know how to articulate many common phrases such as this.

Exs. 4B and 4C introduce the phrase 'KIDATUM' as semi-quavers. This phrase is very common in Kanjira playing and can be very effective when played up to speed. Look out for the indicated fingering. Notice how the fingering is different

to Ex. 4A.

Here is a composition which should help develop this phrase. It fits into 4/4 but is written out in its composite units to make it easier to understand. It ends with a short phrase repeated three times (Arudie):

Ex 5

2/4 KI 1 DA 3 TUM 3

3/4 THA 3 KI 1 DA 3 TUM 3

4/4 DI 3 THA 3 KI 1 DA 3 TUM 3

5/4 THA 3 DI 1 THA 3 KI 1 DA 3 TUM 3

4/4 DI 3 THA 3 KI 1 DA 3 TUM 3

11/8 THA 3 KI 1 DA 3 TUM 3

11/8 THA 3 KI 1 DA 3 TUM 3

6/8 TA 3 KI 1 DA 3 TUM 3

TUM (Beat No.33)

This would fill up four bars of 4/4 with the final TUM being the first beat of the fifth bar.



To finish off this month's article, here are a few more short phrases.

Ex 6A

3/4 THA 3 DI 1 KI 3 DA 3 TUM 3

Ex 6B

3/4 THA 3 DI 1 THA 3 KI 1 DA 3 TUM 3

Ex 6C

3/4 KI 1 DA 3 TUM 3 THA 3 KI 1 DA 3 TUM 3

Ex 7A

7/8 THA 3 DI 1 KI 3 DA 3 TUM 3

Ex 7B

7/8 TA 3 DI 1 THA 3 KI 1 DA 3 TUM 3

Ex 7C

7/8 THA 3 KI 1 DA 3 TUM 3 THA 3 KI 1 DA 3 TUM 3

Ex 7D

7/8 THA 3 KI 1 DA 3 TUM 3 KI 1 DA 3 TUM 3 KI 1 DA 3 TUM 3

Try to spend some time discovering your own techniques on this instrument. This is only one of many possibilities. Next month we'll conclude our look at Kanjira by building some rhythms out of what we've learnt so far. We'll also take a look at pitch bending techniques for the left hand.