

# from hand to drum

## HAND DRUM TECHNIQUES FROM AROUND THE WORLD



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## The Mridangam

Of all the instruments so far covered in Hand To Drum (and there have been a few), the mridangam found in Carnatic music from South India poses the biggest challenge so far. The technicalities and complexities of both the musical systems from India and the intricate playing techniques on the drums, make learning a challenge for even the strongest-willed percussionist.

One thing that is an enormous help to the newcomer, however, is that the system and method of learning is logical, thematic and modular.

With this in mind, we will begin our study with the first four sounds learnt on the mridangam: 'Tha', 'Thi', 'Tum' and 'Nam'. Before this, though, we will grace ourselves with the playing position (not easy in itself).

Look at Fig. 1, the basic playing position. To achieve this you will need to sit cross-legged on the floor, folding your right leg in under your left. Now move your right leg away from your body so that your heel is about six inches away from your left shin. The gap between your legs is the area the drum rests in.

Now lay the drum in the gap, with the bass end to the left, resting on the floor, and the treble end (with the large, black centre patch) to the right, resting on and slightly proud of your knee. Refer to Figure 1 for more guidance.

Traditionally the bass end is prepared by applying a small patch of dough to the centre. This increases the bass frequencies produced by the head. A good substitute is a small lump of Blu-Tac, approximately two marbles in size.

### 'Tha' (Treble end non-resonant stroke)

This stroke is articulated by striking the three finger unit of the right hand onto the centre of the black spot. The fingers should stay in

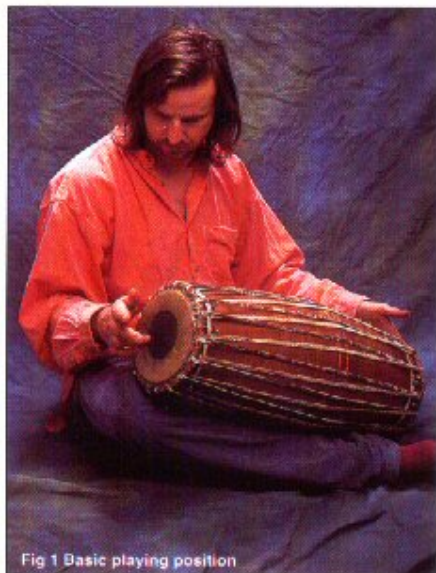


Fig 1 Basic playing position

contact with the head for a millisecond after impact. The sound should be sharp and staccato.

### 'Thi' (Treble end non-resonant stroke)

This stroke is articulated in the same manner as 'Tha' but with the first finger alone. The sound should be as close to 'Tha' as possible.

### 'Tum' (Bass end open tone)

The 'Tum' stroke is the main bass end resonant tone of the drum. It is articulated with the middle two fingers of the left hand, which are held together in a firm but not stiff or rigid manner. The drum is hit with the middle joints just coming to the inside edge of the thick ring. The tone should be clear, open and struck with positive intent.

### 'Nam' (Treble end open rim tone)

This stroke is articulated with the first finger of the right hand. The second finger is held away from the head while the third and fourth rest on the skin just near the edge of the black spot. The finger strikes the rim firmly with the other three fingers staying in position. This is the main tonal note on the drum and is the note used to tune it (usually to the tonic of the tune).

The finger is removed from the head quickly after impact, while the 3rd/4th resting fingers remain in contact in their resting position (depending on what stroke is to follow).

Right, a few musical starting blocks are required. Good luck and persevere. See you next time for some 'Thamkidataka'.



Fig. 2 TUM stroke 1



**Ex 1**

THA THI TUM NAM

**Ex 2**

THA THA THI THI TUM TUM NAM NAM

**Ex 3**

THA THA THA THI THI THI TUM TUM TUM NAM NAM NAM

**Ex 4**

THA THA THA THA THI THI THI THI  
TUM TUM TUM TUM NAM NAM NAM NAM

**Ex 5**

THA THA TUM TUM THA THI THA TUM TUM THA  
TUM THA TUM TUM THA NAM THA TUM TUM THA

**Ex 6**

THA THA THA TUM TUM THA THI THI THA TUM TUM THA  
TUM TUM THA TUM TUM THA NAM NAM THA TUM TUM THA

**Ex 7**

THA THA THA TUM TUM THA THI THI THA TUM TUM THA  
TUM TUM THA TUM TUM THA NAM NAM THA TUM TUM THA

**Ex 8**

THA THI TUM NAM THA TUM TUM THA TUM TUM THA TUM THA TUM TUM THA

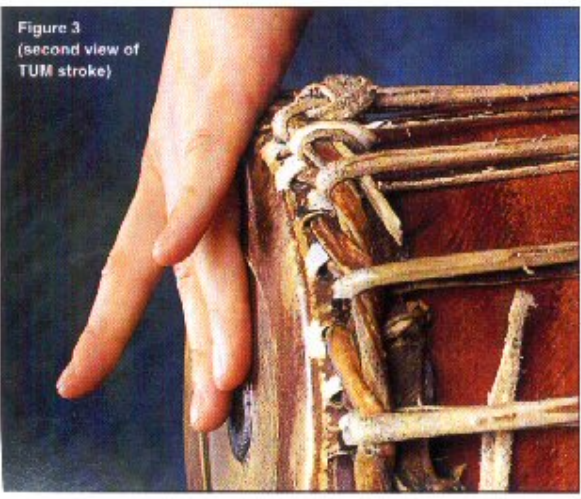


Figure 3  
(second view of  
TUM stroke)

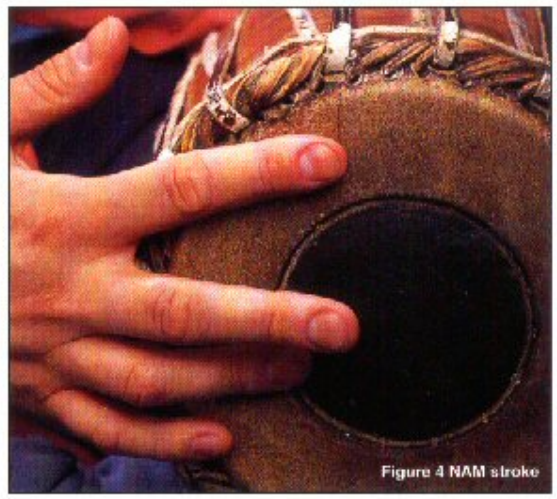


Figure 4 NAM stroke