

from hand to drum

HAND DRUM TECHNIQUES

FROM AROUND THE WORLD



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...y. The udu is a side hole pot drum with two holes about 3" in diameter – one on the top and one on the side, although I have seen pictures of ancient Nigerian pot drums which have looked radically different, some having very wide holes on top and tiny holes in the body of the drum. Udu quite simply means 'pot' in the language of the Ibo tribe of Nigeria, and a pot it really is. Traditionally it is more spherical in shape than the Indian ghatam, and has a narrow neck which leads up to the hole on top. The udu also comes in different sizes and traditionally would make up a family of four drums in the same way as many other sets of African drums. These four pots range in size from 18cm to 40cm in height. Each drum would have a different pitch with the largest being the bass voice and the smallest the treble voice.

The origins of the drum have been traced back to central and southern Nigeria, and it has been found that although we're using the term udu the side hole pot drum is known by many different names depending on the tribal areas and particular ceremonies in which it is used. Since the early '80s the existence of the udu drum has been developed, transformed and made altogether more accessible thanks to the efforts of one man, Frank Giorgini, who is based in the States.

Since his involvement in 1985 with master Nigerian potter, Abbas Ahuwan, Frank Giorgini has spent much time developing the udu drum. This has manifested in a number of ways: besides making them stronger and more durable (apparently not one has broken under a player's hand), he has introduced a whole new range of udu designs. Some seem to look like bowling balls whilst others look like molten dumb bells. Others look quite simply like something you've never seen before.

The drums can be played in a number of ways – for example, by sitting cross legged on the floor, one can put the drum in one's lap and play with one hand over each hole. The hand on the top controls the pitch whilst the other hand plays over the hole on the side. One can use the palms, finger tips, thumbs, slap in the fashion of conga playing, or even play them with mallets or brushes. It is also possible to stand-mount udu drums and play them standing up.

In these next few articles we are going to be looking at a number of possible ways of playing these drums. For those of you that play percussion already, we will be utilising some of the techniques you might know, such as conga, bongo and tabla methods. For those of you who do not play these styles don't worry, there will be plenty of other possibilities covered.

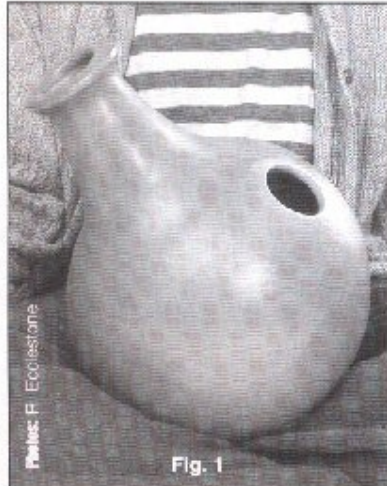


Fig. 1

We'll begin by putting a hand over each hole (see Fig. 2) and working through a few simple rhythms. Place the drum in your lap as in Fig. 1. You will see that the hole in the side of the drum is on the left. This is by no means obligatory and will be changed from left to right as I go through various techniques. You will also notice the angle of the neck. Again, this is up to you. Find the angle which is most comfortable.

With the open palm of the left hand, hit over the hole as in Fig. 2. When the hand

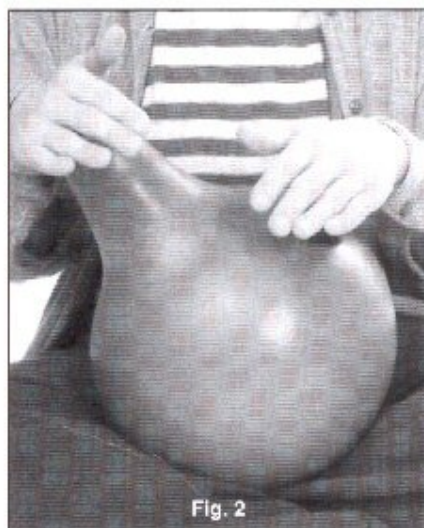


Fig. 2

hits it should cover the hole completely (for now the top hole will be left open). The result should be a deep 'whoof' type sound. Now pull the left hand away from the hole quickly and notice the higher pitch 'suction' sound of some air being extracted from the pot. Now try the same with the hole on top with the right hand whilst the hole on the side is left open. Notice how it is a much higher version of the same sound.

Now we'll try an experiment. Place both hands on the drum as in Fig. 2 and start hitting over the hole on the side with the left hand. As you do this slowly tilt the right hand away, gradually opening the hole on top. Notice how this changes the sound of what's being played by the left hand. If you're doing it correctly then the sound should gradually get more and more open.

Right, let's start on a few rhythms using these two sounds (Left hand hitting over side hole and Right hand hitting over top hole).

KEY

Left hand over side hole Right hand over top hole T is indicates the opening of the top hole with the right hand (from closed to open).

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.



Now we'll bring in a bit of expression by utilising the technique of changing the pitch of the side hole sound by altering the position of our hand over the top hole. This will be done in the sections of the rhythms where there are more than three simultaneous left hand strokes. Good luck and I'll see you next time for a bit of conga and bongo technique on udu drums. Ciao for now.

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