

from hand to drum

HAND DRUM TECHNIQUES FROM AROUND THE WORLD



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Indian Striking Units

Here's a recap of all the instruments covered in *Hand To Drum*...

Kanjira (south Indian hand held drum), **Middle Eastern Def** (Arabic frame drum), **Bodhran** (Irish single-headed drum), Udu (Nigerian clay

pot), **Dhol** (North Indian Bhangra drum), **Darabuka** (Egyptian version of the Tabla), **Dholak** (Indian folk drum), **Ghatam** (south Indian clay pot), **Bongos** (Cuban drums), **Req** (Egyptian hand drum/tambourine), **Mridangam** (South Indian master drum), **Mounted Frame Drum** (contemporary/hybrid techniques).

The techniques and views covered in the articles have attempted to



supply information in many areas. Sound production, simple rhythmic motifs, advanced rhythms, traditional rhythms, a bit of history, what instruments to buy, where to buy them and how much to pay. Now, after our prolonged analysis of ethnic percussion, the series comes to it's conclusion. To finish off, I'd like to pick out what I feel are the most important techniques and rhythms, and cover a couple of philosophical points which I've been meaning to get round to for months.

One thing not really touched upon so far is the main point to all this, the thing that binds it all together under one hypothetical umbrella: music and musicality – what to play, where to play it and most

importantly, why. It would be easy to look at an instrument with a strong tradition, like many of those in the series, and say, 'Right, that's the only way to do it, it's been done like that for donkey's years so why change? And anyway, who am I to change it?' ... That attitude would be a big mistake in developing musically on any instrument. It cuts off the human creative forces that gave rise to the instruments and traditions in the first place. Someone had to invent them, after all, so why shouldn't you help develop them.

Of course, to develop one has to learn elements of the traditional way, but this should not inhibit a free creative view of the instrument. The problem is partly created by the preconceptions of the listener and what they expect from a particular style of music or instrument.

Secondly, ego – playing to impress, generally as a guard against feelings of inadequacy. This necessarily cuts you off from involvement with the musicians around you and more often than not excludes the listener as well. I mention this because it is a very easy trap to fall into with some of the instruments in the series, instruments with enormous technical potential and many world class artists playing them.

Generally speaking, you should play what the music dictates and feel free to create new things without fearing the almighty wrath of 'those that know'.

Right then – technique. Out of all the techniques from the series, by far the most useful is the Indian method of dividing the fingers of the right hand into two striking units.

The hand is split into two striking units, namely the three-fingered striking unit and

the one-fingered striking unit. If we look at Fig. 1 and 2 we can see the position for striking with our two units on the treble head of an Indian drum.

The sound of the strokes should be high pitched, staccato and clear, with each striking unit moving away from the head quickly after the stroke. This technique is very common in all Indian drumming but particularly on the following drums: dholak, mridangam, ghatam, tabla, kanjira, thavil, phakawaj and nall. The photos demonstrate it as played on the dholak.

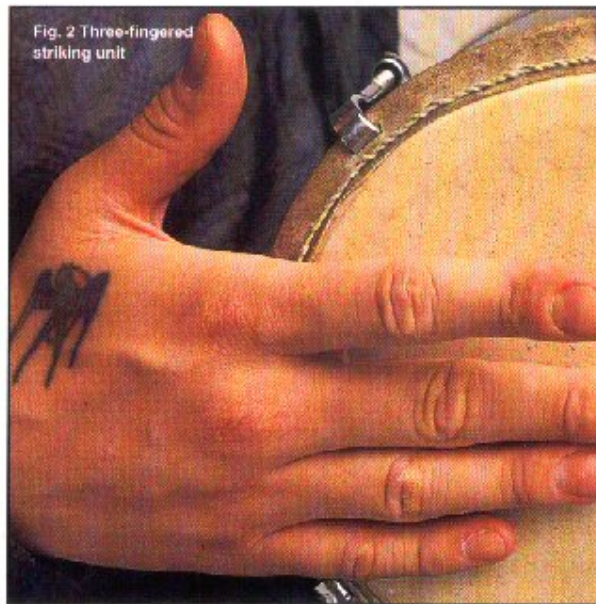
It can also be employed to great effect on drums such as congas, bongos, frame drums, tambourines, bota and pretty much any drum

The image displays a series of musical notations for a drum series, organized into two main sections: 'SPEAK' and 'CLAP'. Each section contains multiple staves of notation, with rhythmic patterns indicated by notes and rests. Above the notes, rhythmic syllables (TA, KA, TA, KI, TA, TA, KA, TA, KI, TA) are written. The notation includes stems, beams, and rests, indicating the timing and sequence of strokes. The 'SPEAK' section shows a sequence of notes with stems pointing up, while the 'CLAP' section shows notes with stems pointing down. The notation is presented in a clear, structured manner, facilitating the learning and practice of the rhythmic patterns.

Fig. 1 One-fingered striking unit



Fig. 2 Three-fingered striking unit



you choose. Players like John Bergamo and Glen Velez are true masters when it comes to hybrid use of this technique. It can be used to create open, muted or slap tones on the edge or in the middle of the drum, or anything else you want.

Rhythmically the Indian system is profound, swapping about between different time levels with ambitious dexterity. (Keep an eye out for Gavin Harrison's soon-to-be-released book. It has some fantastically

practical ambiguities in it) I've finished my series with a rudimentary South Indian rhythmic exercise which can be very testing to begin with. It's quite simply a five-beat unit modulated (thanks, Gavin) into a number of different time levels. I hope you enjoy it and that you've found this series rewarding. Keep your eyes open for a 'Talko to Tabla' gig near you. Thank you and good night...

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Fig. 3