An Introduction to Commonly Used Hand Drums

Djembe, Congas, & Bongo

McKayla Phillips

Lecturer of Percussion, University of North Carolina - Chapel Hill
Adjunct Professor of Percussion - Shaw University

Saturday, November 5, 2022 - 2 pm
North Carolina Music Educators Association Conference

Djembe, Congas, & Bongo:
A Brief History

- **Djembe Origins:** modern day Guinea, Mali, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, and Senegal (West Africa), approx. 12th century (Mandinka people)
- **Congas & Bongo Origins:** Cuba, late 19th - early 20th century
- **Common Names for Congas**
  - High: Quinto, Cachimbo, Niño
  - Middle: Conga, Tres Golpes, Tres per Dos, Segundo, Mula
  - Low: Tumba(dora), Salidor, Caja

Congas & Djembe:

The Instrument & Set-Up

- **Angle of the Drum & Body Set-Up**
  - Angle the drum forward
  - Keep wrists straight & engaged
  - The angle of your wrist determines the sounds/tones
- **Seat Height**
  - Adjust height if possible
  - Allow separation between the chest cavity and the elbow

Bongo

The Instrument & Set-Up

- Angle of the Drum & Body Set-Up
  - Held between the legs with the high head (macho) held up against the left leg and the low head (hembra) held down against the right leg
- Seat Height
  - Generally, a very low seat/stool height is preferred
  - Strokes will be with smaller portions of the hands

Important Terms

- ***Contact Point***: where the hand makes contact with the head of the drum
- ***Bearing Edge***: where the head of the drum comes in contact with the shell of the drum

The Essential Tones: Open, Muff, Slap, & Bass

OPEN

Wrists straight

Fingers together

Contact Point: middle of the fingers

Move (mostly) from the wrist

Rebound

MUFF

Wrists straight

Fingers together

Contact Point: middle of the fingers

Move (mostly) from the wrist

NO rebound!

BASS

T-Rex arms

Contact Point: full flat palm

Relax & let go!

SLAP

Wrists bent

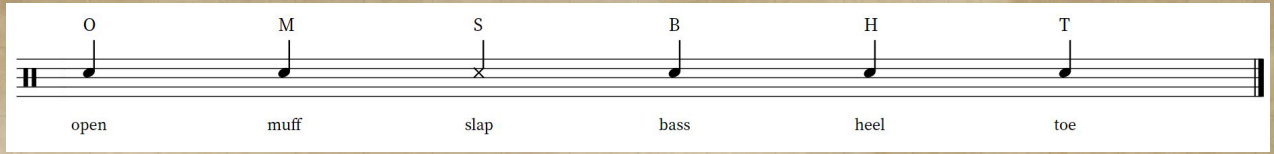
Fingers naturally curved

Middle of palm on bearing edge

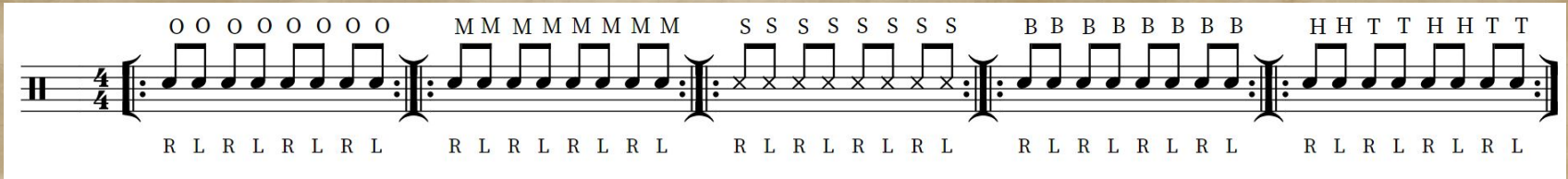
Contact Point: finger pads

Rebound for open (djembe) stay on head for closed (congas)

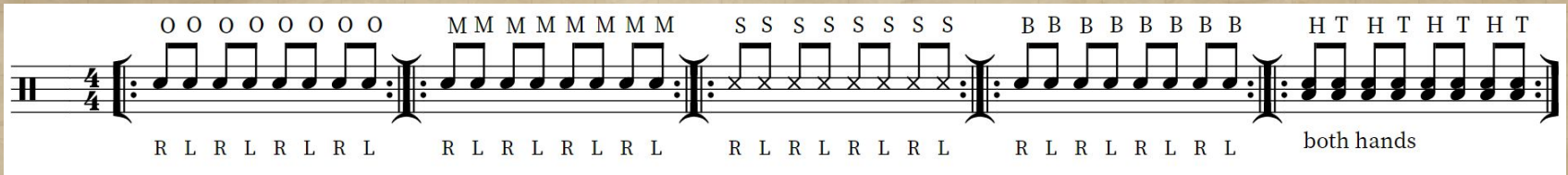
Notation Key



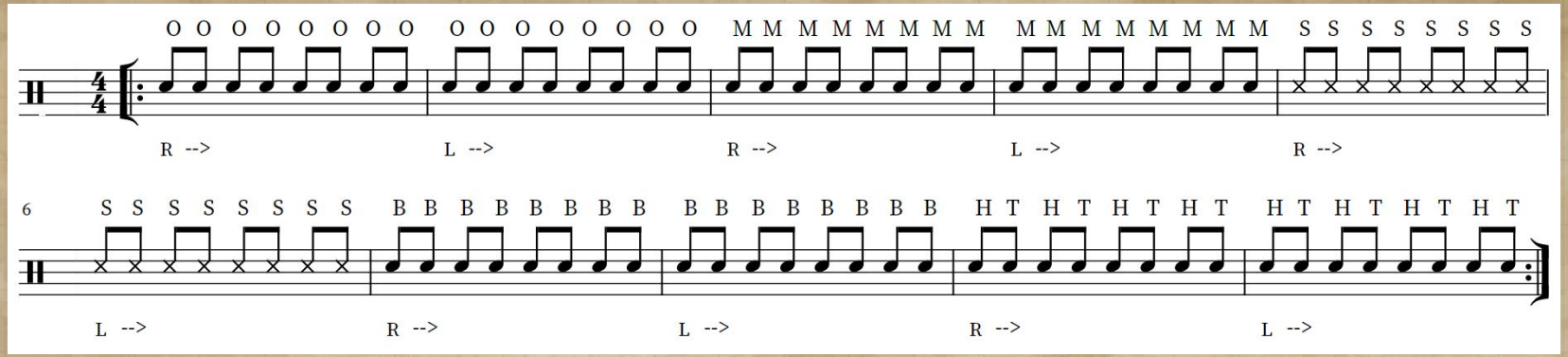
Alternating 8's (chapoteo)



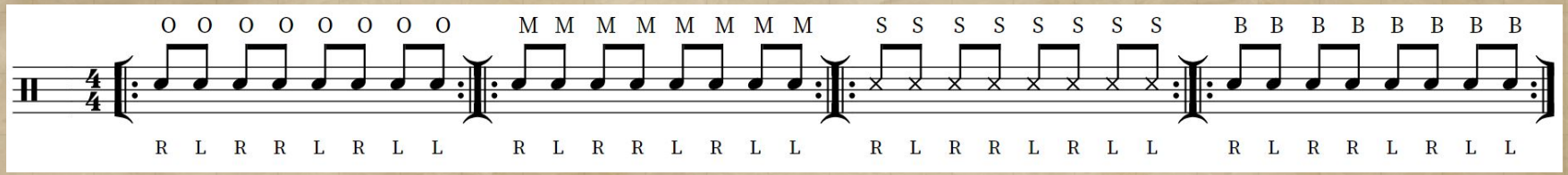
Alternating 8's (double stop heel-toe)



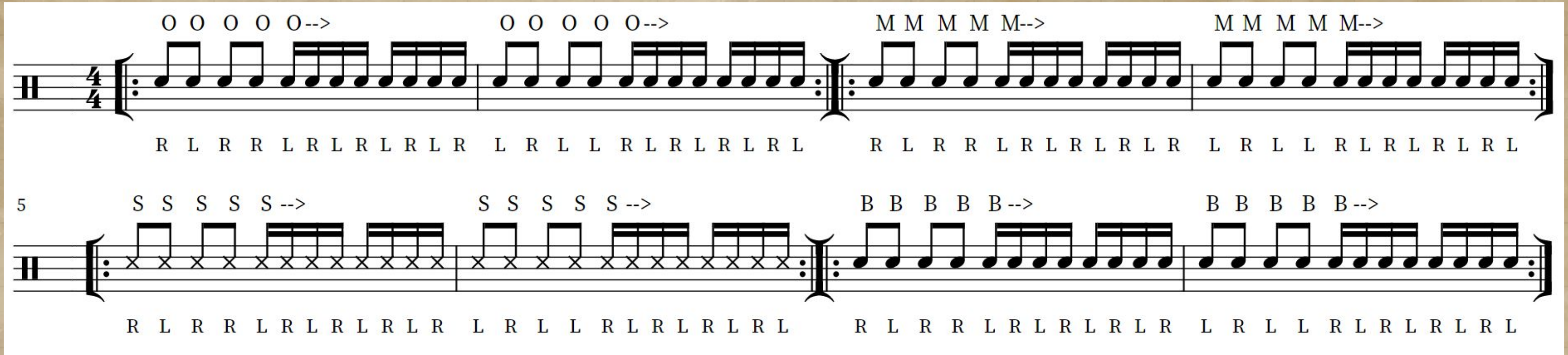
8 On A Tone



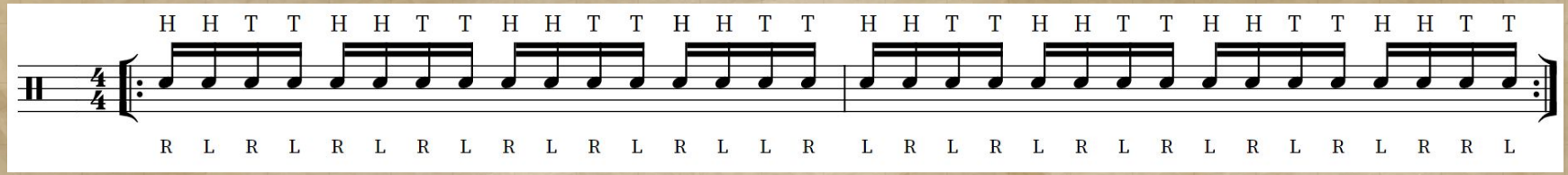
Tone Paradiddles



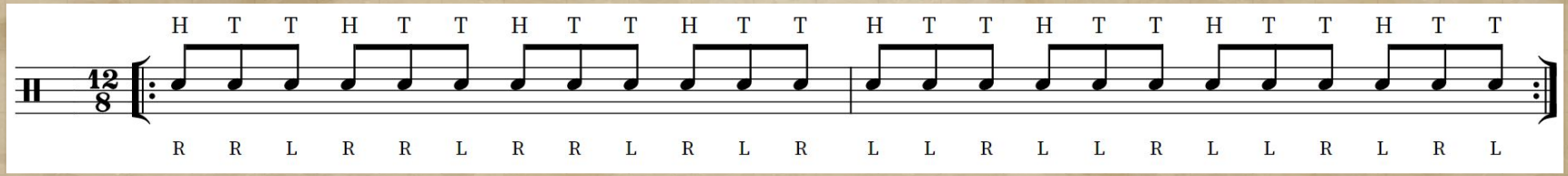
Tone Paradiddles: Variation 1



Heel Toe 4's



Heel Toe 3's



Extended & Combination Strokes

Heel

Same as the ‘bass’ tone

technique shift when tempo increases

Toe

Palm & fingers move down as a unit

technique shift when tempo increases

Touch Tone

Quiet stroke that only YOU can hear

Used for timekeeping

Used on congas, bongo, & djembe!

Essential Styles & Where to Go From Here

- **Musical Styles & Concepts**
  - Clave - both styles & directions (rumba & son, 2-3 & 3-2)
  - 12/8 Bell Patterns - traditional, modern, & variations
  - Salsa
  - Rumba
  - Cha-Cha-Cha
- **Listening to Recordings & Attending Performances** - rhythmic language and vocabulary
- **Historical Context** - instrument, musical styles, rhythms, melodies, cultural context, and more are essential

Why, How, & What?

- **Why Teach It?**
  - Approachability
  - Limited student financial investment
  - Student creativity, improvisation, & rote learning
  - Historical connections
  - Cross-Curricular opportunities
  - Increasing frequency in literature
- **How to Pay for It? - details in handout**
  - Grants & Funding Opportunities
- **What to Buy? - details in handout**
  - Nice Enough vs. Very Nice
  - Animal Skin Heads vs. Synthetic/Plastic Heads
  - See handout for details

Questions?

Thank You!

If you have any additional questions, feel free to email/DM at the links below:

mckaylaphillipspercussion@gmail.com

www.mckaylaphillips.com

Instagram: @mckayla_p

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