

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

A musical staff with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. It shows six individual notes, each with a letter above it and a label below it. The notes are: an open note (labeled 'open'), a note with a stem (labeled 'muff'), a note with a stem and an 'x' (labeled 'slap'), a note with a stem and a flat (labeled 'bass'), a note with a stem and a sharp (labeled 'heel'), and a note with a stem and a natural (labeled 'toe').

Alternating 8's (chapoteo)

A musical staff in 4/4 time with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. It contains five measures of music, each with a repeat sign. Above each measure are letters representing strokes: 'O O O O O O O O', 'M M M M M M M M', 'S S S S S S S S', 'B B B B B B B B', and 'H H T T H H T T'. Below each measure are the corresponding rhythmic patterns: 'R L R L R L R L', 'R L R L R L R L', 'R L R L R L R L', 'R L R L R L R L', and 'R L R L R L R L'. The notes are quarter notes, and the 'S' measure contains 'x' marks.

Alternating 8's (double stop heel-toe)

A musical staff in 4/4 time with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. It contains five measures of music, each with a repeat sign. Above each measure are letters representing strokes: 'O O O O O O O O', 'M M M M M M M M', 'S S S S S S S S', 'B B B B B B B B', and 'H T H T H T H T'. Below each measure are the corresponding rhythmic patterns: 'R L R L R L R L', 'R L R L R L R L', 'R L R L R L R L', 'R L R L R L R L', and 'both hands'. The notes are quarter notes, and the 'S' measure contains 'x' marks.

8 On A Tone

Musical notation for the exercise "8 On A Tone" in 4/4 time. The exercise consists of two staves of music. The first staff contains four measures of music, each with a specific fingering pattern indicated above the notes: O O O O O O O O, O O O O O O O O, M M M M M M M M, and M M M M M M M M. The second staff contains four measures of music, each with a specific fingering pattern indicated above the notes: S S S S S S S S, B B B B B B B B, B B B B B B B B, and H T H T H T H T. Below each measure, there are directional arrows indicating the starting hand: R -->, L -->, R -->, L -->, R -->, L -->, R -->, L -->, R -->, L -->, R -->, L -->.

Tone Paradiddles

Musical notation for the exercise "Tone Paradiddles" in 4/4 time. The exercise consists of a single staff of music divided into four measures, each with a specific fingering pattern indicated below the notes: R L R R L R L L, R L R R L R L L, R L R R L R L L, and R L R R L R L L. Each measure is separated by a double bar line with repeat dots.

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

Facebook: mckayla.phillips.9

