

Similar Tones from Different Homes

Similar Tones Concept: there is a family of basic sounds that may be produced from several “world percussion” instruments. This concept goes beyond similar sounds, but connects methods of performance from “Western” percussion to “Eastern” percussion. That is, familiar concepts drawn from “Western classical” percussion studies should be used to help guide a percussionist deeper into world percussion studies.

For example, the following instruments all share similar tones: djembe/jembe, doumbek/darbukka, frame drums (including tar, bodhran, and riq), congas, and talking drum (loosely). This is far from an exhaustive list.

Familiar Basic Concepts:

All instruments, Western or Eastern, should be played with proper posture. Always keep your back straight and your shoulders relaxed. This will help increase stamina and reduce injury.

Always warm up before practicing/performing. Stretch out hands and fingers. If the weather is cold outside, then run warm water over your hands before playing. If your hands are sore or swollen after playing, then run cold water over them after playing and ice them when you get a chance.

Do not allow your hands to tense up. All hand drums require relaxation and control to produce proper tones. Would you allow yourself to tense up with a drumstick or mallet?

Everyone’s body is different. After you have learned proper techniques, do not be afraid to experiment. A slight angle change might help you relax and get a better tone.

Basic Tones:

Bass, Low Tone, or Dun (spoken as boom or doum)

Tone or Open Tone (spoken as “bi-ti” on djembe)

Tak (Tek) and Ka (replaced with Heel-Toe on congas)

Slaps (spoken as “ba-ta” on djembe)

Muff, Muffled Tone, Kah, Pah, or Closed Tone

What are the names of the different conga drums? What are the names of the different dun-duns?

Familiar Concepts Applied as a Link to the Realm of “World Percussion:”

All these instruments produce tones that may function in the same manner as the combination of a hi-hat, snare drum, bass drum, and toms. However, the performer must be careful not to take borrow all the intricacies of playing drum set. See common mistakes below for more details.

GROOVES/PARTS: As there are common rhythmic grooves on drum set, there are common grooves, patterns, or Arabic rhythmic modes. As drum set players often embellish grooves, Arabic rhythmic modes are often embellished. Michael Spiro’s describes this embellishment as “part/lick” to show the importance of maintaining the original melody in each pattern while embellishing around it.

TONE/TECHNIQUE: Just like when beginning snare drum studies before jumping into drum set, it is important to begin by focusing on single tones. Technique is as important on these instruments as any other concert percussion instrument.

PHYSICS: On a concert percussion instrument, it is important to focus on staying relaxed and allowing different heights along with gravity to help use produce different dynamics. This is clear in drumlines that use height measurements for dynamic levels. If you are forcing a louder dynamic, then velocity and tension negatively affects your tone. Allow gravity and the weight of your hand do the work for you. If you must work to produce a certain tone, then you are not doing it right. Do aim for a loud sound at first.

EXERCISES: Create or borrow exercises to supplement technique studies. Look at the first exercises provided below.

DRUM SPEAK: Reciting syllables for different tones may be compared to reciting rudiment. As world percussionists have borrowed from rudimental drumming, we may apply rudimental drumming concepts to world.

DOUBLE STROKES/ROLLS: Heel-Toe motion on a conga takes place of the double stroke on a snare drum. Just like the double stroke, they are usually not meant to be overplayed. Ta-ka takes place double strokes and rizz takes place of buzz rolls on a goblet drum. Thumb-to-outer-finger pivoting may be compared to one-handed rolls on a keyboard instrument.

STUDY THE PROS: Study performance videos online to learn the styles of each drum. This is no different from studying drum set players for style. Transcribe solos if it helps.

Common Mistakes:

Playing congas like a snare on the drum set (i.e., slaps too loud and tones not loud enough).

Setting up congas backwards. In a traditional setup with two drums, the low drum is on the right.

Working hard to produce sound—also described above as “forcing” sound.

Playing slaps by turning the hand sideways and curling fingers as the hand hits the drum.

Playing djembe slaps and conga slaps the same or playing djembe and conga the same in general.

Ex 2b. Tone vs. Slap

(Also play while reversing tones and slaps)

T T S T T S T T S T T S
RL-->

Ex 2c. Heel-Toe Workout

H H t t H H t t H H t t H H t t H t S H t T H t S H t T H t S S
RL--> RRL--> L R

H H t t H H t t H H t t H H t t H t S H t T H t S H t T H t S S
LR--> LLR--> R L

Ex. 2d. Changuito's "La Mano Secreta"

Conga Key

T H t S t T H t S t t H t T T t t H t T T t

t H t T T t H t T H t T T t

Arabic Rhythms (Rhythmic Modes)

1. Maqsoum

D T T D T

2. Ayoub or Malfouf

D T D T

3. Chiftitelli

D T T T T D D T

4. Baladi (Beledi)

D D t k T D t k T t k

5. Karsilamas

D T D T T T

Conga Rhythms

1. Tumbaou

H t S t H t T T H t S T T t T T

Tumbao Variation

H t S t H t T t H t S t T t T T

2. Guaguancó

S T S T t T S S S H S T S

3. Bembé

H t S H T T H t S H T T T S T S T S T S T S

Artists to Check Out

Congueros: Jose Luis Quintana “Changuito,” Giovanni Hidalgo, Los Muñequitos de Matanzas

Djembe: Mamady Keita, Famoudou Konate, and Adama Dramé

Doumbek/Darbuk players: Raquy Danziger and Kalani with World Drum Club

Frame drums players: Glen Velez, Layne Redmond, and Pete Lockett