

GETTING STARTED HAND PERCUSSION



Engaging & Inspiring Musicians

Excerpted from
MakingMusicMag.com

■ Hand percussion instruments are among the oldest known to humanity, and all the varieties—congas, cajóns, and djembes—can trace their lineage back to prehistoric hand drums made from hollowed-out logs and animal skins. Commonly sold in music stores today, affordable, modern hand percussion instruments are a great addition to any instrument collection. They are perfect for acoustic jams sessions or impromptu drum circles.

Congas are common in Latin and Caribbean music, such as salsa, merengue, and reggae. Often made of either fiberglass or wood with a leather or synthetic “head” (drum skin), they come in several sizes. The “requinto” is a small conga, the “tumba” large, and the “conga” itself a medium-sized drum. Several sounds can be produced from the tuneable head, depending on how it is struck and whether or not the tones are played open or dampened with one hand pressed against the skin.

The first cajóns were homemade instruments, made out of fruit or shipping crates, or any similar box with a resonant tone. Introduced into Peruvian music in the 1970s, modern cajóns are more sophisticated, with snares inside to add a buzzing tone, adjustable screws for tuning, and sound holes. To play one, you sit on the instrument and hit various parts of the cajón to get different sounds. Fans of flamenco and rumba will love this drum!

Traditional West African drums, djembes are the instrument of choice for many drum circles. Although they look quite different from congas, there are many similarities. A djembe is tuneable, most commonly with rope, but modern djembes also use lugnuts; the heads are traditionally made of rawhide; and both instruments are played using slaps and strikes.

If you’ve ever wanted to play drums or percussion, think of trying a conga, cajón, or djembe first. Inexpensive, relatively easy to get started on, and a great way to learn hand coordination and basic drum rhythms. Can’t decide which one to buy? Well, electronic hand percussion instruments have conga, cajón, and djembe sounds, and more!

TRY THIS: BASIC DRUM RHYTHM

As you play each beat, are you using one motion or two? Many people begin playing the drum using two motions: hit the drum, lift the hand. But you can improve the ease and quality of your playing by allowing the natural bounce of your hand to turn those two parts into one fluid motion. The key is to let the downward force of gravity drop your hand, and when you make contact, let the weight bounce your hand back up, much like a drumstick would bounce back up. It’s a natural and relaxed movement, but it may not feel that way at first. Once you’ve mastered it, you’ll be surprised how much easier it is to play your drum.



CONGA CAJÓN

A cajón is a box-shaped percussion instrument originally from Peru. You sit on a cajón and play it by slapping the front face and other parts. Look for cajóns made from quality wood with snare wires for a buzzing effect.



DJEMBE

A traditional djembe is a rope-tuned, skin-covered goblet drum played in much the same way as a conga (and like most modern congas, modern djembes use synthetic materials). In Mali, the name “djembe” is derived from the saying “everyone gather together in peace,” and this defines the drum’s communal purpose.



ELECTRONIC PERCUSSION

Want hundreds of sounds and patterns in your rhythmic arsenal? Electronic hand percussion is good choice for the multi-instrumentalist—or the perpetually undecided. An electronic hand drum also has metronomes,



pitch and effects controls, backing rhythm patterns, and more.