



Tambourine

Christopher Deane

Over the years, the tambourine has been used by composers as a purely coloristic instrument, as a rhythmic instrument, and to serve as a folk reference instrument within various musical works (i.e., Spanish, Russian, Italian folk-dance music). Genuine performance practices in Middle Eastern countries place equal importance on both the head sound and the jingle or zil sound. Western concert music is usually written with the jingle sound being most important. The head on the tambourine is also very important in that it provides a versatile playing surface to activate jingle sound and provides a resonating chamber to help project the jingle sound. A tambourine without a head (or with a broken head) will not give the appropriate sound for most concert music applications. (One exception is concert band and orchestra arrangements of rock and popular music in which a headless tambourine is actually preferred.)

Performance

Choose the weaker or less agile of the two hands for holding the instrument. Instrument should be held at chest height with the plane of the head at a 45-degree angle for most applications. (This gives the most articulate sound and reduces unwanted jingle sounds.)

One-Hand Rhythms

For soft musical passages, use the fingertips at the extreme edge of the tambourine opposite the hand that is holding the instrument. As the volume increases, the fingers move away from the edge towards the center. Loud playing is done with the fist slightly off center.

Two-Hand Rhythmic Passages

Soft musical passages are played by resting the tambourine on the thigh (head up is more stable, head down is more articulate) and playing with the fingertips on the edge of the instrument.

For fast playing at louder dynamics the “fist and knee” technique is used: Place right hand directly over the right kneecap. (This may require a chair for the right leg to be stable.) Hold the tambourine upside down in the left hand and move the instrument up and down between the fist and knee. Always begin passages with the fist sound rather than the knee; also end pattern with fist sound if possible. (If left handed, reverse these directions accordingly.) Some players use fingertips bunched together, supported by the thumb rather than fist, for this technique.

Rolls

Shake rolls are used for most parts. Tambourine quality greatly affects this technique. Tambourine should be held at shoulder level with the plane of the head at about a 90-degree angle to the floor. A door-knob twisting motion is usually the preferred motion.

A technique called a thumb roll is often used for soft tambourine rolls. The thumb or fingertip is “scraped” along the edge of the headed side of the tambourine, producing a vibration. Moisture or some substance that creates a mild friction (violin rosin, for example) is usually required. The thumb or finger must vibrate from the connective joint to the hand, which means that the finger or thumb must be rigid.

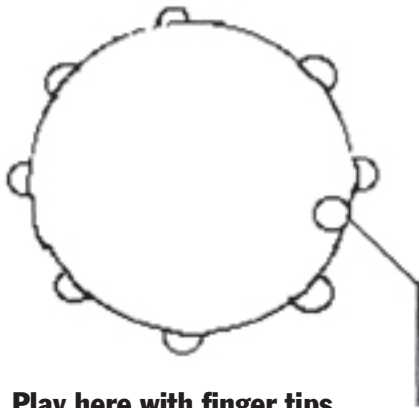


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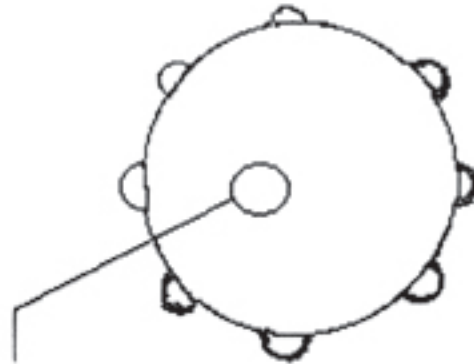
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Too much pressure of the finger on the head creates an uneven or unpredictable sound. Begin lighter than needed and increase finger pressure until roll is achieved. Louder rolls using this technique can be produced by moving the finger inwards slightly from the edge of the tambourine.

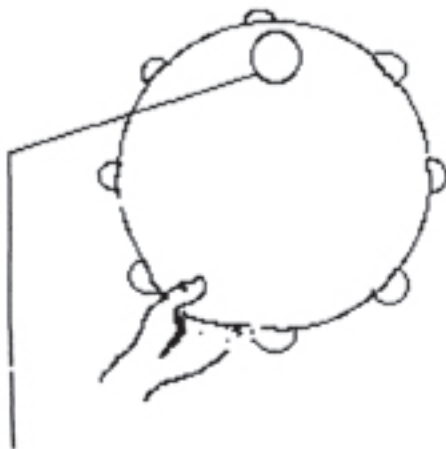
It is recommended that percussionists use any beginning to intermediate snare drum method to provide practice materials for the tambourine. The style of writing most often encountered for the tambourine is very similar to that called for in basic snare drum playing.



Play here with finger tips supported by the thumb for soft rhythmic passages



Play here with fist or bunched fingers for loud rhythmic passages



Playing opposite the holding hand makes rhythms more easily controlled

Helpful hints:

- 1. Hold the tambourine at a 45 degree angle to the floor for clean articulation.**
- 2. Practice your shake rolls as much as you practice rhythms.**
- 3. Keep your thumb stiff, not bent forward, to play good thumb rolls.**

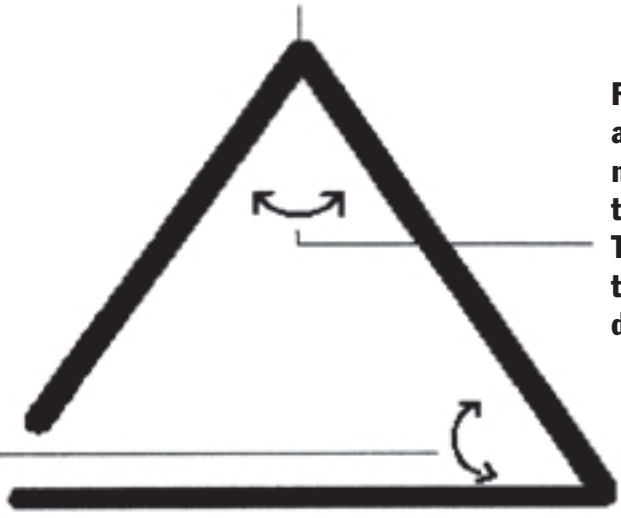


Triangle

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Fundamental concepts of the triangle

Roll here for the loudest rolls or when loud rhythms are needed to be played in one hand.



Roll here for soft rolls and for passages that need to have the triangle remain steady. The top doesn't move the way the lower edges do.

Rod beater

This type of beater can produce an unwanted sound.

Graduated beater

This type of beater produces a more pure triangle sound.

Playing with this angle gives the most full and rich sound with lots of overtones.



This angle gives a clearer sound with fewer overtones.



Soft rhythms can be played here with safety and control.