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## foreword

This set of materials developed by Cheryl Grosso is an excellent addition to the hand drumming repertoire. Her compositions (*Rhythm Chants*) for hand drumming ensemble draw upon elements from western art music and several non-western musical traditions. Their structure and instrumentation offer much versatility with freedom for more advanced players to experiment and improvise. The resulting music is unique, appealing, and rewarding to performers with diverse interests and experience. The *Hand Drumming Essentials* method book thoughtfully approaches the development of technique on many instruments and ensemble rehearsal activities. Cheryl's materials are a valuable resource for percussionists and the non-percussionist music educator.

John Bergamo

## acknowledgments

I am thankful for the many people who have encouraged me and nurtured my musical growth. I am beholden to David Charles, Michael Geary and Dane Richeson for sharing their insights with me and for providing valuable contributions that made this book possible. Thanks also to Peter Schmeling and Gregory Thornburg for serving as models. I am especially grateful to John Bergamo who has been, and continues to be, a significant influence in my life. I am endlessly appreciative for the generosity and kindness of my sister Jeanne.

C. A. Grosso

## biography

Cheryl A. Grosso has been a member of the music faculty of the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay since 1985. She teaches studio percussion,

contemporary percussion ensemble, new music ensemble, hand drumming ensemble and music theory. Professor Grosso has served as Music Chair, Vice Chair of Communication and the Arts (COA), and has just been elected Chair of COA. She earned the degree of Doctor of Musical Arts in Percussion Performance and Pedagogy from the University of Iowa, Master of Fine Arts in Percussion Performance from California Institute of the Arts, and Bachelor

of Arts from the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay. Dr. Grosso studied western percussion with John Bergamo, Thomas L. Davis, Karen Ervin Pershing, Ron George, David Charles and Tele Lesbines. She studied non-western percussion with artists Pandit Taranath Rao, Alfred and Kobla Ladzekpo, Sowah Mensah and K. R. T. Wasitodiningrat.

Dr. Grosso is active as a percussion soloist, chamber musician, composer and clinician. She has performed live for Wisconsin Public Radio as a featured soloist on *Sunday Afternoon Live*, and *Concerts from Around the State*. Two of her compositions for contemporary percussion are published by Smith Sonic Art Editions, and her incidental music for the David Ives play *All in the Timing* won a Kennedy Center ACTF Award of Merit. The UW-Green Bay Hand Drumming Ensemble, which she founded and directs, regularly performs at festivals and schools throughout Wisconsin.





## chapter one

# Introduction to Hand Drumming



The aesthetic of groove-oriented drumming appeals to a primal instinct in many people and has made hand drumming popular around the world. Vast differences exist among hand drumming traditions; styles, performance techniques and the instruments associated with them are too numerous to mention in this text. It is important to note that although drums are found in many different shapes and sizes, all drums are capable of producing many different tones. The drum sounds and strokes presented in this text and the accompanying ensemble compositions can be applied to any hand drum. Each type of drum has its own unique timbre, but all drums can produce the variety of tones utilized herein. The music will simply be characteristic of the drums employed. The formation of drumming groups has increased dramatically, and the desire to organize ensembles in educational and professional settings is rapidly growing. A drumming ensemble can be formed with almost any combination of hand drums.

There is little music published for hand drumming ensemble. A limited number of transcriptions of African and Afro-Cuban drumming music are available. I have composed about forty pieces for hand drumming ensemble during the fourteen years since founding my own ensemble. This text is designed to provide fundamental information regarding instruments, performance techniques and exercises to form and develop a hand drumming ensemble; it represents one school of thought. The conga drumming techniques presented reflect a style developed through the study of West African and Afro-Cuban drumming. *Rhythm Chants*, compositions for hand drumming ensemble, are included at the end of this text. A supplemental volume of *Rhythm Chants*, grouped by level of difficulty, is published separately.

## benefits of a hand drumming ensemble

The goals of each ensemble will likely be different. Ensembles formed for educational purposes will have different goals and standards for membership than ensembles that will be performance oriented. Music and non-music students will get exposure to a type of music that has non-western roots. In junior and senior high school settings, hand drumming can dramatically improve the rhythmic strength, time keeping ability and cohesiveness of the percussion section, in addition to providing an exciting new musical outlet for students. Non-percussion students have been readily able to achieve basic coordination and the development of strokes. Participation in a hand drumming ensemble by music-program students will improve ensemble performance in regard

to the development of listening skills, rhythmic training and accuracy, time keeping, and the forming of musical bonds between students who are not usually in the same small ensemble or section. Instructors can also use a hand drumming ensemble to build confidence in students regarding improvisation, as many students are more willing to explore their own musical voice when using an instrument other than the one they have been studying for years. Hand drumming ensemble also offers the opportunity to explore rote teaching techniques that will improve memorization and listening skills, and can be an effective tool for getting students to use their voices to count and vocalize percussion patterns.

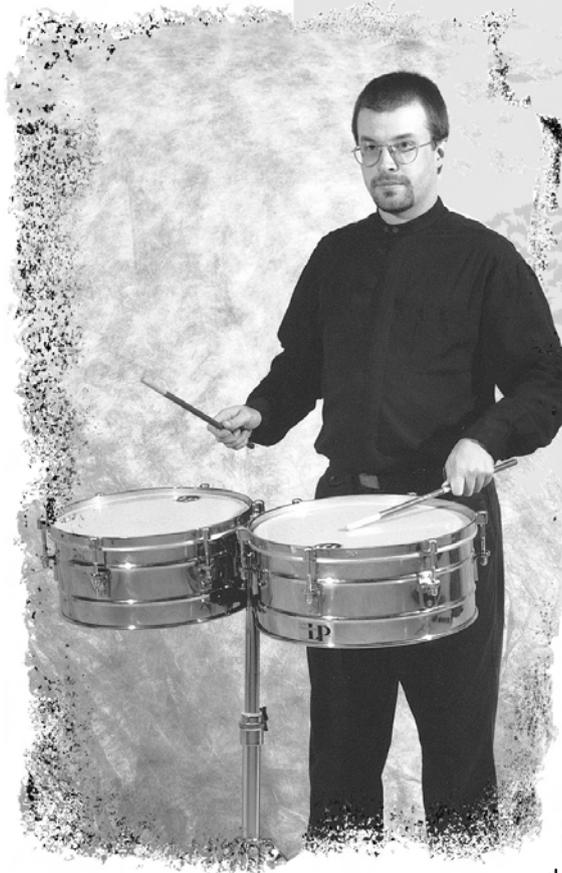
## Timbales

The sizes of **timbales** in a standard pair are 14 and 15 inches in diameter. These drums have cylindrical metal shells and a single plastic or skin head. They are played standing, with the larger drum on the left, and should be tilted slightly away from the player. In a traditional Latin setting, one or two cowbells are mounted on the timbale stand. In the hand drumming ensemble, a separate player performs on the bell, akin to a West African drumming ensemble. Timbales are played with thin wooden dowels that are approximately  $\frac{3}{8}$  or  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch in diameter and rounded off at both ends. The butt end of small snare drum sticks may serve as a substitute. Matched grip is employed.

By design, timbales are loud and can easily overpower several congas. The player must be careful to achieve dynamic balance with the rest of the ensemble.

In the hand drumming ensemble setting, there are two general systems of sticking associated with timbale playing. In one system, the hands generally alternate, moving freely between the two drums. In the other system, the hands are more independent: the left hand or left stick plays patterns of dead and open strokes on the low drum, while the right hand plays more intricate rhythms on the high drum. Both of these systems, as well as a free fusion of them, may be utilized. The dead and open strokes used in timbale playing are the same as those described for playing the surdo. The following abbreviations are used throughout this text and the accompanying compositions to indicate stroke types and stickings:

+ = Dead stroke      L = Left hand  
o = Open stroke      R = Right hand



**Timbale standing position**



Two other sounds are widely used in timbale playing. **Rim shots**, in which one stick strikes the head and the rim simultaneously, are frequently used. This is a powerful sound and can be used quite effectively. The other sound is **paila** (this means to strike the drum shell).

Playing paila simply means to continue playing the same rhythmic pattern but on the drum shells. In this idiom, paila is most commonly employed during the solos of other ensemble members.

**Dead stroke with fingers**



**Dead stroke with stick**

## chapter five

## Development of Hand Drumming Technique

The conga exercises on the following pages are categorized as **tone production**, **warm-up**, and **dexterity** exercises. These categories indicate which aspect of hand drumming the exercises will best support. In each category, exercises are presented in order of increasing difficulty.

Tone production and warm-up exercises should begin each rehearsal. Tone production, as a result of proper technique, should be given attention every time a drum is struck. Investing time in improving tone production is a necessity with inexperienced players. In addition, performers should always practice while keeping steady time, no matter which aspect of hand drumming is the focus of a given

exercise. Developing a strong sense of inner time is something that can be worked on regardless of what else is being practiced.

Dexterity exercises develop coordination beyond the hand patterns students learn from their individual parts. Dexterity is important to a drummer's technical development. It will increase the speed at which learning occurs and improve consistency of tone production. Improvisation requires technical ease. The hands must be able to play what the mind creates. Practice each exercise with all indicated stickings. Initially, performers will most likely be more successful when the strong hand is leading.



