

Matt Philipzen

CAJÓN BOOK

For Newcomers, Intermediate Players & Pros

65 including
Online-Videos



CD PLAY-
ALONGS
and
ONLINE
VIDEOS

Cuban & Peruvian Techniques
Traditional Patterns & Modern Grooves
Special Sounds & Add-ons
Floating Hand & Split Hand
Binary & Ternary
Incl. Introduction to Sightreading



Dear reader,

Welcome to the **CAJÓN BOOK**, my method for drummers new to the cajón, intermediate players, and pros!

I have tried to meet the demands of the percussionists as well as the drummers and to show numerous facets of this wonderful percussion instrument.

In the course of my countless workshops over the last few years I have got to know different ways of playing, playing techniques, possible uses and rhythms, which have largely flowed into this book. There is a special focus on the cajón as a replacement for the drum set. Among others you'll find answers to the following burning questions:

- How do I transfer drum rhythms to the cajón?
- How do I transfer traditional and modern patterns to the cajón to use in my music?
- Which stroke techniques for playing dynamics?
- How can I accompany songs on the cajón?
- What kind of add-ons are helpful for improving my playing with additional sounds and playing variations to sound interesting and authentic?

The **CAJÓN BOOK** covers the following subjects:

- Basics
- Sounds & Movements
- Grooves & Rhythms
- Special Sounds & Add-ons
- Techniques and Exercises

It is a pleasure for this nearly 200 year old instrument may also infect you and show you that authentic rhythms from Mexico, Brazil and Cuba, for example, have not lost any of their appeal and can be used just as well as modern grooves in current pop music.

I wish you a lot of fun while discovering, practicing and trying out my **CAJÓN BOOK**.

Matt Philipzen
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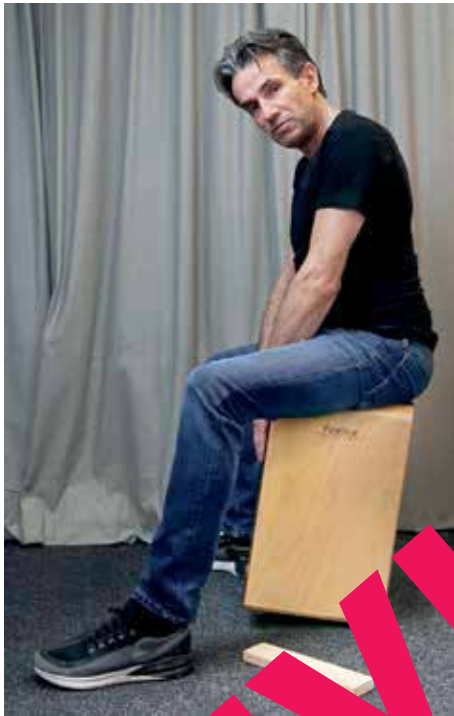
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BASICS: INTRODUCTION

First Basics and Tips

Sitting Position

Tilt your cajón slightly backwards. This will help take the strain off your back and make it easier to reach the playing surface. If this is difficult for you at the beginning, place a piece of wood under the front edge of the cajón so it is stable.



To tilt it, place a piece of wood...



... under the front edge of your cajón.

Always practice in front of a mirror in order to be able to correct your hand position and the position of the instrument. You will find that after a while your hands will automatically find the right position. You can almost 'feel' the tone and its position.

When the cajón will sound and you'll be able to elicit all its different timbres and colours.

The Sound Characteristics of the Cajón

The cajón is very different from a *conga* or a *snare drum* in terms of sound development. While the latter two instruments 'radiate' upwards—i.e. every nuance of the instrument is perceived directly by the player—the cajón develops its volume through the resonance hole on the back and thus emits its sound pressure to the rear (from the player's point of view). Take advantage of this characteristic.

Practicing Cajón in your Flat

If you want to practice in your apartment without disturbing the neighbors, cover up the resonance hole with a pillow and put a towel inside the cajón. This way the high and low tones of the instrument will still be audible and you can practice as usual without being concerned about the volume.

Notation Symbols

Designation of the hands		
R = Right Hand	P = Palm	i = index (index finger)
L = Left Hand	T = Tip (fingertips)	a = anular (ring finger)
Notation system used in this book		
<p>The diagram illustrates the notation system for the cajón. It shows two staves: 'Edge' and 'Bass'. Under 'Basic strokes', it shows 'Open Tone' (a half note), 'Tip' (a quarter note), 'Slap (dark)' (a quarter note with an 'x'), and 'Slap (clear)' (a quarter note with an 'x'). Under 'Floating hand', it shows a sequence of 'P' (Palm) and 'T' (Tip) strokes. Under 'Split hand', it shows 'i' (index) and 'a' (anular) strokes. The 'Bass' staff shows 'Bass' (a half note) and 'Bass (soft)' (a half note with a 'p' dynamic marking).</p>		
Additional characters in this book		
Accent 		Vibrato

Counting or Rhythmic language?

In my clinics I use the *basical idea* of centuries-old Indian rhythm language *Konnakol*, which works with syllables for complex rhythmic figures. However, my version is simplified, since I use it only as a methodical tool to quickly grasp rhythms. I also do not claim to have correctly executed this complex topic, nor to have developed it further. It's important, that ...

1. you enjoy speaking the syllables,
2. the syllables help you to understand rhythms,
3. you can use them quickly—in all conceivable variations and situations—without any effort,
4. this simply 'roll!'

However, the syllable language is not ideal for the cognitive understanding of note values and their relationship to each other. For this, the mathematical method of counting is more useful which is why I include both methods in this book:

The classical counting method for the introduction of new note values, which are based on a mathematical understanding.

The syllable language for the development of rhythm patterns or rhythm sequences, in which the focus is on automation and internalization

This book is not explicitly aimed at cajón beginners, however, I decided to include some 'beginner's knowledge' regarding music notation. This is for the newcomers, intermediate players and pros who do not consider reading music notation as one of their strengths which, in my experience, is quite a few players.

BASS STROKE — Cuban way of playing

Full-size notehead on the bottom line of the staff



Position: Central, just above the center of the cajón face.

Execution: With a slightly overstretched hand, a stiff wrist and closed fingers you strike with the rest of your hand from the whole arm. Only the palm, the finger and the upper palm of the hand strike the cajón face.

Sound: deep, warm, muffled, bassy

Function: bass drum

EDGE STROKE (Cajónone) — Cuban way of playing

Full-size notehead on the top line of the staff



Position: Hit on the top edge to the side of the center (RH: right of center, LH: left of center).

Execution: Hit with stretched, but loose arched fingers. The thumb is straightened to the side. The front phalanges and the wrist hit the cajón face.

Sound: short, bright, open (quieter than the slap, see p. 30)

Function: snare drum

The next exercise contains *eighth notes* and *quarter rests* only. Two eighth notes are just as long as a quarter note. *Eight* eighth notes fit into one $\frac{4}{4}$ bar.

Count aloud: 1 + 2 + 3 + 4 +

(One and two and three and four and)

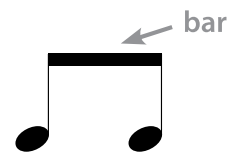
Speak aloud: Ta ki Ta ki Ta ki Ta ki.

Sequential eighth notes are interconnected with a bar.

The focus here is on clean execution of the two strokes as well as rhythmic evenness.

Again, repeat each line—as indicated by the repeat signs.

Eighth notes



Online video U



Exercises with eighth notes (bass & edge)

1 $\text{♩} = 60$ 1 + 2 + 3 + 4 +

Edge $\frac{4}{4}$ Ta - ki Ta - ki Ta ki Ta - ki 3x

Bass $\frac{4}{4}$ R L R L R L R L

2 1 + 2 + 3 + 4 +

Edge $\frac{4}{4}$ R L R L R L R L 3x

Bass $\frac{4}{4}$

3 1 + 2 3 + 4 +

Edge $\frac{4}{4}$ L R L R L R L R 3x

Bass $\frac{4}{4}$ R L R L R L R L

4 1 + 2 + 3 + 4 +

Edge $\frac{4}{4}$ R L R L R L R L 3x

Bass $\frac{4}{4}$ R L R L R L R L

Single eighth note



Eighth notes that occur *singly* are notated with a **flag** instead of a bar.

The Groove & Fill Concept

The *Groove & Fill Concept* will help you to create your own grooves to accompany pop songs in a modular system:

Select a rhythm line from the six grooves on *page 14* as a basic groove and play it three times. For the fourth time, choose a line from the sixteenth note exercises on the *previous two pages* as a fill-in. So your kit consists of:

Online video 09



Fill-in variations 1–8

Basic groove 1

1 3x 1 + 2 + 1 + 1 +

Edge

Bass

The Melody Concept

Now start with your own ideas and create your own 'melodies.' Your *loud slaps* are played alternately with soft filling strokes (*tips*, see page 25), the so-called *ghost notes*. This opens up a versatility of variations. Start with the following *initial pattern* with slaps in the right hand:

Online video 18



Initial pattern 1 (slap accents)



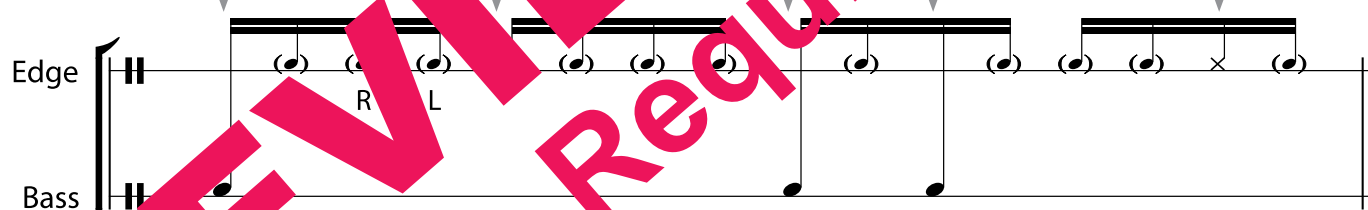
Fill up with **soft tips** on the edge (sticking R L) in sixteenth note rhythm.

Step 1: Fill up with tips in sixteenth notes

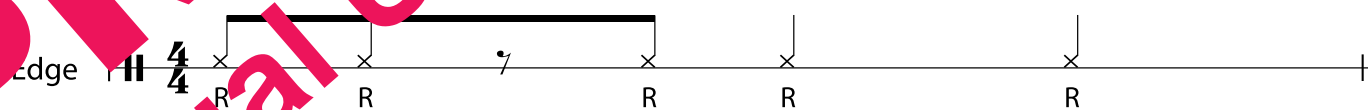


In the second step, you *orchestrate* the slap accents, meaning, you divide them between **bass** and **edge**.

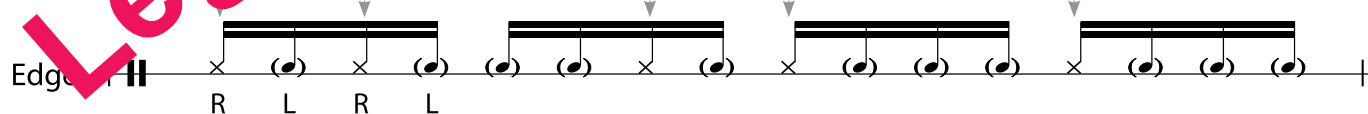
Step 2: Divide the slap accents between bass and edge



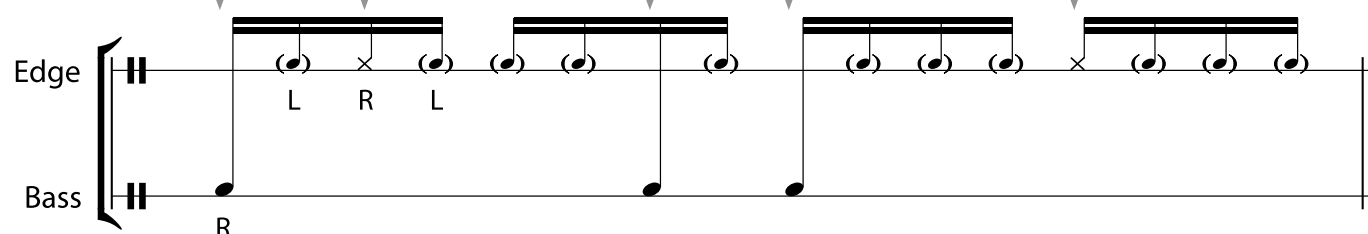
Initial pattern 2 (slap accents)



Step 1: Fill up with tips in sixteenth notes

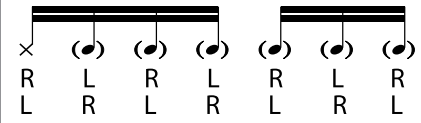


Step 2: Divide the slap accents between bass and edge



7 over 4 (plus 2 beats)

Groups of 7 we put together from two groups, here: 4 + 3!

Group of 7

STEP 1: Play the basic pattern slowly: 60 bpm:

♩ = 60

Edge $\left[\begin{array}{c} \text{4/4} \\ \text{H} \end{array} \right] :$

Bass $\left[\begin{array}{c} \text{4/4} \\ \text{H} \end{array} \right] :$

STEP 2: Practice the 7 over 4 'illusion':

group of 7 (4+3) group of 7 (4+3) +2

Ta - ki - di - mi Ta - ki - di Ta - ki - di - mi ki Ta - ki

Edge $\left[\begin{array}{c} \text{4/4} \\ \text{H} \end{array} \right] :$

Bass $\left[\begin{array}{c} \text{4/4} \\ \text{H} \end{array} \right] :$

STEP 3: Use the 'illusion' as a fill-in or variation (see *Groupings* Fill Concept on page 18):

3x Basic pattern 1x Fill-In

Edge $\left[\begin{array}{c} \text{4/4} \\ \text{H} \end{array} \right] :$

Bass $\left[\begin{array}{c} \text{4/4} \\ \text{H} \end{array} \right] :$

STEP 4: Independently create the accents distributed on bass and edge:

1

Edge $\left[\begin{array}{c} \text{4/4} \\ \text{H} \end{array} \right] :$

Bass $\left[\begin{array}{c} \text{4/4} \\ \text{H} \end{array} \right] :$

2

Edge $\left[\begin{array}{c} \text{4/4} \\ \text{H} \end{array} \right] :$

Bass $\left[\begin{array}{c} \text{4/4} \\ \text{H} \end{array} \right] :$

3

Edge $\left[\begin{array}{c} \text{4/4} \\ \text{H} \end{array} \right] :$

Bass $\left[\begin{array}{c} \text{4/4} \\ \text{H} \end{array} \right] :$

PART 2: GROOVES & STYLES

The Cajón as a Drum Set and for Song Accompaniment

In **PART 2** you learn to play the cajón like a *drum set*.

The strong hand in the bass replaces the *bass drum* and the supposedly weaker hand on the edge replaces the *snare drum* of a drum set.

The rhythms listed below vary only in the right hand (bass) and are mostly based on the rhythmic figure of the bass player in the band. Together you are the rhythm section of a formation.

Pop Grooves

When practicing, pay attention to *balance in dynamics*, i.e. less bass and more edge tones make the rhythms more balanced. Combine the basic patterns with the *Groove & Fill Concept* (see page 18)—with one of each of the four variations listed below.

Online video 28



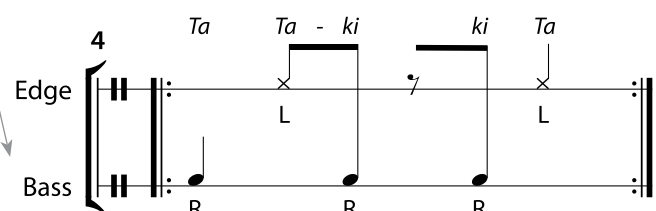
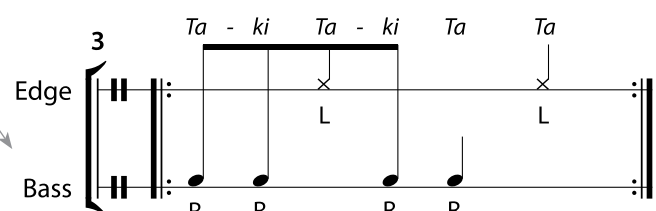
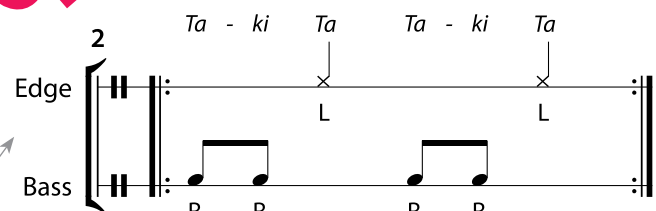
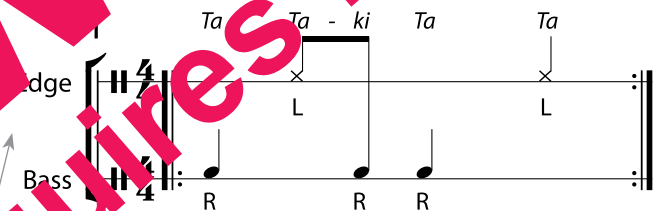
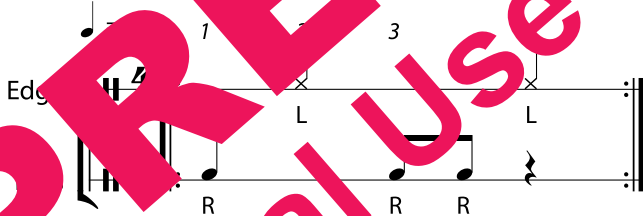
7

8

Demo Track Play Along

Variations 1–4

Basic pattern (bass | snare)



Proceed in the same way with the modules for the next add-ons.

Buzz Board

Material: wooden plate with metal snare spirals you glue onto the cajón surface as an add-on like a playable snare carpet. This gives you more new sounds on the surface.

Sound: sidesnare effect

Online video 37



PREVIEW ONLY
Legal Use Requires Purchase



The Buzz Board is hit by the hands.



Brushes

Material: Please ONLY use plastic brushes, NEVER metal brushes! They destroy the surface of your cajón.

Sound: softer than drum sticks, quieter than rods, wipe and stroke effects

Online video 38



The brush sound is quieter than that of rods. Their playing style also allows for stroked sounds. Use the Sizzle Board modules for this (page 67)!



Latin Pop Grooves for song accompaniment

Mixing the elements of *pop* with *Latin music* can create the following rhythms. Make sure to pay attention to the tempo information and use a *metronome*. The previous concept is used again here. The leading hand imitates the *cymbal pattern* of the drum set with a rod on the edge of the cajón.

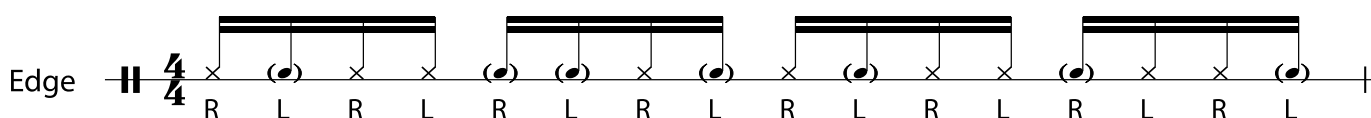
Latin Pop Grooves (Rod in the leading hand)

14

Demo Trade

[illegible]

Trap variation (on the edge of the cajón)



4. now add one of the three basic grooves to one of the four trap variations in the following way:

3x 2 bars basic groove + **1 bar basic groove** + **1 bar variation 1, 2, 3, or 4**

You get an authentic trap groove.

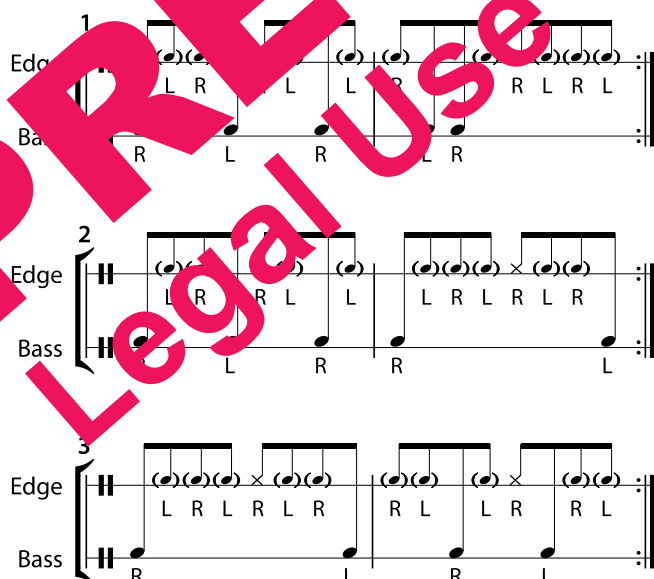
Option: Play the variations on a bright sound source such as the *buzz board* (page 97).

5. Proceed in the same way with the other basic grooves and variations.

Sample (Trap basic groove 1 + variation 1)



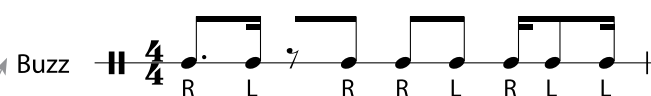
Trap basic groove 1 to 3 (cajón)



Trap variation 1 (edge or buzz board)



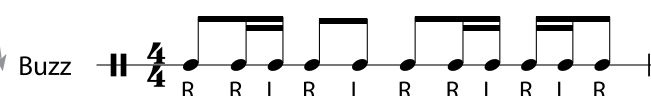
Trap variation 2 (edge or buzz board)



Trap variation 3 (edge or buzz board)



Trap variation 4 (edge or buzz board)



Part 3: Techniques & Phrasing

PART 3 is about playing techniques that have become established on the cajón, but originally come from other percussion instruments.

Floating Hand

This playing technique is adapted from the *conga*, the national instrument of Cuba. On the cajón, however, this technique is not performed with the hollow hand, but with the flat hand.

It is very important that you watch the **videos** to understand the exact movement and to practice correctly. Notes and symbols are only of limited help here – as they will be later with the split hand technique (see p. 115).

Once you have internalized the sequence of movement, you will recognize the benefit of this technique very quickly, in the truest sense of the word a *flowing movement* that creates a smooth flow of movement – especially with fast stroke sequences. As with the tips, these are primarily *filling strokes*, which are important links between the more accented sounds of *bass tone*, *open tone*, and *claps*. You are able to create *two strokes with one motion*, so you can effortlessly perform quick stroke sequences.

The **Floating Hand** (also called *Heel-Tip Motion* and *Heel-Beat Motion*) is a *rocking motion* from the palm to the fingertips. In a relaxed hand position, place your flat hand on the surface of the cajón with your thumb bent and fingers slightly spread.

The movement sequence is as follows:

Step 1: Lift your **fingertips** (T = **tip**) from the surface while your **palm** (P = **palm** of your hand) remains on the surface.

Step 2: Now drop the *fingertips* (T) onto the club face. At the same time lift the *palm* (P) a little bit.

Step 3: Now tilt your *palm* (P) back onto the club face. Your *fingertips* (T) return back to the starting position of *Step 1*.

In a figure-eight sequence, distribute the strokes as follows:

1, 2, 3, 4: The **palm** (P) strikes on the **major counts**.

1+, 2+, 3+, 4+: The **fingertips** (T) strike on the **minor counts**.

First, practice the *bass tone* of the floating hand technique with *right* and *left hand*.

If you don't have an instrument at hand, you can use a *flat playing surface* (e.g. a table) to learn the movement.

Online video 5



Floating Hand: Bass Tone

Palm

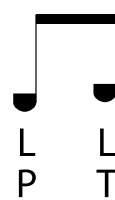
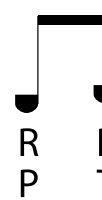


Tip



R

L



BASS Floating Hand: Basic exercise (R | L)

Basic exercise notation for Bass Floating Hand:

Right Hand (R): A sequence of notes on a staff, alternating between P (palm) and T (tip) strokes. The notation shows P on the major count and T on the minor count.

Left Hand (LH): A sequence of notes on a staff, alternating between P (palm) and T (tip) strokes. The notation shows P on the major count and T on the minor count.