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## About the Author

Kalani has performed and recorded with such music legends as Kenny Loggins, David Sanborn, Max Roach, Barry Manilow, Vic Damone, John Mayall, Chante Moore, Dr. John, Jeff Porcaro, Michael Kamen, and Melissa Manchester. He is the featured percussionist on the multi-platinum video and CD *Yanni: Live at the Acropolis*, and has performed on film and TV sound tracks for most major studios including Disney, Warner Bros., Tri-Star, 20th Century Fox, Universal, the Nature Company, and Jim Hensen Records.

Kalani has produced over 15 instructional videos for a variety of instruments including congas, bongos, djembe, hand percussion and drumset. He is the founder and director of DrumLesson.com, an educational website for students that has been featured in the New York Times and on CNN Live, and the director of Drum Camp, a summer program offering classes in a variety of drumming traditions. (Visit [www.DrumCamp.com](http://www.DrumCamp.com) for more information.) Kalani has designed drums and developed educational and recreational music programs for the Kaman Music Corporation (Toca/LP) and is one of Toca's primary percussion clinicians ([tocapercussion.com](http://tocapercussion.com)). He has won awards from DRUM! Magazine in many areas including Rock/Pop Percussion, World Percussion, Percussion Clinician and Drum Circle Facilitation. He is the chairman of the Percussive Arts Society's Recreational Drumming Committee and serves on both the World Percussion and Health & Wellness committees. He is a consultant and program coordinator for Peripole-Bergerault® Educational Instruments (Peripole® Percussion by Toca).

Kalani currently presents workshops, programs, and drum circles at conferences, music stores, educational institutions, and festivals in the U.S. and abroad. His university appearances include the University of Southern California; California State University, Northridge; University of Missouri, Kansas City; Central Missouri State University; University of California, Los Angeles; University of Akron; University of Kentucky; and Louisiana State University. He has been a featured clinician at the Taipei Percussion Institute, the International Percussion Festival (Belgium), the World Rhythm Festival (Seattle), and several Percussive Arts Society International Conventions. He received a Bachelor of Music degree from California State University, Northridge, and Orff-Schulwerk training at Mills College and the University of Memphis.

Kalani uses Toca percussion instruments, Gibraltar hardware, Paiste cymbals, Evans drumheads, Vic Firth sticks and mallets, Peripole-Bergerault educational instruments and Audio-Technica microphones.



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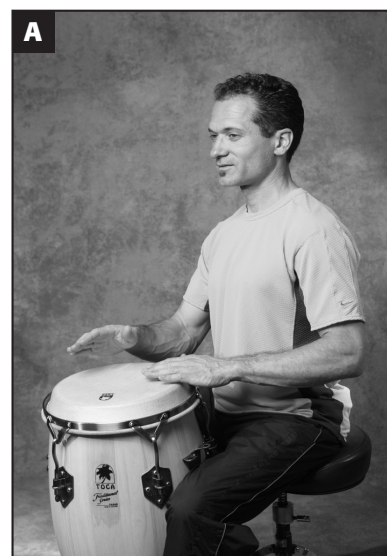
## Chapter 4: Playing Positions

Congas are commonly played in either a seated or standing position. Before you start to play or practice, take some time to adjust your equipment to fit your body. If you're using a seat, make sure it's at a height that allows for natural arm movements and good posture. If you decide to stand, adjust your conga stands so they hold the drums at a height that encourages good posture and facilitates proper technique. By adjusting your equipment before practicing or performing, you form good playing habits and minimize the risk of injury.

### Sitting

The congas are traditionally played in a seated position with the drum resting on the floor and held between the legs at a slight angle (photo A). I recommend sitting on a drum throne or other adjustable armless seat, because chairs with arms can end up restricting your movement. Adjust the seat to a height that allows your elbows to be slightly higher than the top of the drum. Back rests tend to invite slumping, so I recommend using a seat of simple design unless you have back trouble and need the support. Sit toward the front of the seat and keep your back straight. This will help keep your energy level up by using your spine for support rather than your lower back muscles.

Traditional-style playing sometimes involves lifting the drum off the floor by grasping it between the thighs while pressing up on the toes (photo B). Players will lift the drum off the floor when playing certain sounds such as the bass tone, as it helps the quality and volume of the sound. Various floor stands are available from several manufacturers that hold the drums slightly off the floor. These allow the drums to "breathe" and keep them in approximately the same position as if you were lifting them off the floor as described above. Floor stands also add stability to the congas, which, because of their tapered design, are easily knocked over if bumped. The Peripole-Bergerault company, in association with Toca Percussion, offers a line of instruments called Sienta Drums (photo C) that have built-in stands (*sienta* means "sit" in Spanish). They are designed for group drumming and are well suited for kids and classrooms.

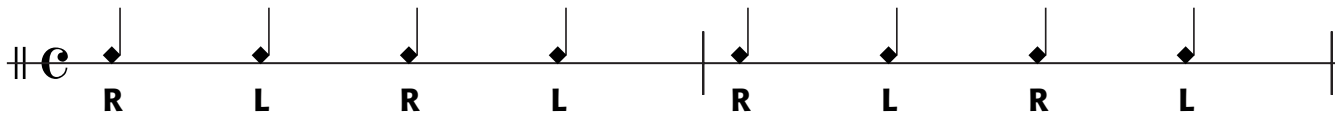


*Note: Congas sound best when played on a hard surface such as wood, cement, Linoleum or tile. If you're playing on carpet, grass or a similar surface, you may wish to place a small (16"x16") piece of plywood or Masonite under each drum to prevent the sound from being absorbed by rough surfaces. Use the same boards to prevent wood floors from being scratched by the drums.*



Most of the musical examples contained in this book are demonstrated at either 100 bpm ( $\frac{4}{4}$ ), or 120 bpm ( $\frac{6}{8}$ ).

**Bass**  Track 1



B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B
R	L	R	L	R	L	R	L

### Key

B = Bass tone  
R = Right hand  
L = Left hand

## The Open Tone

This is the fundamental tone of the conga—the sound of the head as it vibrates in its natural state. The open tone is the most resonant tone and produces a distinct pitch. As with the bass tone, it's best to have the drum off the floor, either tilted or mounted in a stand. When you play the open tone, focus the weight of your hand into the lower part of the fingers, which act as one unit when they strike the drum. The fingers are not rigid, nor are they soft—just firm enough to stay together and produce a solid tone. The hand strikes the head so the knuckles (where the fingers meet the palm) are lined up with the edge.



*Open tone top*



*Open tone side*

### To Play the Open Tone:

Start with your arm in a relaxed position and the drum at a comfortable height.

1. Raise your hand and arm from the elbow.
2. Allow gravity to pull your hand towards the head.
3. Strike the head with your wrist and hand flat, focusing the weight into the lower part of the fingers.
4. Allow the hand to rebound back to the starting position while the drum resonates.

To produce a full open tone, make sure your hand is relaxed. The goal is to get the head moving and then get out of the way to allow the head to sing freely. Be careful not to strike the rim with the palm; if this is occurring, you may be dropping your wrist. A similar technique to the open tone is the *muted stroke* for which the hand stays on the head after striking it. Leaving your hand on the head (playing a muted stroke) may help you learn how **not** to play the open tone. As with all the tones, allow the hand and arm to be in a relaxed and natural position before and after each movement.



*Open tone hand area*