

# AN AMERICAN APPROACH TO *World Percussion*

A practical method for the development of jazz applications  
to hand percussion instruments

By Tom Teasley



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## About the Author

Tom Teasley, described in the *Washington Post* as “a multi-instrumental genius,” maintains a unique career as a solo percussionist, composer, and collaborator. He is the recipient of the 2010 and 2011 Helen Hayes Award for Outstanding Sound Design, and has been nominated for the award four times. In addition, he has been named the 2012, 2013, and 2014 WAMA (Washington Area Music Award) World Music Instrumentalist. Tom tours frequently throughout the world, performing and presenting clinics for the instrument companies he endorses (Yamaha, Vic Firth, Sabian, Remo, Latin Percussion, and Cooperman Fife and Drums). Tom has presented his work at three separate PASIC conventions. He has performed his unique clinic programs, which combine world percussion with American jazz, at universities and conservatories throughout the world. As a five-time recipient of a Fulbright-Hays grant for performances in the Middle East, Tom has collaborated with indigenous musicians and has given historic performances in Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Iraq, the West Bank, and Jerusalem. He has been an artist-in-residence at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and has collaborated with the National Symphony Orchestra as both a soloist and a composer. As an international collaborator, he has performed by invitation in Europe, South America, New Zealand, Samoa, and Korea. Tom earned the Artist-of-the-Year Award from Young Audiences of Virginia for his creative and educational presentations. Tom serves on the faculty of University of the District of Columbia. His eight CDs have been greeted with international airplay and acclaim. In addition, he has been featured in numerous *Modern Drummer* and *DRUM! Magazine* articles. Please visit [tomteasley.com](http://tomteasley.com) for more information.

## Palm Drums

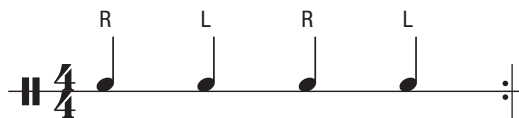
I consider palm drums to be any drums that can be played with the entire hand (e.g. djembe, ashiko, conga).

### TONES

Practice each of the following tones for several minutes. Pay close attention to how your hand feels when striking the drum, and to the resultant sound produced. Learn to recognize the proper sound, and be able to reconcile it with the tactile sensation felt in your hand. When playing the same tone, strive for consistency between the hands. When playing different tones, strive for clarity between them. Working on producing the proper sounds should always be a part of your practice regimen, regardless of how advanced the technique exercises become. All too frequently, drummers and percussionists become too focused on developing “fast hands” and don’t spend enough time on the quality of sound. The time you spend developing a beautiful sound will always serve you well!

To produce the open tone, keep your fingers very relaxed. The knuckles should be approximately at the rim of the drum, and the motion should come from the wrist. Remember, the open tone is the most neutral sound the drum will produce. Listen for a good blend of high and low sounds.

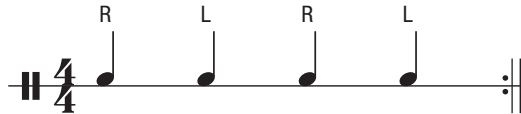
#### 1A. Open Tone



The bass tone is the lowest, most resonant sound that the drum will produce. I use my entire hand to create the sound, and I will frequently have my students rub the drumhead first to develop the tactile memory of having the entire hand in contact with the head.

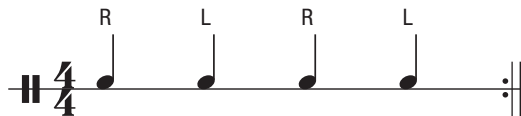
To produce the bass tone, strike the drum in the very center so the entire hand (palm down) makes contact with the head at the same time. If the fingers come down a little late, a high “slap” frequency will be produced instead of a true bass tone.

**DVD 1B. Bass Tone**



The slap stroke can be one of the more elusive sounds. It is important that you don't strike the drum too hard, as this will create a tense hand and prohibit ease in creating the slap sound. Before attempting the stroke, first shake your hand to loosen up your fingers. Then let the weight of your arm bring the hand down. Sometimes it's helpful to first let your fingers gently “grab” the head at the point of impact. Once you're able to create a good slap sound, go back and practice it softly, as nothing is more beautiful than a soft slap sound!

**DVD 1C. Slap Tone**



When working on the 16-8-4-2 sequence in exercise 2, repeat each grouping several times before continuing to the next lower grouping. I frequently use this exercise as a form of meditation; it helps me to limber up my hands and relax into a groove. Please don't worry about speed. It's more important that you start off in a slow, *relaxed* manner. Speed will come in a natural, organic fashion.

**DVD 2. Heel-Tip**