

## *The Basics of Hand Drumming*

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originally printed in Salem Monthly  
Volume 3, Issue 7- October 2006

Playing a repetitive rhythm on a hand drum can release stress and lift your spirits. Here are a few tips and some basic strokes that will help get you started.

Elevate your drum by either mounting it on a stand or holding it between your knees and feet. This allows the air to escape from inside the drum, producing a full, rich tone.

The first stroke, the bass tone, is played by hitting the center of the drum with your palm, keeping the entire hand flat, with fingers gently held together. Let your hand bounce away from the drumhead, pulling the low-pitched bass tone out of the instrument. Stay relaxed and practice the stroke with both hands, striving to make the strokes sound identical.

Noticeably higher in pitch is the open tone, produced by using the fingers as a paddle and striking near the edge of the drum. Aim so that the rim of the drum connects with the hand at the base of the fingers. Remain relaxed and pull away immediately after contact. Let the open tone ring out and keep the sound consistent between the right and left hands.

The slap is the third and often most difficult stroke to develop. When playing a slap, the base of your palm will make contact with the rim of the drum and your fingers will fall near the center of the drumhead. Instead of bouncing away, as in the bass and open tones, let your hand remain on the drumhead. At the moment of contact, your fingertips should slightly tug or grip at the head. Executed properly and quickly, the slap stroke will create a short, loud, high-pitched crack. Practice each of these three hand drum strokes repeatedly with both hands.

Feel free to conjure up your own combinations of basses, opens and slaps. Listen to your favorite music and let the sounds you hear lead you into patterns. Jam with a friend or two. Take your drum to a local drum circle and be guided by its energy and spontaneity. If something more structured suits you better, inquire about hand drum lessons at music stores in your area.

Hand drums such as Latin congas, Middle Eastern dumbeks or African djembe or ashiko can be found at nearly any music store and are excellent choices for the beginner.

Mark Powers teaches private drum lessons at Weathers Music in Salem and facilitates group percussion and leadership workshops in the area. He has studied and performed throughout the US, China, Thailand and Ghana, West Africa. Visit Mark online at [www.powerspercussion.com](http://www.powerspercussion.com) and email him at [mark@powerspercussion.com](mailto:mark@powerspercussion.com)