

From Zero to Drummer in 3 Easy Lessons
Lesson 3- PA & TA
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Sorry to disappoint you, but I didn't invent these nifty little words ('GUN,' 'DUN,' 'GO,' 'DO') that we have using to verbalize our rhythms (refer to Lessons 1 & 2). These mnemonic syllables are from Nigeria, where Yorubans used them not only to aid in the memorization of djembe phrases, but also as a form of communication. Verbalizing a rhythm is a terrific way to internalize the tones, spacing and feeling ('groove') involved to play it. It is much easier to get the rhythm out of you once you have securely got it in you. Many great teachers stress the importance of being able to 'say what you play.'

Having completed the first two lessons, you now have a handle on the GUN & DUN 'bass' strokes, the GO & DO 'open' strokes and a number of rhythms that utilize them. Now we are ready to spice things up a bit!

Again borrowing from the Nigerian tradition, the next stroke our right hand will play is called PA (pronounced 'pah'). This is the most difficult of the tones to produce consistently. When played correctly, the resulting sound will be a short (staccato), powerful, high-pitched tone- referred to as a 'slap.' The steps to a great PA 'slap' stroke are:



- Hit the drum so that the rim makes contact with your hand at the very base of your palm, about 1-inch before your wrist.
- Your fingertips slap onto the drumhead immediately after the base of your palm meets the rim.
- Techniques vary between conga and djembe players. If you are playing a conga, cup your hand slightly and keep your fingers gently held together. If you are playing a djembe or ashiko, keep your fingers ever-so-slightly apart and grip the drumhead with your fingertips as soon as they make contact.

The same stroke played with our left hand will be called TA (pronounced 'tah'). Make the right and left hand strokes (PA & TA) sound identical. Strive to create a sort of 'pop' or 'crack' sound with each hand and be

patient. It will take slow, dedicated practice to produce a sharp ‘slap’ cleanly and consistently. Watch other, more experienced, players and experiment with slightly different positions to find what works best for you. Whatever you choose, remember to stay loose and relaxed.

To make reading easier, our right hand PA stroke will be shortened to ‘P’ and the left hand TA will be ‘T.’ As in the first two lessons, a dash (-) means ‘rest.’ Now, on to some rhythms using our new tones! Be sure to speak or sing each phrase as you play it.

P - T - P T - - P - T - P T - - (repeat many times)

Spoken, the above rhythm is,
“PA (rest) TA (rest) PA TA (rest) (rest)” (repeated)

Let’s play a couple more . . .

P T - T - T P - P T - T - T P - (repeat)

P - P T - - - T P - P T - - - T (repeat)

Practice the PA & TA strokes repeatedly until you are getting solid ‘slaps’ with both hands. When you feel comfortable, you are ready to combine them with the GUN, DUN, GO & DO strokes!

G = GUN (right bass tone)

D = DUN (left bass tone)

g = go (right open tone)

d = do (left open tone)

P = PA (right slap tone)

T = TA (left slap tone)

G - D - g - d - G - D - P - T - (repeat)

G - D - g d g d G - - T - - T - (repeat)

G - P D - P d - G - P D - P d - (repeat)

P - T - G - - d - d g - G - D - (repeat)

Have fun- there are many, many ways to combine these six strokes. We are not attempting any culturally-specific rhythms in these lessons, so there is no 'right or wrong' here. Explore the bass, open and slap tones and you will discover a never-ending supply of patterns and combinations.

Here is a great game to play with a friend, using our drum 'language'! Without playing on your drum, mentally make up a pattern of your own, using the GUN, DUN, GO, DO, PA & TA strokes. Sing the mnemonic syllables to your friend and see if he/she can play the rhythm back to you on his/her drum. Switch roles and see if you can play the rhythm that your friend sings to you. Then play this game with two or more friends!

I hope that these three lessons have given you a taste of some of the rhythmic possibilities and fun to be had while hand drumming. I would love to hear any questions, comments or future lesson ideas that you might have. Please direct correspondence to: mark@powerspercussion.com

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