Basic Djembe Technique with Ray McNamara

The *djembe* (pronounced "Jem-Bay") is a skin covered hand drum. It originates in West Africa, and dates back to the first millennium. Its shape can be likened to an hourglass, or a goblet. A very popular drum in the U.S. Available at many music stores and online retailers.

Open Tone, Bass, and Slap

There are three main sounds to a *djembe* rhythm: the slap, tone, and bass. These sounds are referred to as below:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Tone** | **Bass** | **Slap** |
| **Right** | Go | Gun | Pa |
| **Left** | Do | Dun | Ta |

Sometimes the sounds are abbreviated more simply:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Tone** | **Bass** | **Slap** |
| **Right** | O | B | S |
| **Left** | O | B | S |

Played on the edge of the drum, fingers fairly firm and when striking the skin.

Whole hand near the center. Try not to slap it, bounce it off to leave the skin vibrating.

Sharp sound. Bass of hand on the rim, with a slight hollow under the palm. Relaxed wrists.

A simple warm up exercise to practice the different tones:

1) B,B,O,O,B,B,O,O repeat 2) B,B,O,O,S,S,O,O repeat

Start out slowly and concentrate on hand position and getting the correct sound. Then play to a song or metronome to keep a steady tempo. Try

different speeds to develop your time at various tempos.