

BODHRÁN WORKSHOP

INTRODUCTION

This is a five-hour workshop divided into two sections. The first two hours contain the introductory material you expect to receive today, while the last three hours are more advanced. The reason I've decided to offer a full afternoon to this workshop is because it was difficult for me to find bodhrán instruction and materials, so I would like to kick-start your enjoyment of the instrument as best I may in the time we have together. You are free to leave whenever you like, and you are free to stay for as long as you like, no matter what your estimation is of your current skill with the instrument.

A note on learning: Forget the things you've been told and the things you've told yourself about the reasons why you can't learn to be musical, especially when you're approaching folk music. Folk music is, by definition, music of the people, and it belongs to everyone who chooses to participate in it. Having said that, there might be times when this workshop feels too fast for you or when you feel lost. Those are the times to ask questions, so please feel free to stop me and ask them. If the time comes when you've simply reached a level of saturation and need to sit back and watch others, stretch or get a cup of tea, that's all right as well. Do what you need to do, and come back if you like.

HOUR ONE: THE FUNDAMENTALS

RESPECT YOUR BODY WHILE PLAYING-5 MIN.

Your dominant hand will be doing most of the work today, and that work will be centered in your wrist. Like any repetitive motion, playing the bodhrán can stress your carpal tunnel and other small wrist structures. Therefore, we're going to begin today with a series of wrist stretches and a handout, so that you can begin healthfully and stop a moment to rest and stretch when necessary.

<Hand Wrist and Forearm Stretches Handout>

PARTS OF THE DRUM-5 Min.

THE FRAME: The frame is round and might or might not have a brace in the back. I prefer a cross-brace because I think it provides me with greater control of the drum while playing, but I have seen many fine players who prefer more freedom of movement in the off-hand and so do not play a drum with a brace in the back.

THE SKIN: Bodhráns are traditionally made of goat skin, but I have seen drums skinned with the hides of many different animals. Goat skin is said to provide the deepest and most traditional sound, but like human skin, it must be kept flexible, or it will dry and eventually split. The most traditional treatment for goat skin drums is lanolin, which can be rubbed into the skin in small amounts until the tone of the drum deepens as desired. This should only be done once in a great while, when the skin feels dry and the sound of the drum is high-pitched. In a pinch, during a gig, the tone of the drum can be deepened with a cloth dampened with water, or Guinness, if you have it handy. Conversely, a drum that is too flabby with humidity or moisture can be tuned by putting it near a fireplace to warm or

evaporating the water with a hair dryer. Please be careful when doing these things, so you don't over-dry your drum, which might cause the head to split. Finally, if you've over-lanolinized your drum, you can remove some of the oil with a hot, damp cloth.

Conversely, you can do what I did when I became a vegan, and buy a drum with a Remo Renaissance head. Renaissance is a patented replacement for animal skin developed by Remo, and the sound it produces is very similar, often indistinguishable from that of a traditional drum. Both Remo and Cooperman Fife and Drum make drums with Remo Renaissance heads on the continent. I understand there are a few Pakistani companies that make drums with artificial heads, but I can't vouch for their quality. Not only are artificial heads more animal-friendly, they're imminently gig-friendly too, because they don't fall out of tune the way animal skin does, even when played in the damp or next to a fire.

HOW TO HOLD THE DRUM AND TIPPER-10 MIN.

Demonstration-5 Min.

Demonstrate the way a bodhrán is held:

- Against the body, under the arm of the off-hand
- Off-hand against the skin of the drum
- Off-hand braced against the cross-brace, if desired

Discuss Tippers:

- The benefits of a slim, weighted tipper vs. a heavy or thick one (wrist fatigue)
- Use a bit of string to attach the tipper to your finger

Discuss the Off-Hand:

- Placement of the hand against the drum to muffle sound
- Removal of the off-hand to allow full sound
- Placement of the fingers or heel of the hand against the drum for partial sound

Checking Student Technique-5 Min.

HOW TO STRIKE THE DRUM-10 MIN.

The Single Stroke - 5 Min.

- Striking the drum with a downward and an upward motion evenly
- Example and practice

The Triplet - 5 Min.

- Using the top of the tipper to effect a triplet
- The natural development of this skill over time and with speed
- Example and practice

The Off-Hand - 5 Min.

- Using the off-hand to mute the drum, provide tonal variation and open the drum for a fuller sound
- Example and practice

HOW TO PRACTICE-10 MIN.

Using a Metronome - 5 Min.

- A brief example of regular up and down strokes without the metronome
- Why learning to play against a metronome is crucial for developing good drumming skills
 - Playing against a metronome helps you to even out irregularities in your playing
 - Playing against a metronome disciplines you to become a better timekeeper for fellow musicians
- How playing against a metronome helps to develop speed
- A brief description of flex-timing and how keeping time with other musicians is improved by practicing with a metronome
- Example and practice

Playing to Music - 5 Min.

- Why playing to Irish music is so important
 - It helps familiarize you with the musical form
 - It helps you learn to play with other musicians
 - It gives you the opportunity to listen to the ways other bodhrán players interpret Irish music

Irish Rhythms - 20 Min.

The Reel - 10 Min.

- Counting to four verbally, with emphasis on the one
- Counting to four with the drum, with emphasis on the one
- Why it's important to emphasize the beginning of the count rather than the end (drives the beat)

The Jig - 10 Min.

- Counting to six verbally, with emphasis on the one and four
- Counting to six with the drum, with emphasis on the one and four
- Again, why it's important to emphasize the beginning of the count rather than the end (drives the beat)

HOUR TWO: BEGINNING PRACTICE

Striking the Drum Evenly - 30 Min.

- Single Strokes, Up & Down, Without Metronome (Timed in 2 Min. Bursts) - 10 Min.
- Single Strokes, Up & Down, With Metronome (Timed in 2 Min. Bursts) - 10 Min.
- Learning the Triplet, Without Metronome - 10 Min.

Learning to Count Irish Rhythms to Music - 30 Min.

- Counting & Playing the Reel - 15 Min.
 - *Hithergreen Reel – Fannigan's Isle*
 - *Glory Reel/Heathery Cruach - Altan*
- Counting & Playing the Jig - 15 Min.
 - *Skyline Jig – The Chieftains*
 - *Ballerina Jig – Solas*

QUESTIONS & BREAK-15 MIN.

- Resources for Further Instruction:
 - <http://www.csmaccath.com/icgc2009transcripts>

POST-WORKSHOP INSTRUCTION

The Value of Knowing the Musical Form - 1 Hour

- The A-B-A form of Irish traditional music, divided into eight measures each - 15 Min.
 - A might be interpreted with one pattern of drumming, played softly
 - B might be interpreted with a second pattern of drumming, played with more emphasis
 - A2 might be a return to the first pattern but with more volume and/or energy

Listening to & Playing the Reel - 15 Min.

Think of the piece in terms of A-B-A while listening to it the first time, and then the second time the piece is played, try to vary your playing accordingly.

Listening to & Playing the Jig - 15 Min.

Think of the piece in terms of A-B-A while listening to it the first time, and then the second time the piece is played, try to vary your playing accordingly.

Student-Led Instruction - 1 Hour

- Student questions and answers, specific needs addressed
- Time for playing and individual instruction
- Soloing to music
- Soloing without music
- Looking ahead to what you might study next
 - Slip jigs, hornpipes & marches
 - Off-hand dynamics
 - Music theory, drumming notation and bodhrán notation