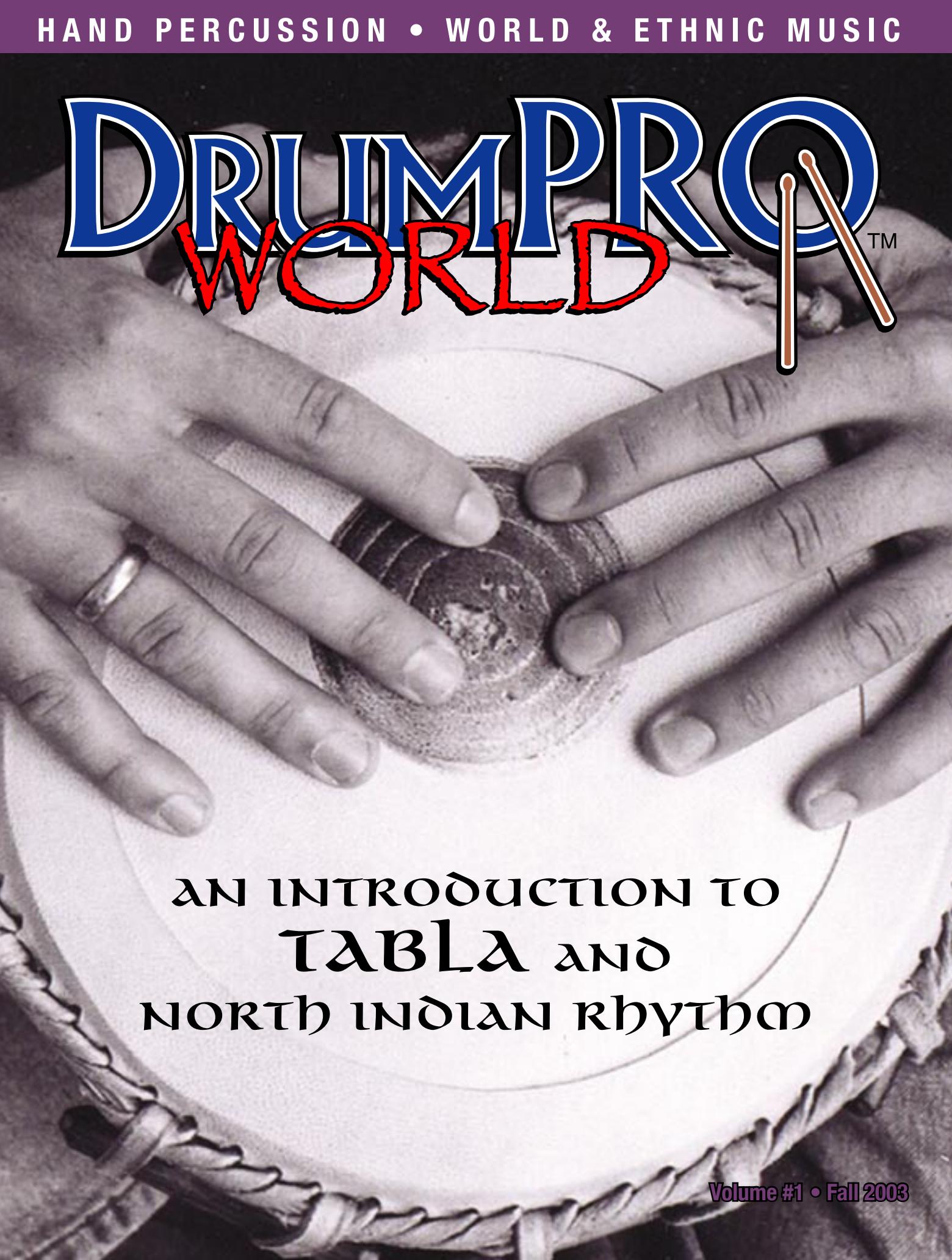


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AN INTRODUCTION TO  
TABLA AND  
NORTH INDIAN RHYTHM

Volume #1 • Fall 2003

## 8 AN INTRODUCTION TO TABLA,

NORTH INDIAN RHYTHM AND IT'S APPLICATIONS.

By Jonathan Dimond

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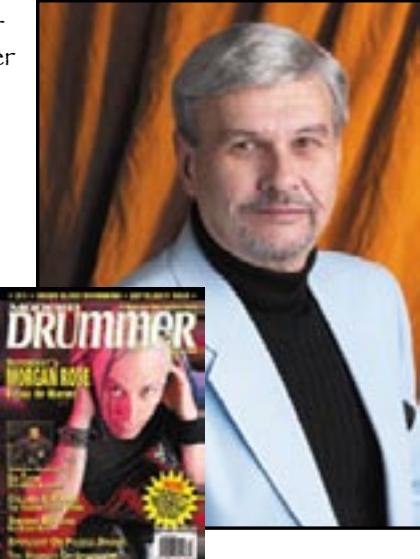
Hello Everyone!

By now, many of you have heard of the passing of Ron Spagnardi, the founder of Modern Drummer Magazine. Ron was a visionary and an innovator.

Editor & Publisher  
of Modern Drummer

RONALD  
SPAGNARDI

April 25, 1943 -  
September 22, 2003



Modern Drummer, the “grand daddy” of all contemporary drumming publications has inspired, educated and gave some of us the courage to follow a career in drumming.

Some may say that the drumming community has lost one of its greatest innovators. I don’t believe that Ron Spagnardi’s work and vision has been lost, by any means. Ron has given the international drumming community a rich legacy and the resources to evolve into the world of tomorrow. Although Ron will be greatly missed, his influence will be seen for many generations to come. That is true success! Cheers Ron! We all couldn’t have come this far without you...

“Carpe Diem” - Seize the Day!  
Innovation is the product of enlightenment and enlightenment is the product of courage!

George Shepherd  
DrumPRO Magazines  
Publisher



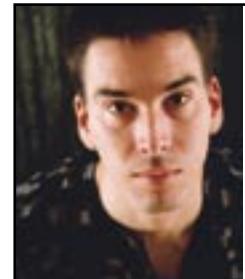
## From the Editor

Welcome to the first ‘World’ edition of DrumPRO Magazine. I am delighted to share with you some information and inspiration that all stems from one of the deepest and most virtuosic of all percussion instruments – the tabla.

While absorbing this issue, please bear in mind that a complete musical experience must involve a balance of theory, practice, history, and focused listening. So utilize the discography, the web links that may lead you to opportunities to witness live performances in your town, and if so desired employ a teacher who can guide you through the whole journey.

Please feel free to contact me with questions or feedback – we’re all learning, and I’d love to start a dialogue with percussion enthusiasts, wherever you may be on your journey.  
Enjoy!

Jonathan Dimond  
DrumPRO World  
Editor



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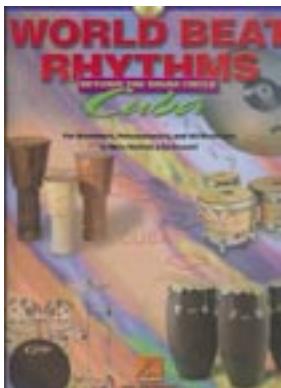
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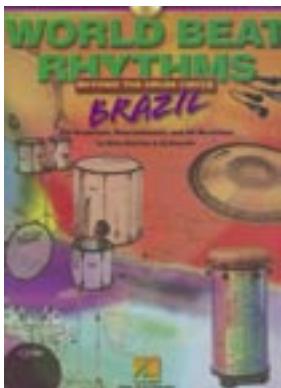
**TOTALS** \_\_\_\_\_



## World Beat Rhythms Cuba

By Maria Martinez & Ed Roscetti

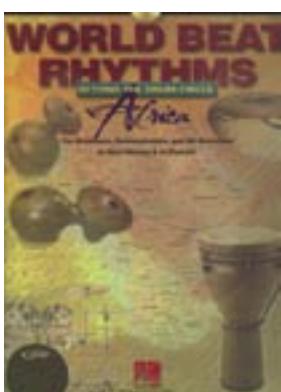
World Beat Rhythms Cuba "Beyond The Drum Circle" is a great tool for learning the ethnic rhythms of Cuba. Each style covered has a full score and explanation of the instrumentation of each. This new book features charts, pictures, examples and audio of the various styles and instrumentation of Cuban music. Styles include Rumba, Mozambique and Conga. The accompanying CD offers play-along tracks for all instruments and examples of each rhythm. Very cool book! For more info, visit [www.musicdispatch.com](http://www.musicdispatch.com) or call (800) 637-2852. Book and CD Retail Price \$16.95



## World Beat Rhythms Brazil

By Maria Martinez & Ed Roscetti

This new book in the World Beat Rhythms series by Hal Leonard offers an exciting insight into the world of Brazilian music. Throughout the series, each style is showcased through stylistic examples, pictures, charts and audio examples. Styles include Odolum, Baiao and Samba. Full scores and audio examples give an in-depth look into the instrumentation of each style. Also, a very cool book! For more info visit, [www.musicdispatch.com](http://www.musicdispatch.com) or call (800) 637-2852. Book and CD Retail Price \$16.95



## World Beat Rhythms Africa

By Maria Martinez & Ed Roscetti

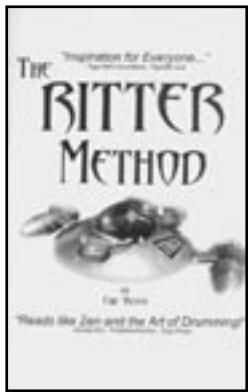
The third book in the World Beat Rhythms Series is another in-depth journey, this time into the music of Africa. Of course, it is impossible to dissect the ethnic music of each region in only 62 pages, but Maria and Ed do a wonderful job in bringing these three styles to the western world. The styles showcased in this book are Akom, Adowa and Central African Republic. Each style, again, features charts, scores, pictures and audio examples of the various instrumentation. You can check out more info on Maria and Ed's seminar series by visiting [www.worldbeatrhythms.com](http://www.worldbeatrhythms.com). More info on the books can be obtained through [www.musicdispatch.com](http://www.musicdispatch.com) and can be ordered by calling (800)637-2852. Book and CD Retail Price \$16.95

*"Stop and rest if you must, but never quit.*

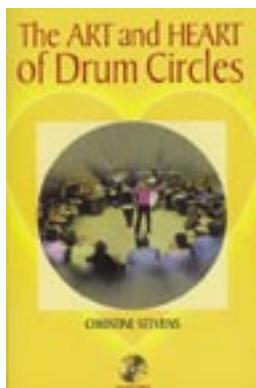
*Inspiration is our main source of energy, so gather as much of it as you can."* -Chip Ritter

## The Ritter Method

By Chip Ritter



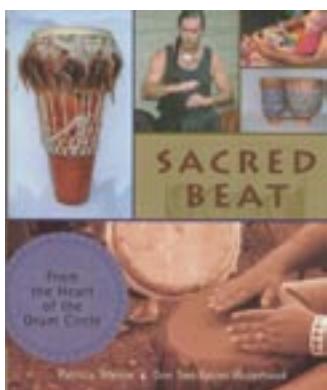
The above quote reflects is why we read books, go to clinics, surf the web and play music. Drumming is not only an art form, but it is a way of living. Chip explains many philosophical concepts to improve one's playing and one's self. There are many drum "idols" and teachers that we have all looked up to, but how many of these great players have ever really inspired you to completely change your life or your way of thinking? If you find inspiration, hold onto it, support it and perpetuate it. Chip's *Ritter Method*, is a great inspiration and should be supported. *The Ritter Method* can be ordered/downloaded through Chip Ritter's website at [www.chipritter.com](http://www.chipritter.com). Book Retail Price \$9.95



## The Art and Heart of Drum Circles

By Christine Stevens

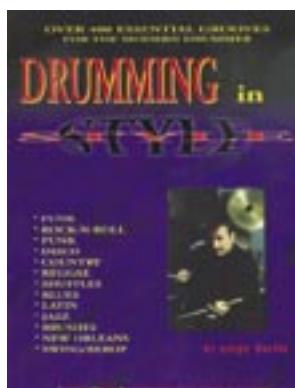
Have you ever felt that you'd like to give something back to the drumming community? How about organizing a drum circle. There is something magical about drumming and feeling the pulse of a group of drummers living through the rhythm. Christine Stevens has masterfully written a guide to anyone interested in organizing and operating a drum circle. *The Art and Heart of Drum Circles*, published by Hal Leonard, explores important topics such as instrumentation, arranging, cues, experiential learning and just plain having fun! This book, with CD, is a great aid for even a skilled drum circle leader. To learn more visit: [www.udrumcircles.com](http://www.udrumcircles.com) Book and CD Retail price: \$14.95



## Sacred Beat “From the Heart of the Drum Circle”

By Patricia Telesco & Don Two Eagles Waterhawk

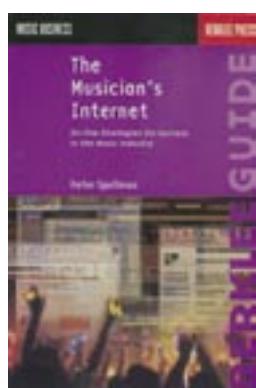
This new book by Red Wheel/Weiser, explores many facets of drum circles and drumming communities. Topics include: Etiquette, Meditation, Drum Selection, Dancing and the medical benefits of drumming. *Sacred Beat* is sure to be informative reading for anyone interested in drum circles, the history and tradition that goes along with community drumming. To learn more visit: [www.redwheelweiser.com](http://www.redwheelweiser.com) or call (800) 423-7087 Book Retail price: \$17.95



## Drumming in Style

By Gregg Martin

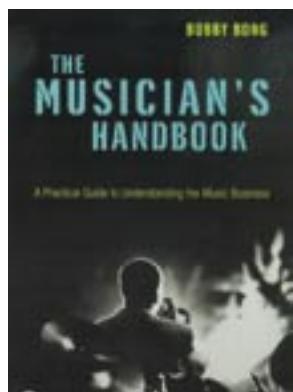
*Drumming in Style* is the ultimate resource for any musician interested in expanding their musical and stylistic repertoire. Featuring over 400 grooves, Gregg takes an in-depth adventure into the styles of: Funk, Rock, Punk, Disco, Country, Reggae, Shuffles, Blues, Latin, Jazz, Brushes, New Orleans, Swing and Be Bop. Each style gives nearly 40 examples of the grooves that you may encounter in playing situations. To learn more, visit [www.cdipublications.com](http://www.cdipublications.com) Book Retail Price: \$19.95



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By *Bobby Borg*

Many of us are familiar with the popular music business book *All You Need to Know about the Music Business* by Donald Passman. Here is a book that is destined to become just as popular. Bobby illustrates many detailed aspects of the music industry in his new book. Bobby is also a contributing writer to DrumPRO Magazine. One of the things that set this book apart from other music business books is the author's point of view- the working musician! This book is the A-Z resource of the music industry. It belongs in the hands of every serious musician. I don't want to sound like a salesman, but this is an awesome book, which I stand behind fully as a definitive resource for the music industry. To learn more visit [www.watsonguptill.com](http://www.watsonguptill.com). Book Retail price: \$19.95

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# AN INTRODUCTION TO TABLA, NORTH INDIAN RHYTHM AND IT'S APPLICATIONS,

By Jonathan Dimond

*bayan/duggi = left (bass) drum  
dayan/tabla = right (treble) drum.*

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE INSTRUMENT

Tabla is a pair of hand drums and is most prevalent in North Indian music, specifically in the classical (Hindusthani), light-classical, folk, and popular styles.

The drums certainly have a long and rich tradition, as information on early Indian percussion instruments has been documented in the Vedic scriptures of the Aryan culture from around 100 B.C. The tabla developed as a hybrid of two drums, namely the mridangam and pakhawaj, around the 6th-7th centuries. These are laterally-played, one-piece drums that continue to be played today in the south and north of India (respectively).

The development of the styles of playing music in India follows a geographic and family lineage known as the gharanas or schools of playing, which are traceable from the 18th century.

## THE COMPONENTS OF THE TABLA

The drums are almost always setup the same way, even if the performer is left-handed. The drums sit on the floor on cushions or gudhi, and the musician sits cross-legged behind them. The right drum is angled by a noticeable amount in order to facilitate the strokes. This also has an effect of projecting the treble sound forward toward the listener. The bayan is approximately level, with a slight incline forwards.

The tabla (right drum) is tuned to the drone or drone instrument (tampura). This is usually to the tonic ("sa" in Indian solfege) or sometimes the perfect 5th ("pa").

The bayan (left drum) has been also likened to an African "talking drum," in that pitch modulations are part of its playing technique. They're not normally

associated with anything key-wise in the surrounding music. However, one of Ustad Zakir Hussain's tricks is to double the melody of the melodic instrument on the bayan, much to the audience's delight!

The instrument is made out of goatskin heads, leather strapping and wooden tension blocks (gate). The shells are copper/metallic (in the case of the bayan), or wooden (in the case of the dayan).

One of the most notable structural features of the bayan is the black spot (or gab), which forms the innermost concentric circle on both drums. The gab is comprised of a paste of iron filings and other "secret ingredients" whose recipe seems to be a closely-guarded secret! While in India I worked a little in a tabla shop that makes my guru-ji's drums and discovered that only the owner of the shop knows the recipe of the gab. He makes the formula for the paste, which

is then applied by the workers then “fine-tuned” by the master himself. Anyway, the purpose of the gab seems to be not only a way to create a position of superiority for those who know its recipe, but also, it adds mass to the vibrating skin! This increases resonance and sustain. Notice that the gab is positioned off-center on the bayan and is not directly struck on this drum.

## THE SOUND OF THE TABLA

What largely effects listeners in such a profound way is the melodic sound of this percussion instrument. Indeed the tabla may be defined as a melodic percussion instrument whose melodies are formed by an intricate vocabulary of wet strokes, dry strokes, combinations of both and true pitches. There are even melodies within the pitches sounded by the tabla, in that various harmonics of a fundamental pitch are accentuated by the player. The range of harmonic sounds the tabla is capable of are simply enormous. It must be, if masters such as Ustad Zakir Hussain claim they are still discovering sounds!

Coupled with the speed and rhythmic finesse of a master player, tabla performances can be some of the most exciting musical performances you'll witness!

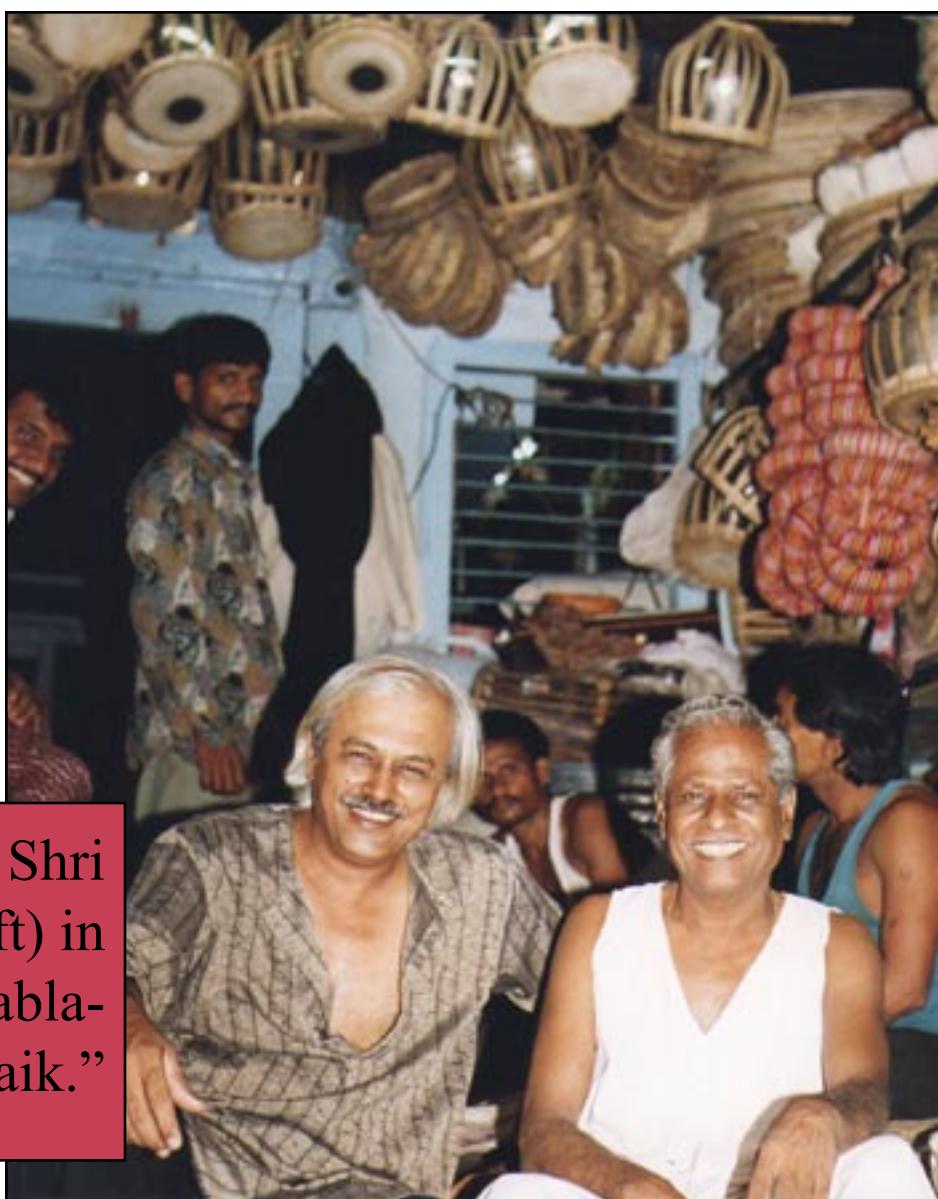
Integral to the acoustic sound of the tabla is the language by which strokes are arranged. So integral is this language, that I believe it to be very difficult (and almost futile) to perform “free improvisation” on the tabla that is devoid of association with this language.

## TRADITIONAL APPLICATIONS OF THE TABLA

In North Indian classical (Hindusthani) music, the tabla reigns as the principal percussion instrument for accompanying voice, harmonium, stringed instruments (Sarod, Sitar, Sarangi, Violin, Santoor), and wind instruments (Shennai). tabla is also used to accompany Kathak dance, a wonderfully rhythmic art form where the dancers choreograph tabla compositions and sometimes recite them while dancing. My tabla teacher Sri Bharat Jangam co-runs a school in India, which is dedicated to Kathak. (<http://members.tripod.com/~KALACHAYA/>)

Tabla can also be found in the Karnatic music of the south. Though the mridangam is of primary importance.

There is also a rich tradition of tabla as a solo instrument. Traditionally, tabla recitals are accompanied by the sarangi, which plays a repeating melody called a lehra that acts as a kind of melodic metronome, outlining the rhythmic cycle upon which the tabla soloist performs compositions and improvisations. The tabla player will often use recitation in this situation also. I have had the fortune of also witnessing multiple player tabla solos by artists of the caliber of Ustad Alla Rakha, Zakir Hussain and his brother Fazal Qureshi. With differently tuned daya



“My tabla teacher Shri Bharat Jangam (left) in India, with his tabla-maker Shri Naik.”

The collage consists of three separate Pro-Mark drumstick advertisements stacked vertically. The top ad features a black man playing tabla, with text: "Millions of people choose the world's finest sticks. HERE'S THREE. TEDDY CAMPBELL INDEPENDENT American Hickory, SD9, Wood-tip". The middle ad features a man in a tuxedo holding a drumstick, with text: "ALAN EVANS SOULIVE Japanese White Oak, PW747, Wood-tip". The bottom ad features a man in a top hat and mask, with text: "FISH INDEPENDENT American Hickory, TX747, Wood-tip". At the bottom of the collage is the Pro-Mark logo: "PRO-MARK" with a stylized "P" icon, and the tagline "The World's Finest Sticks" followed by the website "promarkdrumsticks.com". A small note at the bottom left reads: "© 2008 Pro-Mark Corporation. We use only non-endangered wood."

in call-and-response phrases and rhythmic unison, this is a sight for the eyes and a feast for the ears!

## CONTEMPORARY APPLICATIONS OF THE TABLA

The rich tradition that the instrument belongs to does not mean the drums are in any way obliged to remain only within that tradition. Sometimes the sound is used in popular culture and media to evoke a feeling of spirituality, transcendentalism and other-worldliness. Even a small snippet of its sound may trigger such a response, just like the sound of the sitar's chikari strings or of a tampura drone. As one of my interview subjects Benjy Wertheimer pointed out, the thoughtless addition of a few tabla bols without proper consideration of the compositional context is likely to degrade the power and beauty of the instrument.

In more "serious" contemporary musical applications, we find the tabla mounted on stands or on a table, so that other hand percussion and/or a drum kit can be performed around it. The bayan can be an excellent bass drum accompaniment to a ride cymbal pattern, or the dayan can be played while a shaker is played in the left hand. The potential instrumental combinations are endless.

We also see arrays of tabla assembled in the style of tabla tarang, with multiple daya tuned to different pitches and played in a modulating harmonic setting.

In the recording studio, phasers, flangers, digital delay and other effects can be added to further morph the sound to another place. Such effects are particularly effective on the daya, with its strong pitch content. Indeed, simply close micing the drums with good condenser microphones magnifies the nuances which the instrument produces, from the soft contact of the finger-pads resting on the skin, to the enormously full, bassy tones of the wet baya strokes.

Extended techniques have been applied to these drums as well, some of which may

make purists cringe! But in the hands of master drummers such as Zakir Hussain, one can only be awed by the variety of timbres produced. I have also seen Benjy Wertheimer use his tuning hammer on the gab of the dayan, in order to modulate its pitch. The effect is not dissimilar to the portamento of the ghostly-sounding Ondes Marteno (the old electronic keyboard instrument featured in the Beach Boys' "Good Vibrations").



**Benjy Wertheimer**

Other extended techniques include playing one drum with both hands (a rarity in normal tabla playing), to produce rolls, and something I discovered myself was a way of modulating the daya's pitch down. Try cupping both hands over the resonating head immediately after a wet stroke is made.

## TABLA BOLS AND THE LANGUAGE OF INDIAN RHYTHM

The power and beauty of tabla is that its language penetrates well beyond the limits of actual drum performance. The language of onomatopoeic words called "bols," which represent strokes, are

readily transferable to the rhythms played by other instruments, both percussion and non-percussion. Asked what he was thinking of when playing a certain jazz-fusion groove on drum kit at a clinic in Sydney, Trilok Gurtu responded “Te-Te-Kat-Dha-NaTe-Te-Kat-Dha-Na!” “But how do you do that so fast?,” the audience member asked. The answer lays within the bols themselves and the syntax which arranges them.

Firstly, these words do indeed sound like the drum strokes they represent. “tat!” is obviously an accentuated dry stroke with a full, heavy-handed sound and a quick decay. Secondly, these syllables are more readily looped or repeated than, say, “one – e – and –a, Two-e-and-a...” etc. Once you get over the fact that you are speaking syllables that are Sanskrit and not English, you will find them rolling off your tongue like “ta-ka-di-mi ta-ka-di-mi!” Thirdly, groups of these bols are logically arranged into groups that form multi-syllabic words and sentences, which are thought of as a single entity. Take for example a word that has a value of 9: “tete kata gadi gina dha!”

So melodic, intuitive and immediate is this rhythmic language, that I have found great benefit in thinking this way while playing the bass guitar. Analyzing jazz phrases on recordings or manuscript and composing, I have also witnessed great progress in students who come to me purely for recitation lessons. The students go on to play guitar, saxophone and the like.

It is no surprise that one finds tabla bols recited in classical Indian performance, not only by tabla soloists, but also by singers. Singers will actually set them to pitch, in a compositional form called tirana.

It is also worth noting that basic tabla-playing is traditionally studied by students of all instruments, with the intention of instilling a hands-on experience and knowledge of rhythm, time cycles and the whole rhythmic language that propels the music through time.

Examples of tabla bols include: dha, dhin, ta, na, ke, ka, ki, ge, ga, gi, kat,

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“...basic tabla-playing is traditionally studied by students of all instruments, with the intention of instilling a hands-on experience and knowledge of rhythm, time cycles and the whole rhythmic language that propels the music through time.”

tete, tirakita, tirakitaka, trekre, dhira, tetekatagadigina, dhet, ra, kra...

[udu.html/udugallery.html](http://udu.html/udugallery.html)

## **INSTRUMENTS INSPIRED BY OR RELATED TO THE TABLA**

The most significant instrument is the hadgini drum, invented by Boston percussionist Jamey Haddad and the artist Frank Giorgini. This is a one-piece clay construction that resembles the udu drum and the ghattam (clay pot drum). A tabla technique can applied fairly readily to the hadgini drum with success. Good internal microphones and a quality PA system allow this instrument able to be added to a contemporary ensemble in performance or recording. Think of it as a clay tabla! This instrument is distributed by LP. Haddad's and Giorgini's inventiveness in other percussion instruments can be seen by visiting <http://www.jameyhaddad.com/prods1.html> and <http://www.udu.com/>

Trilok Gurtu is one master percussionist who continues to realize the complementary nature of these instruments within a drum set.

## **THE NATURE OF TIME**

Time runs in a circle, with its end becoming its beginning. Pretty soon, the journey becomes more important than the destination. This non-linear interpretation of time can be viewed as an overriding philosophy, if you wish, or kept within the microcosm of tal - or musical time cycles.

Tal is the word for time in Indian music and can be likened to meter, time-signature, or the length of a rhythmic cycle. Having established the numerical length, the cycles repeat, without change in overall length, for quite some duration. The general aesthetic in classical performances is that the music commences slowly, and picks up pace gradually in order to build



up tension and excitement. In so doing, one “piece” may traverse through tempi ranging from 25 beats per minute up to 400 or so, the whole time staying in, say, 16 beats per cycle!

Indian rhythm is based upon additive rhythm. This is in contrast to the divisive rhythmic scheme which we westerners were taught in elementary music class, where the rhythm tree was presented as an even dividing-up of a whole note into halves, quarters, eights, 16ths etc. Indeed, additive rhythm turns the tree on its head, with the starting point being the smallest unit of time (called the “subdivision” in the divisive rhythmic scheme), and whereby longer durations are created by adding these small “atoms” together. This scheme is able to create all the rhythms and meters we know well in divisive rhythm, but then can also give us the ability to group subdivisions that are independent of how they may cross the bar line, syncopate, or delineate odd meters.

The next interesting facet of Indian tal is the fact that it, like India’s social structure, is arranged in a hierarchy. That is to say, not every beat is created equal, but they all have their special role to play that gives the total a unique form. Firstly, the most important beat is beat 1, or sam. Beyond that, if a western drummer was asked to groove in 7, for instance, you might not really know what to expect, if you were a bassist trying to also play a line with them. It would take a few cycles perhaps before the period, sub-grouping and unit of subdivision became apparent. Furthermore, if you asked 10 drummers to groove in 7, you would likely hear

very different things from each, but perhaps each one by themselves would have limited ideas for how to make an interesting form out of this cycle. The key with the rhythmic system in Indian music, like the modal (melodic) system for that matter, is that rules are embedded within every cycle that establishes the aforementioned hierarchy. These rules influence the stylistic setting of the meter, the tempo range that it is performed at and more importantly, what kind of drum strokes are to appear where. Just like two ragas can share the same “scale” yet sound completely different, two tals

in 12 can also groove differently. The most important thing, for a beginning listener to realize in order to orientate themselves within a time cycle, is that two fields of time exist in any tal - bharee and khali. These are portions of the cycle where the bayan’s wet (ringing) strokes are either present or not. Khali literally means “empty,” and indeed the portion of the cycle where there is a lacking of bass certainly sounds empty. Tal is a language of time that involves patterns of stresses and releases.

## *The nature of time in Indian music is unique and distinguishable from its western counterpart because tal:*

- is based upon additive rhythm
- is set to a wide variety of time cycle lengths
- includes rules which dictate the range of tempi which the cycle operates
- features an internal structure which comprises bharee and khali sections
- has an built in sub-grouping
- distinguishes different grooves for the same overall cycle length

All of these concepts come to give tal a certain “gait”, “lilt”, “flow”, or “groove”.

The name for the preset series of bols which outline a rhythmic cycle and its integrated rules is theka. So playing the theka is playing the basic groove pattern.

## *Some other terms that you should know:*

|             |   |          |
|-------------|---|----------|
| Beat        | = | matra    |
| Bar         | = | vibhag   |
| Cycle       | = | avartana |
| Speed/Tempo | = | laya     |

Examples of laya include: vilambit (slow); madhya (medium); drut (fast). Ati is a prefix, which means “very”.

## *Some examples of tal*

### **6 dadra**

A folk tal, also used in light classical music. The last piece on a classical program might be set to dadra.

### **7 rupak**

Classical tal, unusual in that sam starts the Khali section. Grouped 3+4. Set to Madhya laya.

### **8 keherawa**

2 main types, one which feels like 4/4, and can also have a shuffle or swing feel. A folk tal, also used in light classical music, dhuns, bhajans, and gazals.

### **9 matta**

Grouped 4+2+3.

Classical tal, sometimes a vehicle for tabla solo performances. Also featured in John McLaughlin's "The Wish" with Shakti.

### **10 jhaptal**

Classical tal, sometimes a vehicle for tabla solo performances. Set to madhya laya. Grouped 2+3+2+3.

### **11 chautal ki savari**

Classical tal. Set to madhya laya. Grouped 4+4+3.

### **11 ashtamongal**

Classical tal. Set to madhya laya. Grouped 4+4+3.

### **12 ektal**

Classical tal. Set to all laya. A favorite for vocalists, especially vilambit laya compositions to start concerts. Grouped 4+4+2+2.

### **12 chautal**

Classical tal. Considered ektal's parent (and often played on pakhowaj). Set to madhya laya. Grouped 4+4+2+2.

### **13 jaital**

Classical tal. Set to madhya laya. Grouped 4+2+4+3.

### **14 dhamar**

Classical tal, sometimes a vehicle for tabla solo performances. Set to madhya laya. Often played on pakhowaj. Grouped 3+4+3+4.

### **14 deep chandi**

Classical tal. Set to all laya. Grouped 3+4+3+4.

### **14 ada chautal**

Set to madhya laya. Grouped 4+4+3+3.

### **15 pancham savari**

Classical tal, sometimes a vehicle for tabla solo performances. Set to madhya laya. Grouped 4+4+4+3.

### **16 tintal**

Most popular classical tal, sometimes a vehicle for tabla solo performances. Set to all laya. Grouped 4+4+4+4.

## **Tali Counting:**

The passing beats are tracked by the hands and fingers in a way that delineates the sub-groupings (vibhags), and pronounces the down beat (sam). Slightly different methods of tali counting seem to dominate in the north and south of India.

In the north, the fingers of the right hand are divided up into four points each, one for the finger base, two for the joints and one for the tip. The tip of the thumb is used as a pointer which progresses up from the base of the pinky to the tip, then back to the base of the ring finger and so on,



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covering up to 16 points in total, each representing a beat. Try this method with tintal, and you will see that the fingers happen to correspond neatly with the vibhags, and that the third finger is the “khali finger”. With repetition, while reciting compositions of various kinds over various tals, the points on the right hand become a matrix of meaningful numbers.

The South Indian method involves clapping the right hand on the outstretched palm of the left. The first beat of the tal’s sub-groupings is clapped and the remaining beats are tapped lightly with the remaining fingers of the right hand, in order from the pinky. In khali sections, a wave replaces the clap. It is recommended to accent the clap for sam, to distinguish it from the claps of other groupings. (For alternative gestures see Leake’s kriya exercise in his interview.)

Tali counting can become quite sophisticated in some styles and situations. You will notice that musicians in live performances of the karnatic style count tal quite prominently and in hindusthani performances you will notice audience members counting along with the performers.

## CHANGING THE WAY TIME FLOWS

Despite the fact that tal has its own built in groove and flow, as established by theka, it is the foundation upon which many other rhythmic strata are laid. These strata vary in the amount they conform and conflict with this foundation’s groupings, sense of flow, etc.

Superimpositions of sequences of groupings which somewhat oppose the beat structure can create interesting “push-pull” effects.

If the superimposition involves regular, periodic regroupings of matra or their subdivision, polyrhythm is created. Otherwise, some degree of syncopation is created.

Addha literally means “half”, and initially can be seen to mean that half as many prominent attacks occur than in the cycle’s regular theka. In normal application, however, addha tends to mean regrouping of the matras and their subdivisions. The tal called sitar khani is a good example of changing the way tintal flows:

|     |      |      |     |
|-----|------|------|-----|
| DHA | DHIN | DHIN | DHA |
| DHA | DHIN | DHIN | DHA |
| DHA | TIN  | TIN  | TA  |
| TA  | DHIN | DHIN | DHA |

Becomes:

|          |      |          |     |
|----------|------|----------|-----|
| DHA-(GA) | DHI- | (GA)     | DHA |
| DHA-(GA) | DHI- | (GA)     | DHA |
| DHA-(KA) | TI-  | (KA)     | TA  |
| TA-      | (GA) | DHI-(GA) | DHA |

This is essentially a 3+3+2 grouping in eighth notes and gives the new tal a “swing” feel. Note that the unstressed strokes are in parentheses and rests are indicated with a dash.

A good command of numbers assists in the experimentation with regrouping. The Hindi words for the first ten numbers are often used in kathak and



by Indian musicians and being mono-syllabic, are easier to pronounce than, say, “seven”.

## Hindi Numbers:

- 1 ek
- 2 do
- 3 tin (pronounced “teen”)
- 4 cha (pronounced “chaar”)
- 5 panch (nasal sound)
- 6 che (pronounced “chey”)
- 7 sa (pronounced “saat”)
- 8 aath
- 9 nau (pronounced “noh”)
- 10 dus

Try the following grouping exercises within the named talas to change the way the flow of time feels:

### tintal (16 beats):

- 1-2-123
- 1-2-123
- 1234
- 1234
- 12345
- 12345
- (Eighth note subdivision, grouped 7+7+4+4+5+5)

### tintal (16 beats):

- 1-1- (4)
- 12 12 (4)
- 123 123
- 1234 1234
- 12345 12345
- (Eighth note subdivision, grouped 4+4+3+3+4+4+5+5)

### tintal (16 beats):

Improvise with mixtures of the following combinations, in eighth note subdivision:

- 3+3
- 5+5
- 5+5
- 3+3
- 3+5
- 3+5
- 5+3
- 5+3
- Etc.

An interesting (and authentic) effect can be achieved by halving the subdivision of a particular grouping and playing it twice as many times, to fill the same value of time.

For example:

3+3

5+5

Can become:

**3+3+3**

**5+5+5**

Where the **bold** numbers are in sixteenth notes and the others are in eighth notes.

### tintal (16 beats):

I witnessed the following pattern by kathak dancers in India, and later, by coincidence, heard Zakir Hussain set it to tabla in a solo concert. (I think it is ascribed to the great artist Pandit Birju Maharaj.)

1234 5-6-7--

1234 5-- 6-- 7--

1234 5----- 6----- 7---

Recite three times and end on the last “7”.

(Sixteenth-note subdivision, grouped 11+13+20)

The grand total for the three repetitions of this composition is  $(11+13+20)+(11+13+20)+(11+13+16)=128$  subdivisions. This works because there are 64 sixteenth notes in one cycle of tintal and 128 in two.

Intermediate and advanced tabla players may enjoy the following setting, which I transcribed from Zakir Hussain’s performance. Note that 32nd note subdivisions are rendered for the fast DhiraDhiraKitaTaka bols. Also that the compositional feature is the contrasting strokes for each line of “5 6 7”, which range from the high, percussive chop stroke “TAK”, the medium-harmonic sound of the sur stroke “TUN” and the bassy “bell” sound of “DIN” (add “GE” to this stroke).

DHIRA DHIRA KITA TAKA TAK- TAK- TAK--

DHIRA DHIRA KITA TAKA TUN-- TUN-- TUN--

DHIRA DHIRA KITA TAKA DIN----- DIN----- DIN----

Play three times and end on the last “din”.

### rupak tal (7 beats):

[BACK TO CONTENTS](#)



123-  
1234-  
12345-  
123456  
(tin...)

### The classes of tal (jati)

It is a common principal to change the number of prevailing subdivisions within a constant tempo in order to change the way time is perceived to flow. In North India, the “-jati” suffix is affixed to words that relate to divisions of 3, 4, 5, etc. It is interesting to note the symbolic nature of some of these subdivisions:

- 3** tisra-jati (rishis / saints)
- 4** chatusra-jati (devas / divine men)
- 5** khanda-jati (rakshasas / mythical demons)
- 7** misra-jati (common people)
- 9** sankiran-jati (commercial class)

Musically speaking, the jati can be used universally by all musicians, not just tabla players, as a way of identifying, feeling and verbalizing subdivisions and groupings. Note that these words are similar to bols but don’t necessarily strictly translate onto the tabla. There is no “mi” stroke, for instance, but it is both easy to say and also easily translated.

Generic groupings for the different jati:

- 3** ta ki ta
- 4** ta ka di mi
- 5** ta ka ta ki ta (2+3)  
taki ta ka (3+2)
- 7** ta ki ta ta ka di mi (3+4)  
ta ka di mi ta ki ta (4+3)
- 9** ta ka ta ki ta ta ka di mi (2+3+4)  
ta ka di mi ta ka ta ki ta (4+2+3)

In South Indian drumming, these kind of

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phrases and their application are called solkattu, which literally means “syllable groups”. solkattu is an integral part of South Indian rhythmic pedagogy and can be a rewarding study for any musician. Many solkattu can be visualized as graphical shapes that expand, contract, or utilize both motions. These give rise to a feeling that the time is slowing down, speeding up, or alternating between both sensations.

The rupak tal example (on page 15) is solkattu-like in nature. Here's another in tintal (16 beats), using an eighth note subdivision with gaps of one after each grouping:

1-  
12-  
123-  
1234-  
12345-  
1234-  
123-  
12-

This pattern yields a diamond shape, or a mridangam shape. It is actually a type of South Indian yati (or shaped solkattu), which is called a mridangam- yati.

Try other incrementally expanding/contracting groupings to fill other rhythmic cycles in various subdivisions. How could the above pattern be used in 4/4 in groupings of triplet eighth notes, for example?

## Tihai

The most important rhythmic cadence in Indian music, both for melodic instruments and percussionists, is the tihai. Crudely speaking, a tihai is a phrase repeated exactly three times to span from

one point to another. Most often, the destination is a place of prime importance, such as sam (beat 1). The application of tihai becomes a little more challenging when you realize that the last attack of the phrase in question must land neatly on your destination. For instance, here is a tihai, which has three identical “partials” (as they're called), which are delineated by a separating gap and arrive on sam:

12345-  
12345-  
1234  
5...

In sixteenth notes, this tihai fills one bar of 4/4, landing the last “5” on the downbeat.

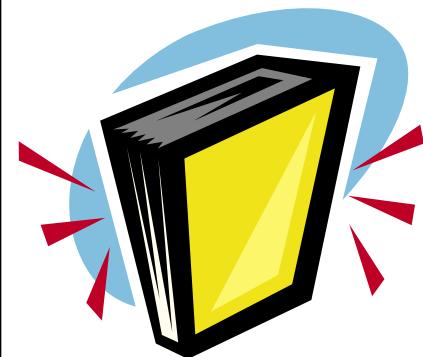
Tihais can span 60 or more matras (beats) and therefore a multiple of avartanas (cycles), making for a huge wave of tension build-up and eventual release. There can also be tihai within tihai, making a cadence called a chakradar tihai. Listen for these at the endings of pieces. Tihai are also integrated into other compositional forms from the tabla repertoire, including tukra, kaida, and paran. A full experience requires listening and a tutor. An awareness of this intrinsic factor of 3 in Indian music will make your listening experience a whole lot more informed!

## CONCLUSION

The experience of tabla can be a rewarding one for any concert goer or musician of any level. Try to keep a balance between your practice, listening, analysis, lessons, etc, and remember that every hurdle you overcome will offer you a reward, which will indelibly deepen your overall experience. Thank you for listening.



## FURTHER READING AND LISTENING



### BOOKS:

- Ali Akbar Khan, George Ruckert: The Classical Music of India - The First Year's Study. 367 pages, hard cover, 19 b/w plates. East Bay Books, 1991. Well-structured, easy-to-read text covering the beginner's needs and issues. 180 pages of useful exercises and inspiring vocal and instrumental compositions in a variety of ragas.
- Jerry Leake: Drum Set Adaptations of North Indian tabla. 73 pages, 116 transcriptions. Rhombus Publishing. Introduces the general approach of tabla-playing to drum set players so to foster improved melodic drum-playing.
- Jerry Leake: Volume II: Indian Influence – tabla Perspectives (3rd edition). 241 pages, 200 photographs. Highly recommended companion to the beginner tabla-player. A rich source of compositions for the advancing tabla-player.
- David Courtney: Fundamentals of tabla. 294 pages.
- Alla Rakha, Jeffrey M. Feldman: Learning tabla with Alla Rakha. 102 page Book and Videotape.
- Robert S. Gottlieb: 42 Lessons for tabla. 24 pages plus recording of Ustad Keratullah Khan. Folkway Records, 1973.
- Trichy Sankaran: South Indian Drumming. Lalith Publishers, 1994. 170 pages including exercises.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jonathan's extensive musical studies include the fields of classical music and jazz improvisation. He holds a bachelor's degree from the Queensland Conservatorium of Music (Brisbane, Australia), and a graduate degree from New England Conservatory (Boston, Massachusetts). While at N.E.C., Jonathan studied tabla under Jerry Leake, and Hindusthani music on trombone under a number of teachers including, Abby Rabinovitz, Warren Senders and Harriette Hurie. Jonathan has also undergone vigorous training in tabla in India under Shri Bharat Jangam (Pune). An experienced university lecturer in music and a private instructor, Jonathan's multi-instrumental and diverse background allows him to teach in a holistic and flexible manner. Jonathan teaches tabla classes for beginners at Bang a Drum store in Los Angeles.

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Jonathan Dimond performs on electric bass in a number of outfits, including his Indo-Jazz Fusion band "Loops".

Jonathan has used the tabla in performances around Australia, Japan and the U.S.A., as a soloist and accompanying Classical Indian voice, sarod, sitar, santoor and with fusion jazz bands.

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Company web site

<http://www.sensoundmusic.com/>

Personal web site:

<http://www.jonathandimond.com/>

CDs of Jonathan's compositions for "Loops" can be sampled and bought from:

<http://www.cdbaby.com/loops2>

<http://www.cdbaby.com/loops1>

These CDs feature many of the concepts discussed in this publication. Listen for Indian rhythmic cadences (such as tihai and chakradar), compositions (such as kaida and gat) and other tabla patterns set to melody in the "Loops" pieces:

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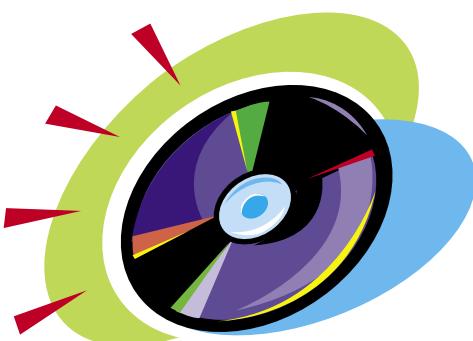
Rhythm Changes

Koraippu

## CDs:

- Shakti: "A Hand Full of Beauty". Sony, 1977. The original Indo-jazz-fusion band with Ustad Zakir Hussain on tabla.
- Alla Rakha, Zakir Hussain, Ramesh Misra: "tabla Duet (tintal)". Moment Records, 1991. The late legendary Ustad Alla Rakha and son display their soloistic genius with traditional sarangi lehra accompaniment.
- Alla Rakha, Zakir Hussain, Sultan Khan, Shaukat Hussain: "tabla Tradition". Gramophone of India, 1991
- G.S. Sachdev, Zakir Hussain: "Flights of Improvisation". Lyrichord Discs, 1992. Bansuri (bamboo flute) and tabla.
- Hariprasad Chaurasia, Anindo Chatterjee, Rupak Kulkarni: "Evening Ragas vol.III". Music Today, 1992. Bansuri (bamboo flute) and tabla. Other artists also appear on this compilation.
- Jan Garbarek, Fateh Ali Khan, Shaukat Hussain, Nazim Ali Khan, Deepika Thathaal, Manu Katche: "Ragas and Sagas". ECM, 1994. Garbarek's lyrical saxophone voice and

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compositional aesthetic are well-suited to Indian music and its fusion with jazz.

- Pandit Jasraj, Appa Jalgaonkar, Kedar Pandit: " Evening Ragas vol.I". Music Today, 1992. tabla in vocal accompaniment mode – male voice.
- Rajan & Sajan Mishra, Sohanlal Mishra, Mehmood Dhaulpuri: " Ahead of Time ". OMI, 1992. tabla in vocal accompaniment mode – two male voices in jugalbandi (duet).
- Shahid Parvez, Zakir Hussain: " Shahid Parvez At His Best ". Chhanda Dhara, 1989. tabla and sitar.
- Ustad Ali Akbar Khan, Pandit Mahaparush Misra, Pandit Shankar Gosh: " Signature Series vol.III ". AMMP, 1994. One of the living legends of the sarode (fretless lute) with virtuosic tabla-playing and intricate rhythmic interplay.
- Vishwa Mohan Bhatt, Ustad Sabir Khan: " Guitar a la Hindusthan ". OMI, 1992. Guitar and tabla. Demonstrates the ultimate in lyrical improvisation on the guitar.
- Zakir Hussain : "The Rhythm Experience". Moment, 1991. Zakir Hussain explores multiple-table and percussion jams.
- Kayhan Kalhor, Shujaat Husain Khan, Swapan Chaudhuri: Ghazal: As Night Falls on the Silk Road. Shanachie, 1998. Persian-Indian collaboration featuring one of the greatest tabla-players alive, Swapan Chaudhuri.
- Alla Rakha, Zakir Hussain, Chatur Lal, Pulghat Raghu, A.K.Palinivel, P.K.Kalimurthi: "Ravi Shankar - The Master Drummers of India". Legacy. Compilation of Indian drumming overseen by the famous Ravi Shankar.
- Shakti (J. McLaughlin, U.Shrinavas, Z.Hussain,V.Selvaganesh): "Remember Shakti: The Believer". Polygram, 2000.
- Jerry Leake: "Bu'Ahbl - Percussion Vignettes by Jerry Leake". Rhombus Publishing, 2000. Demonstrates Leake's multi-talent on tabla and other percussion instruments.
- Jonathan Dimond, Jamie Clark, Ken Edie, John Rodgers: "Loops – Recursion". JDR, 1999. Indian-Jazz fusion and contemporary jazz from Australia.
- Jonathan Dimond, Jamie Clark, John Parker: "Loops – Ek!". JDR, 2001. Double CD of original Indian-Jazz fusion and contemporary jazz.
- Bill Laswell, Zakir Hussain, Ustad Sultan Khan, Talvin Singh, Trilok Gurtu, Karsh Kale: "Tala Matrix: tabla Beat Science". Palm Pictures, 2000. tabla in a contemporary context, mixing electronica, drum 'n' bass, and dance-related styles.
- Shivkumar Sharma, Shafaat Ahmed Khan: "Santoor Wadan Vol.2". Venus. Demonstrates the rhythmic virtuosity of the santoor (hammered dulcimer) and its sublime relationship with tabla.
- Shivkumar Sharma, Zakir Hussain: "Rag Madhuvanti/Misra Tilang". Nimbus, 1992.
- Natraj - Phil Scarff, Jerry Leake: "Meet Me Anywhere". Dorian Discovery, 1994. One of America's most musical world-jazz fusion ensembles.
- Natraj - Phil Scarff, Jerry Leake: " Deccan Dance ". Galloping Goat, 1998.
- Natraj - Phil Scarff, Jerry Leake: " The Goat Also Gallops ". Accurate, 1990.
- Zakir Hussain: "Making Music". ECM, 2000.



## WEB-SITES:

- SenSound <http://www.Sensound.com/>
- Ty Burhoe <http://www.TyBurhoe.com/>
- Benjy Wertheimer <http://www.benjymusic.com/>
- Rhombus Publishing (Jerry Leake)  
<http://www.rhombuspublishing.com/>
- tabla.Com <http://www.tabla.com/>
- Pacific tabla  
<http://www.pacifictbla.com/>
- RagMala <http://www.ragamala.org/>
- Sitars Etc <http://www.sitarsetc.com/>
- Ali Akbar Khan College  
<http://www.aacm.org/>
- Chandrakantha.Com  
<http://www.chandrakantha.com/>
- Shawn Mativetsky  
<http://www.percussionist.net/>
- Jamey Haddad  
<http://www.jameyhaddad.com/>
- Frank Giorgini <http://www.udu.com>
- Moment Records (Zakir Hussain)  
<http://www.momentrecords.com/>
- RagaNet  
<http://www.raganet.com/RagaNet/>
- Swapan Chaudhuri  
<http://www.transtabla.com/>
- Club D'Elf  
<http://www.clubdelf.com/>
- Kala Chhaya  
<http://members.tripod.com/~KALACHAYA/>
- New England Conservatory  
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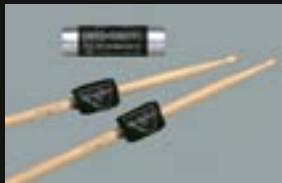
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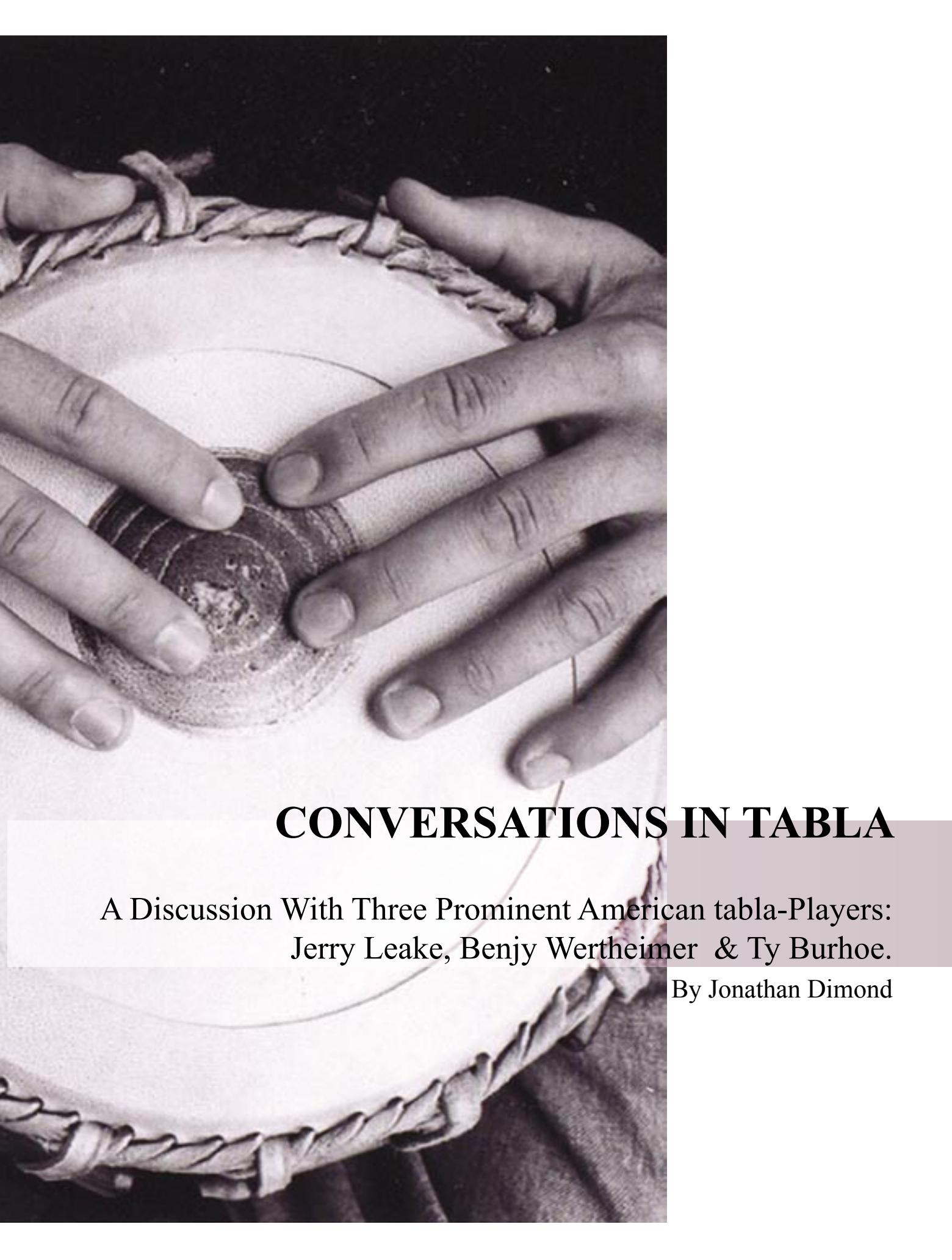
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# **CONVERSATIONS IN TABLA**

A Discussion With Three Prominent American tabla-Players:  
Jerry Leake, Benjy Wertheimer & Ty Burhoe.

By Jonathan Dimond

**DrumPRO:** *Is tabla your first instrument? How did you become attracted to tabla and what impact did taking up the instrument have on your preexisting musical life?*

**TY:** No, tabla came into my life after I was an adult. I grew up listening to my father singing with the Chicago symphony and with chamber orchestras all over the Chicago area. At home he constantly played all styles of music ranging from the old 1920's - 30's Classical opera and all the great composers to Eric Clapton, Moody Blues, Cat Stevens and CSP. There was always music in the house. Also, between my two brothers and myself, we all sang and played guitar and some harmonica. My other instruments from the time I was 6 years old were violin for a couple of years and then trombone from age 8 'till age 14. The only instrument that I have maintained from those years is a finger style acoustic guitar. From the age of 18 to 27, I didn't practice music at all. I worked as a wild life biologist in Montana for a couple of years (Grizzly Bears and Beavers mostly) and became a single father along with finishing a degree in Psychology. As a matter of fact, because I felt that rhythm was my weakest spot musically, at age 27, I purposely sought out the hardest possible and most exotic drum I could find to take up as a personal hobby. And truly it is as hard as it is beautiful. The thing that sold me on taking up the tabla was listening to the band Shakti, which featured Zakir Hussain.

**JERRY:** Similar story! My college roommate played a Shakti recording ("A Hand Full of Beauty" [see Discography]) and I could not believe that one person (Zakir Hussain) was producing so many sounds and rhythms on one instrument! The tabla and ghatam (clay pot: T.H. Vinayakram) solo/duet in "Isis" is a timeless journey through rhythmic invention and technical virtuosity. Like many percussionists, though, I started on drum set, playing jazz, rock, fusion through high school. When I decided to pursue a music profession and attend Berklee College, I switched to vibraphone to study jazz with Gary Burton. While a student I discovered Afro-Cuban congas (w/ Pablo Landrum) and other world-music traditions, which compelled me to participate. The magnetic pull was profound and undeniable.

**BENJY:** I was attracted to tabla in large part because I had been playing percussion on "found" instruments (especially pots and pans) throughout junior high and early high school. In my junior year of high school I saw Zakir Hussain for the first time, and I knew that (a) here was something that was several orders of magnitude beyond what I could ever do with pots and pans and (b) this was something I really wanted to learn. When I actually got out to California from Boulder, Colorado (where I grew up) my musical life went through a major transformation - I dove completely into studying North Indian classical music, both in the melodic and rhythmic forms. And I have no doubt that learning the incredible system surrounding the art of tabla has helped me in every style of music I play - it's like an extremely sophisticated road map for understanding the structure of rhythm and musical patterns.

**DrumPRO:** *Wow! - it seems that Zakir Hussain is the Jaco Pastorius of tabla! His performances are such an intense*  
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*experience that I know budding tabla players can be not only inspired but also quite daunted, really. How do feel about the situation where potential students of tabla have been intimidated by master tabla performances and advised that "you have to dedicate your whole life to tabla if you want to enjoy the drums"? Can tabla students of any age, background, or level of dedication receive enjoyment and satisfaction?*

**TY:** This is an issue that shows up around not only potential, but practicing students of tabla. There are other ways in which to perceive this deep and beautiful art form. It is true that the tabla is an amazingly difficult instrument to simply become fluid and comfortable on, especially if you look at the classical tradition. And here in the west, we have had the privilege of being exposed to the very top layer of the most successful tabla players, all of which are classical maestros. Thus, we don't get to see the vast majority of devotional and folk tabla players who have simply learned enough to be able to accompany the music that they are involved in. Usually that means learning basic grooves and a few choice strokes. Many westerners naturally get attracted to the sound of the tabla in a fusion or folk setting but then find a teacher who comes from the more intense classical tradition. Then they have to face learning all sorts of things meant for the training of a classical musician in order to learn some fairly simple techniques and rhythms. A good example of this dilemma shows up in the guitar world. There are amazing guitarists like the late great Segovia, Paco De Lucia and John McLaughlin out there who have surfed the front of the wave of their tradition and if they were our only reference into the guitar world then 90% of the guitarists out there would give up frustrated. But if you look around the US and Europe, you see that a majority of house holds have a guitar laying around in it and many of the musical hero's strum a few main popular cords and the solos on records are fairly simple and catchy phrases. It becomes accessible and thus acceptable to just enjoy the simple sounds of the instrument



# Conversations in tabla

and develop a repertoire that doesn't require hours of practice a day to attain. So it is important to have an invitation to an art form that doesn't immediately discourage us. Sometimes less is more and that is usually under emphasized in tabla. The wide open and diverse potential of any instrument is always limited by what we think we are allowed to express through it. So for the tabla in the west, it just needs to find its place and expand in both directions. As my teacher says, the tabla is a young and developing instrument, it will continue to become more refined for those who are drawn to putting the time and study in, and it will hopefully settle down into a place where playing a little and finding the instruments sweet sound is enough. So ultimately we'll find a wide array of levels and applications just as you find in other instruments. I myself was drawn to the tabla as an accompanying instrument. I loved how it wove together with the melody (raga) and had such subtlety and power. It reminded me of nature. It truly was and is the "relationship" aspect of it that is inspiring. So even though I started late in life and had a child by myself and was quite poor, it was a craving to have those musical tones in my life and around my home that kept drawing me back. I never imagined that I would make it a career and I am constantly returning to my original love of the warm rolling tones for my inspiration. And if you take my Guruji, Zakir Hussain, as the highest example of that, you see that he has such a joy and love of even the simplest strokes and rhythms of the tabla. I believe that it is through this kind of presence that the natural craving to put in more hours will arise.

**JERRY:** I have five-year-old students who can't wait to have their next lesson, to recite and play their entire repertoire, drilling the same stroke for finding the proper sound. I try and make something complex and abstract immediately accessible and fun. I also have non-percussion students who study North (Hindustani) and South (Karnatic) Indian rhythm theory, strengthening their time center of gravity to avoid "rhythmic culture shock" when playing music that is out of their element. Many apply theoretical ideas directly to their instrument in ways that I would never have imagined. They have taken the material and placed their own personal stamp of identity for exploring their creative power.

**BENJY:** I'm someone who has come to tabla first as a deeply committed student of the classical art of tabla. I think the best way to address this issue is by an analogy to the piano, since I also spent a great deal of time studying keyboards: One does not have to become a master at the level of a concert pianist to enjoy the piano, but

without taking the time to really understand the terrain, there are limitations on where you can go musically. For many people being able to play relatively simple pieces or improvise for their own enjoyment without undertaking in-depth study of the instrument can be very fulfilling and enjoyable. Certainly, too, it's true that many people without flashy technique, who learn the art of musical nuance and the essential skill of listening as they play, are a tremendous joy to hear. So in essence what I'm saying is that, depending on what someone wishes to attain by playing tabla, it's certainly possible to receive a lot of enjoyment and satisfaction without having to retreat into a semi-monastic life of intensive study. Again, this is analogous to someone who may want nothing more than to lean some favorite songs on guitar or piano without getting into really intensive study of the instrument. The flip side of this is that the more facility one develops within the amazing North Indian classical percussion system, the more tools one has to engage in all kinds of musical explorations, either playing solo or with others.

**DrumPRO:** *Comment on the role of tabla in contemporary music – that is, tabla combined with western instruments and mixed ensembles, electronic instruments, hybrid drum kits, jazz, etc.*

**TY:** In terms of the tabla finding its way into non-Indian styles of music, I see that the instruments follow in the wake of the artists' vision. It is a very versatile and dynamic instrument and has the capacity to blend in relationship, as fully as the artists want to take it. The classical tradition certainly is not fragile enough to be threatened by experimentation and evolution. After all, the classical tradition is also a moving, evolving entity.

**JERRY:** Hindustani music is constantly changing, but I avoid the word "evolving" because in some ways the classical music is taking steps backward, with not enough attention by young students placed on keeping the pure tradition alive. Many of the great early masters are now deceased and so many of their great compositions and insights have vanished.

**TY:** We all deeply miss the presence of such great maestros as Ustad Alla Rakha with the material and focus they embodied.

**JERRY:** Absolutely. Fortunately though, the current generation of master musicians are fulfilling these responsibilities. For example: Swapan Chaudhuri and his great devotion to students at the Ali Akbar College in California. Swapan has shared concerns that many young players seem to be ignoring the more challenging kaida, gat, and paran compositional forms for fast rela grooves and improvisations. Musical context shapes player attitude and approach. Without clear stylistic distinctions, players lose their sense of focus and purpose, and the music suffers.



## **Conversations in tabla**

**TY:** As soon as a tradition becomes too narrow minded, then it will stop yielding the genius to carry it forth. I feel that the classical tabla tradition is very strong these days as well as the folk traditions, and there is plenty of room to continue to push the boundaries of new settings for the tabla. It is all about the sound, and the sound can blend into a trap set or a banjo riff or a flamenco bulladis and even with 12-tone “outside” jazz. If we are studying classical then we must honor that process, and the expertise will only come with much practice, dedication to your teacher and love of your instrument. If we are exploring new settings and fusions, then it is best to open your mind and follow the sounds. The potential is there to go both ways if we open our minds.

**DrumPRO:** *So the player's attitude plays a big role. Jerry, what about the balance of traditional versus contemporary applications?*

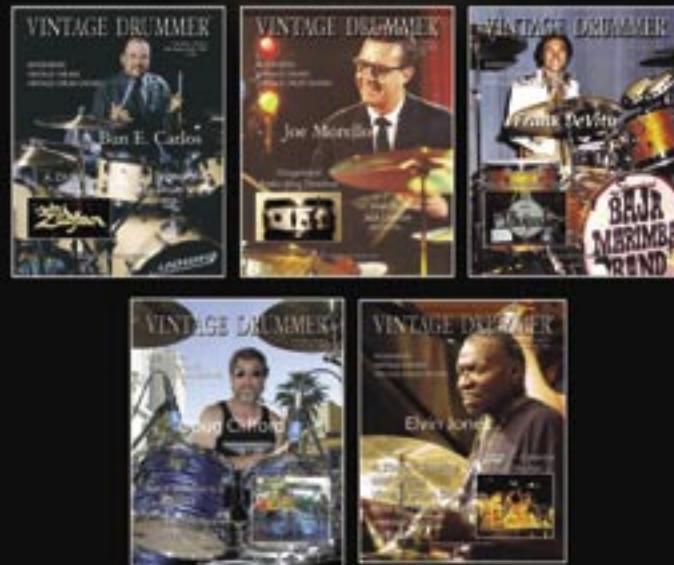
**JERRY:** Sure, the player's attitude is everything. It allows one to switch musical “hats” from traditional to contemporary styles, for instance. In (the Boston-based group) “Club d’Elf”, I sometimes assume the role of a live drum machine, rendering unchanging patterns for long periods, applying a more African grooving sensibility and literally adapting African or Afro-Cuban repertoire to the tabla. In “Natraj” and “d’Elf”, I experiment with playing other instruments with tabla - one hand playing clay drum, shakers, bells, frame drum, cymbals, while the other plays either the daya or low bayan. Trilok Gurtu pioneered the floor drum set/tabla approach, which I have adapted to fit my own style. There are no limits to how the tabla can be incorporated, only intelligent choices that respond to the music itself.

**BENJY:** I agree with Ty. It’s amazing to see how much classical tabla playing has evolved even in the last few decades, where the tabla player is considered more and more to be an equal participant in a performance (as opposed to an “accompanist”). Although there is a rich and long-standing Indian classical music tradition, it’s a living, breathing, growing discipline. I think that the emerging generation of classical tabla players will continue to effect change within that tradition while being fully steeped in the knowledge of their forebears, and I’m really excited by what I see happening in this vein already.

My hope is also that there will be more and more accomplished tabla players who will explore the wonderful realm of world fusion music. Certainly this has been an area of magnificent growth in the past few years, and I expect it will continue to grow. I can only hope that not too many artists will go down the path of “throwing in” some tabla to provide trappings of “world music” ... There are so many new areas to be explored and certainly many rules and boundaries were made to be broken. But I’m also a firm believer in understanding what the rules are and why they are there before discarding them. Time and again, in

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# Conversations in tabla

my own experience, I've found that understanding, and to a large extent, adhering to, these rules and structures actually provide much more freedom than working without form or structure. My hope is that tabla will continue to grow dramatically in both the traditional and contemporary applications.

## DrumPRO: Do you teach? How has teaching affected your own practice and music making?

**BENJY:** Teaching is one of the most fabulous ways to learn there is ... each time I teach someone, even a first-time student, I'm forced to examine my own understanding of what I do. And if I'm really present in the process of teaching someone else, I come away from the lesson having learned something every time. Maybe it's a mechanical principle about how a certain stroke can be played with greater efficiency, or an insight into how one might improve the clarity of tone in a stroke or passage.

**TY:** I was a little overly excited when I first started learning tabla. I was on several recordings during my first year and started playing with all sorts of people from any style of music I could find. Nothing could keep me from it. I was a bit psycho! I also started teaching very early on because I was one of two players in my whole area and people wanted to learn. That was helpful to me mostly because it made me look at my technique and at the material more closely. I basically had to start from the beginning every time I helped a student, which highlighted the basics. I had to do that more to survive and wouldn't usually recommend teaching until one has not only a clear view of the instrument, but ideally, permission from a maestro. So, for myself, I would take one lesson every six months or so with Zakir. For each 2-hour session, I would drive the 1,400 miles from Boulder to the Bay area and turn around sometimes the same day to drive through the night back home since I was a single dad, time was of the essence. The learning has always been "little lesson, big practice" for me because Zakir is touring so much and I have had such demanding responsibilities. But I've managed to keep my dedication and devotion going over these years and now it is beginning to open up for me more and more.

**JERRY:** Yes, I teach privately out of my home, at the New

England Conservatory, Tufts University, LearnQuest Academy of Indian Music, and occasionally at Berklee. I also give lecture/demonstrations with my colleagues and mentors - George Ruckert (MIT, sarodist/scholar), Peter Row (NEC, sitarist/scholar), Phil Scarff (saxophone/co-founder of Natraj), and Warren Senders (NEC, Hindustani vocalist/composer). The featured artist and I regularly teach afternoon classes for people to glimpse what they will hear in performance. Teaching allows me to understand the music more clearly, forces me to uncover more of what lies below the surface. When I hear myself explaining a concept, resolving a student's difficulty, nurturing/extracting their untapped abilities, I discover more of my own essence along the way.

## DrumPRO: What are the most common pitfalls of beginner tabla players?

**JERRY:** In today's harried society students want to learn more and more "stuff" rather than mastering previous material. I tell beginners that the first lesson is the easiest and the second is the hardest. They arrive with no prior knowledge or technique, but leave with much responsibility and challenge. The time interval between the first two lessons sets the stage for their entire journey. I emphasize a disciplined practice routine, and encourage them to go home and immediately practice in their own space, acclimating themselves and their drums to their natural environment. In this way, the music and lesson will more thoroughly become a part of who they are. Lessons are devoted to producing the proper sound, hand placement for efficient motions, and a theoretical mastery of all musical aspects. We discuss short term, long term, and muscle memory for assimilating extended compositions, categorizing material into related "chunks" for simplifying the retention/recall process. I liken tabla compositions to poetry, with lines and verses of rhythms flowing naturally from one phrase to the next. We also examine relaxation techniques. Quoting Rajiv [Devasthali, Jerry's teacher]: "Players need to feel calm during even the most intense phrases."

## DrumPRO: What about the most common pitfalls of Intermediate tabla players?

**JERRY:** Many intermediate students need to unlearn bad habits

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that were not addressed with their prior teaching. I do not force them into my particular Gharana (school) of drumming; rather, we analyze the physical properties of the hand for achieving speed and relaxation. I am often surprised by their lack of theoretical practice, their difficulties when reciting simple phrases in three (ta ki ta) while maintaining tintal kriya gestures (hand motions in a 16 beat cycle). Expertise with rhythm theory is the unseen foundation to the drummer's musical stability.

**BENJY:** Far and away the most common pitfall of intermediate players is simply trying to play too fast. When you listen to a master such as Zakir Hussain, Swapan Chaudhuri, or the late Alla Rakha, the absolute clarity of each stroke (often at mind-numbing speeds) is utterly breathtaking. And many intermediate players want to get "up to speed" often sadly, by sacrificing that clarity. In my own practice, I've found that practicing below my top speed often provides amazing insights about technique and tone, and helps my performance a great deal when I'm stretched to playing my fastest as well. So the mantra for the intermediate tabla player is "first clarity, then speed." Of course there comes a point when you have to push for greater speed, but the student needs to do so in a conscious way that doesn't push them beyond the point where they can cleanly execute.

**TY:** True Benjy, the desire to play loud and fast is the most common pitfall for all students (which includes myself)! We hear the recordings and see the concerts of these great players and go home, wanting to recreate that. It is a problem because tabla is an instrument, which requires the careful building of technique. If the muscles and movements involved in the building of techniques are skipped in the rush to play fast or loud then you get the collapsing of key joints, which will prevent the natural evolution of those very things. In looking at the way it works, you'll see that the tools, if learned systematically, practiced slowly and through repetition become comfortable to play, then speed becomes a function of the minds clarity, and wait/volume becomes a by-product of the relaxed confidence of the whole bodies familiarity with the strokes. Again, listen to Zakir play, and observe how the expression and power stems from his complete comfort and clarity with each stroke and phrase. Thus it can become an inspiration to return to the basics, to practice slowly and with awareness.

**BENJY:** Back to beginners, though, the biggest pitfall I've seen them struggle with is the learning curve. It takes a great deal of time to fully internalize the system of bols - the way in which each stroke or combination of strokes played on the tabla has a corresponding syllable. It's amazing that complete independence between the hands can be represented by a single spoken line. This learning curve is an exponential one where once a student really grasps the fundamental concepts of tabla, which can take quite some time. The speed with which the student can learn new things increases dramatically. But many beginners quit before they reach that stage. One other pitfall common to both beginners and intermediates is not playing with a steady rhythm. If the beat isn't solid, nothing else really matters. Much of the classical repertoire is extremely complex and challenging, and it's a great

joy to deal with such minute divisions of time as one finds in many modes of classical tabla playing - but they lose meaning if the fundamental pulse gets lost.

**DrumPRO:** *If you only had one hour to practice per day, what are the most important areas you would cover in your tabla practice?*

**BENJY:** Ah, to have an hour every day to practice! What a gift that would be these days... sometimes I have that much time, but often I don't...

**TY:** Different schools of tabla will have different preferences, but the way I've learned to dedicate my practice time comes from my teacher Zakir. Over and over again he reminds me that the building blocks of the techniques are in the kaidas, being the strictest composing style in tabla. It features and focuses on specific stroke combinations that develop the hand and mind in a certain preferred evolution. We are smart to have a well balanced diet of peshkar, kaida, rela and gat as well as having fun with all the cool ornaments and grooves. But having the bulk of our repetition on the main kaidas will yield great results.

**BENJY:** With the limited time I do have nowadays, the pattern I follow is to start with a series of exercises that are in some ways similar to western drum rudiments. There are certain series that I'll play in various patterns and at increasing speeds for a few minutes each. Many of these are exercises that will focus strongly on one hand at a time at first, and then move onward to types of exercises and compositions that fully integrate the hands. I try to be sure to play at least a little of each of several types of compositions/improvisational frameworks. Kaidas are certainly important "theme and variation" compositional frameworks, but I also want to be sure to play a good deal of theka (the identifying composition for a specific rhythmic cycle and the starting point of most classical playing), one or more peshkars (which could be thought of as slower introductory compositions, almost like an overture in some respects), gats and tukras (shorter fixed compositions), and relas (which are patterns and compositions designed to be played a very fast speeds). If possible, I try to touch on each of them in each practice. Sometimes I find that I need to spend a little more time on one form or another, depending on what I'm preparing for in my practice. There's certainly enough breadth in tabla technique that it's good to touch on several areas as often as possible; otherwise it's all too easy to let some aspects of my playing fall behind.

**DrumPRO:** *Do you do all your practice unaccompanied, or do you use a metronome, tape, sequencer, or even an electronic tampura (drone)?*

**JERRY:** Lately, I've been practicing my solo repertoire using a CD of a George (Ruckert) playing a cycling melody (lehra) in a fixed speed and rhythm cycle. I sometimes use this to perform a tabla solo. The drawback is that the tempo is set to a click track, and Hindustani music and tabla solos progresses from slow to fast speeds. There are two universal concepts of musical time:

# Conversations in tabla

chronos (clock time/machine time), and christos (spiritual time/human time). Chronos is based on the consistent time pulses: click tracks, metronomes, playing along with drum loops. Christos time, however, is empowered time. It is a more instinctive, spiritual time awareness, which allows the music to breathe. I practice in ways, which tap into both timing sensibilities.

All student levels should focus on achieving good sound, drilling the same stroke(s) for consistent placement, resonance, and dynamic range. They should play clear theka (accompaniment) structures, gradually introducing ornaments, which enhance the individual's style. In early tabla history, players did not add many (or any) ornaments to their accompaniment. Their role was to strictly maintain the beat. Nowadays, players are heavily ornamenting, sometimes disguising, and cluttering theka strokes. Rhythmic ornaments should not conceal the theka just as Christmas ornaments should not conceal the essence of the tree. For building stamina and strength, drill the same pattern at various speeds without resting. If tired, slow the pattern down, but do not stop! Finally, I do most of my practicing away from the instrument, reciting compositions while keeping tal. Recitation entrenches compositions into long-term memory. If the mind is relaxed, the body will respond.

**DrumPRO:** *Do you compose original tabla repertoire? What do you compose and how does it come about? (E.g. spontaneously while jamming/writing for the band etc).*

**JERRY:** I often reconfigure, expand, contract, and combine phrases into patterns which work in both traditional and contemporary contexts. I sometimes improvise theme/variations compositions on the spot, following prescribed rules of traditional development. In this way, I do not have to play the same peshkar or kaida over and over again. Invention makes the music fresh and heightens my own involvement and satisfaction. If, I am enjoying myself, the audience would not be left behind. During moments of pure spontaneity there is no time to think about what to do, only time to simply let it happen.

**TY:** I have come to realize that when I am in the arena of classical Indian music, I am operating from the beautiful vantage point of limits and rules. To find our allowance of freedom within those rules requires a trusting and letting go into the journey through the

tradition. And hopefully we find a teacher who points out where self-expression weaves itself into the rules. Then, when we go into the world of fusion, we can open our ears more to the vast array of sounds the tabla makes as a percussion instrument. Out of that realm, the personalized and original repertoire will not only be appropriate but necessary. I made an effort to do this in the project with Miguel Espinoza, Bela Fleck and Kai Eckhardt called "Aras" by Curandero. It was a fusing of Flamenco, Jazz, Bluegrass and Indian flavors. To make a music that wasn't just four things stuck together, we all had to let go of the traditions a little. So, with this in mind, I always try to remember that the basis for the language that we use, even to seek out new ideas with, has its roots in the classical training. This of course has been time tested and refined to such a high level that there is no shortage of new permutations or possibilities to build from.

**BENJY:** I do compose a limited amount of tabla repertoire - certainly in terms of coming up with, say, my own variations on some traditional kaidas or relas. In the context of fusion music I frequently come up with patterns, compositions and grooves that are intended to complement a piece that I may play with a western musician (or for one of my own pieces). One of my favorite ways to operate in playing with a western musician, however, is to improvise. One of my gurus, Ali Akbar Khan, had a great way of expressing the approach to improvisation I want to use "spontaneous composition." I think he uses the term because "improvisation" to him might imply too great a departure from any kind of form or structure.

**DrumPRO:** *Interesting point. You've both just mentioned the role of "rules". How possible is it to perform "free improvisation" on tabla that is free from association with Indian classical music? Is this even a worthwhile pursuit?*

**BENJY:** I'd have to say that I'm pretty dubious about performing convincing "free improvisation" on tabla without any reference whatsoever to Indian classical music. I have heard some people play on tabla who had little or no formal training who could still get some interesting sounds and set up some decent grooves. But I've gotten very spoiled by hearing some of the best players in the world work within improvisational frameworks that are simultaneously "free" and masterfully crafted with a sense of creating a larger structure and mood. One analogy that might work here is to think of what is often called "20th century" western classical music or even "outside jazz". Much of it may appear random, free and wild, but the most convincing practitioners in this vein had also done their homework in earlier classical or jazz modalities. They knew the rules and therefore had the best insights in exactly how to stray from them to create the desired effect in their performance. So, the shorter answer is a qualified "no". It's likely that some players could have a lot of fun in performing such free improv., but to me it's doubtful to have the same impact or craftsmanship as the spontaneous composition of a player with roots in tabla technique that has been developed for centuries.

**JERRY:** The creative imagination is an abyss of untapped

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and accessible possibilities. Pursuits, which exceed familiar comfort levels bear the artist's soul and reach audiences of any background are vital to the growth of both the music and the musician. Denying the powers of the imagination would be tragic. It is by taking chances, by putting yourself out there, that you discover your place in the musical universe. Don't tread on the surface - swim deep!

Just as you should not pat yourself on the back for a "good" performance, do not become depressed over a "bad" performance. Those were brief moments in time, and the next moment will be different. I feel confident when I step onto the stage knowing that I have prepared myself through years of practice and experience. I may not know exactly what I am going to recall or invent, but I will always give 100% of myself to the music. By setting aside the desire to impress others I will always find my place, pace, and space next to the featured artist.

### **DrumPRO: What music inspires you today, what are you listening to?**

**JERRY:** Any style of music, which is expressed with soul and feeling.

**BENJY:** I listen to almost anything I can get my hands on ... I'm hopelessly eclectic. I love Afro-pop, Indian classical, some rap, hip-hop, trance, contemporary folk, traditional west african, shona mbira and marimba music, alternative rock, blues ... I believe that there's a lot one can learn from a broad range of music. Again, an emphasis on emotional expression, creativity and skill with refined musical sensibilities is what will usually draw me to a style or an artist. I should maybe qualify "refined": That certainly doesn't mean it shouldn't have an edge or a lot of crunch. I just love to hear music where it is clear that the way in which something is played is clearly and skillfully aligned with the mood or message the artist is trying to express.

**TY:** I also have always had a very eclectic appreciation of music. From classical European to Middle Eastern to bluegrass to jazz. I have had periods of listening to bass and drums, trance, traditional japanese, african, celtic etc. Thus I've recorded with many of these styles to try to satisfy my craving to participate in the inspiration each world offers. Sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't, but I can't help but follow the visions. And it is important to mention that the whole time I keep a respectful eye on the traditional music I love so much.

### **DrumPRO: Where are you performing/teaching/recording in September/October? What's coming up in the Fall?**

**TY:** I've spent the last few years touring around the US, Central America and Europe almost 90% of the time with a variety of people. I am slowing that down now so I can focus more on recording a number of duet and trio records. My own record company "Owl Records" is an umbrella for my own musical journalizing. It will soon include some recordings of my teacher as well. So the concerts are more spread out right now but people can visit my web site <http://www.TyBurhoe.com/> to see upcoming events and the new CD releases as they get released.

**BENJY:** I'm going to be on the road throughout both months, check out my website for updates: <http://www.benjymusic.com>

**JERRY:** I just finished directing a 6-day rhythm theory seminar at New England Conservatory (with Ruckert, David Locke, Scarff), and am now completing my seventh book, Relating Sound & Time. Researching and writing it has helped me to achieve a higher musical plateau. A journey back to the fundamentals of music where sound + time = groove. Natraj will soon be recording our 4th CD. Bansuri master, Steve Gorn, will be joining us on a tour to Madras as part of a festival organized by friend and colleague, T. K. Ramakrishnan, master of the mridangam. I perform twice a month with Club d'Elf in Boston (<http://www.clubdelf.com/>), and have many diverse gigs upcoming, including faculty concerts at Berklee, and NEC. I am teaching lessons and ensembles at NEC, and co-teach dance and rhythm classes at Tufts. I also teach group lessons at LearnQuest Academy of Indian music.

### **DrumPRO: Any words of wisdom for the professional musician, challenged by survival difficulties in today's economy and live music culture?**

**JERRY:** Stay with it! If you believe in and love what you are

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## Conversations in tabla

doing, if you are passionate and have the will to ride the ups and downs, if you can nurture the love and devotion, than you will reach all of your goals. It may take time, but since time is what God has given us, we may as well use it to achieve something beyond merely surviving. There are many casualties within the arts. Our world is saturated with creative people who are struggling with the realities and economics of life. Remember, take small steps.... small, small, small. And always have fun!

The closer I get to the heart of any tradition the more I must surrender myself to greater scrutiny. Dolsi-naa Abubakari Lunna, my most demanding african teacher, is very hard on me because he knows that I am starting to get it, starting to understand, conceptualize, and apply his music in ways that remind him of home. He does not demand this from less serious students who have not experienced the full earning and learning process.

**TY:** In order to survive as a musician, I have had to improvise and make up some of my own rules. I feel like unless a musician just happens into success, we need to expand our vision of the way the industry works. I started my production company "Burhoe Productions" about 10 years ago because I wanted to learn that side of the business. It not only showed me what the people who present us as performers go through, but it brought some amazing people to me and allowed me to see how they operate. That also was the same inspiration for me

to open up my little record label. It continues to make me look at what works and doesn't work in the "selling records" side of being a musician. I have however, learned to keep a lid on how many productions or how fast the record label expands since my main interest is in playing the music. It can very easily take me away from what I really want to be doing if I am not extremely careful about spreading myself too thin. I always try to make my practice a priority.

**BENJY:** It's important to remember why you're doing what you're doing. There are few life situations more tragic to me than someone who is engaged in a creative pursuit who has become jaded and/or no longer enjoys that pursuit. To be honest, I was there for a while during the end of the time I was writing music for an NBC soap opera. It came to a point where I felt like what I was doing in music was like an onerous second job (especially when, like so many of us, I had to work a day job to make ends meet much of the time, particularly in the increasingly expensive bay area).

It's also important to remember that in defining oneself as a professional musician, you are choosing to have your music be a business, and this is certainly where I, and so many others I have known, have stumbled. One book that I have found invaluable to this end is Jeri Goldstein's "How To Be Your Own Booking Agent" (<http://www.nmtinc.com/howbook.html>). There's so much more to this book than the title alone would suggest. It's like a blueprint for developing a serious career as a performer.

One other thing to consider, know what you want to say with your music, and keep yourself aligned with that vision. I am such an eclectic that I often find this difficult myself, to be sure. But especially if you want to get signed, the words that are the kiss of death from an A&R guy's viewpoint are "I'm versatile" or "I'm eclectic." Sadly, just as in marketing anything else, some degree of what

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might be considered as “brand identification” or “market niche” is essential to success, at least in the early stages of a career. One example - look at where Sting started with the Police, and the breadth of what he’s been able to do since. That doesn’t mean that you have to stick with something that absolutely mirrors a specific genre or style, it’s just that you really need to know who you are and what you want to convey. And be sure that you are conveying yourself and your message with the greatest clarity and skill you can muster.

### **DrumPRO: For a beginner, what would you recommend for listening and materials for instruction?**

**BENJY:** For inspirational listening, I’d head straight to Zakir Hussain’s Moment Records website (<http://www.momentrecords.com/>) and get a number of CDs that feature Zakir and his father Alla Rakha. As for instruction, although there are some good books and such out there (such as Rakha’s (see the “Further Reading” section), I don’t think there is any substitute for instruction with a master of the tabla, or at least someone well versed in classical tabla technique.

**TY:** Yes, it is best to work with a living instructor, even if you only see him/her once or twice a year. It is better to work on and refine a few things given for you specifically by a teacher who has a plan in mind, than to collect various compositions from books that may or may not focus on where you are at in your learning process. Later it can be a fun side note to visit material in books, but can be distracting and can water down your lessons in the beginning years. In terms of listening, if you like the classical music then I would recommend listening to the core classical artists quite often. Let it become natural in your ears. Any of the great artists like Ali Akbar Khan, Nikil Banerjee, Shivkumar Sharma, Hari Prasad Charusia, Ravi Shankar etc... are all accompanied by great tabla players and you can’t go wrong filling your ears with the various styles. But in addition to listening to all the inspired players, if we are learning a particular tradition or style, we should spend very focused time soaking up nothing but that player or style. For myself, I listen to all the music and great players, but focus mainly on Zakir Hussain’s work. His accompaniment in classical is my guiding light and his work with bands like Shakti and Tabla Beat Science is my permission to go exploring. That is a pretty huge universe and beyond that, I am on my own.

**JERRY:** My 3rd edition tabla book includes material for beginners and advanced players (<http://www.rhombuspublishing.com>). I usually select recorded music based on the performers, ragas, and talas (cycles): Ali Akbar Khan (sarod), Hariprasad Chaurasia (bansuri), Nikhil Banerjee/Ravi Shankar (sitar), Shivkumar Sharma (santoor), L. Subramaniam (violin), Vishwa Mohan Bhatt (guitar) to name a few. As Ty said, these artists will always be accompanied by the best tabla players: Zakir Hussain, Swapan Chaudhuri, Anindo Chatterjee, Bikram Gosh, etc.

**DrumPRO:** *I would like to add the great accompanists Omkar Gulwady, Suresh Talwalkar, Balakrishna Iyer, and Samar Saha to that list. The Internet is also a great source of material, both aural and literary. I’ve listed some in the “Further Reading” section. Can you offer any short exercises to practice, compositions, or transcriptions?*

**TY:** In terms of a list of things to practice, I would say again that the kaida world would yield the most results. Even if you are not a classical player, learning a few of the basic kaidas will help straighten out your technique and give you a more balanced sound. If you don’t know any, then one lesson with a local teacher will get you some of that material.

E.g.: Dha te te Dha te te Dha Dha te te ... kaida  
or Dha ti Dha ge Na Dha trkt ... kaida  
or any number of the different classic compositions. A little goes along way!

Like any art form, practice is where it is at. Treat the repetition like a meditation and relax into it until it grooves on its own power. Stay simple and slow and learn to enjoy the sounds of the drums. Because, out of that presence is where all the music and power will arise of its own nature.

**JERRY:** Shown on *page 32* is a chhand (rhythm) exercise in 16 beat tintal. With the weak hand in a fixed outward position, like a table, set up kriya gestures (4 beats per gesture) using palm to palm clap (+), finger to finger clap (2), outward khali wave (o), and fingers to wrist clap (3). While keeping tal recite the numbers shown. Accent the first number/syllable (underlined, as shown on *page 32*).

### **Ginti**

A ginti bol (lit. “counting”) is a composition constructed using a reducing/expanding number series, usually from 1<9, or 9<1, such as:

987654321  
87654321  
7654321  
654321  
54321  
4321  
321  
21  
1

gintis are typically heard during a kathak dance performance. They provide an exciting and challenging forum for performers to exchange numeric repertoire. As before, set-up kriya gestures and recite the three Ruckert gintis shown on *page 33*.

## chhand (rhythm) exercise in 16-beat tintal

+ 2 0 3  
1 - 2 - 3 - 1 - 2 - 3 - 1 - 2 -  
+ 2 0 3  
3 - 1 - 2 - 3 - 1 - 2 - 3 - 1 -  
+ 2 0 3 +  
2 - 3 - 1 - 2 - 3 - 1 - 2 - 3 - 1

Replace numbers with the syllables (bol's) ta ki ta. In each group, pronounce the first ta with sustain (taaa), and the second without.

+ 2 0 3  
ta - ki - ta - ta - ki - ta - ta - ki -  
+ 2 0 3  
ta - ta - ki - ta - ta - ki - ta - ta -  
+ 2 0 3 +  
ki - ta - ta - ki - ta - ta - ki - ta - ta

Count fast 3s, accenting the first number.

+ 2 0 3  
1 2 3 1 2 3 1 2 3 1 2 3 1 2 3 1  
+ 2 0 3  
2 3 1 2 3 1 2 3 1 2 3 1 2 3 1 2  
+ 2 0 3 +  
3 1 2 3 1 2 3 1 2 3 1 2 3 1 2 3 1

Substitute bol's for numbers.

+ 2 0 3  
ta - ki - ta - ta - ki - ta - ta - ki - ta -  
+ 2 0 3  
ki - ta - ki - ta - ta - ki - ta - ta - ki -  
+ 2 0 3 +  
ta - ki - ta - ta - ki - ta - ta - ki - ta -

Combine slow and fast groups, as in slow, fast, fast.

+ 2 0 3  
ta - ki - ta - ta - ki - ta - ta - ki - -  
+ 2 0 3  
ta - ta - ki - ta - ta - ki - ta - ta - ki -  
+ 2 0 3 +  
ta - ta - ki - ta - ta - ki - ta - ta - ki - ta -

Fast, fast, slow groupings are no more difficult than the previous.

+ 2 0 3  
ta - ki - ta - ta - ki - ta - ta - ki - ta -  
+ 2 0 3  
ki - ta - ta - ki - ta - ta - ki - ta - ta -  
+ 2 0 3 +  
ki - ta - ta - ta - ki - ta - ta - ki - ta -

A more challenging version of fast, slow, fast.

+ 2 0 3  
ta - ki - ta - ta - ki - ta - ta - ki - ta -  
+ 2 0 3  
- ki - ta - ta - ki - ta - ta - ki - ta -  
+ 2 0 3 +  
- ta - ki - ta - ta - ki - ta - ta - ki - ta -

Combine all three versions into one sequence.

+ 2 0 3  
ta - ki - ta - ta - ki - ta - ta - ki - ta -  
+ 2 0 3  
ki - ta - ta - ki - ta - ta - ki - ta -  
+ 2 0 3 +  
- ta - ki - ta - ta - ki - ta - ta - ki - ta -

Replace the last syllable 'ta' with a rest to create more spatial tension.

+ 2 0 3  
ta - ki - ta - ki - ta - ki - ta - ki - ta -  
+ 2 0 3  
ki - ta - ki - ta - ki - ta - ki - ta -  
+ 2 0 3 +  
- ta - ki - ta - ki - ta - ki - ta - ki -

Remove 'ki' so that only the first 'ta' remains.

+ 2 0 3  
ta - - ta -  
+ 2 0 3  
- - ta -  
+ 2 0 3 +  
- ta - - ta -

Improvise new configurations.

## ruckert gintis

|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| + |   |   |   | 2 |   |   |   | o |   |   |   | 3 |   |   |
| 9 | 8 | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 8 |   |   |   | 2 |   |   |   | o |   |   |   | 3 |   |   |
| + |   |   |   | 3 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 6 | 5 |
| 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 4 |   |   |   | 2 |   |   |   | o |   |   |   | 3 |   |   |
| + |   |   |   | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 3 | 2 | 1 | 2 |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 4 |   |   |   | 2 |   |   |   | o |   |   |   | 3 |   |   |
| + |   |   |   | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 2 | 1 |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |

also

|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| + |   |   |   | 2 |   |   |   | o |   |   |   | 3 |   |   |
| 9 | 8 | < | 7 | 6 | < | 5 | 4 | < | 3 | 2 | < | 1 | 8 | < |
| 7 |   |   |   | 2 |   |   |   | o |   |   |   | 3 |   |   |
| + |   |   |   | 3 | 2 | 1 | < | 1 | 7 | < | 6 | 5 | < | 4 |
| 6 | < | 5 | 4 |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 3 |   |   |   | 2 |   |   |   | o |   |   |   | 3 |   |   |
| + |   |   |   | 6 | 5 | < | 4 | 3 | < | 2 | 1 | < | 5 | 4 |
| < | 2 | 1 | < |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| + |   |   |   | 2 |   |   |   | o |   |   |   | 3 |   |   |
| 3 | 2 | < | 1 | 4 | < | 3 | 2 | < | 1 | 3 | < | 2 | 1 | < |
| 2 | 1 |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |

also

|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| + |   |   |   | 2 |   |   |   | o |   |   |   | 3 |   |   |
| 9 | 9 | 9 | - | 8 | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 8 | 8 | 8 |
| 7 |   |   |   | 2 |   |   |   | o |   |   |   | 3 |   |   |
| + |   |   |   | 2 | 1 | 7 | 7 | 7 | - | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 |
| 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 1 |   |   |   | 2 |   |   |   | o |   |   |   | 3 |   |   |
| + |   |   |   | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 5 | 5 | 5 | - | 4 | 3 | 2 |
| 6 | 6 | 6 | 5 |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
| 1 |   |   |   | 2 |   |   |   | o |   |   |   | 3 |   |   |
| + |   |   |   | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 3 | 3 | - | 2 | 1 | 2 |
| 4 | 4 | 4 | 3 |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| 1 | 1 |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |

**DrumPRO:** Thank you for all your wonderful contributions; Any closing comments?

**BENJY:** Yes, I'd like to say that one fundamental way in which Indian classical music has changed the way I listen and play is that I have become more aware of the "space between the notes" both rhythmically (silence) and melodically (pitch variations). There are infinite possible shades of expression available to a musician involving any notes or rhythmic strokes, and Indian classical training can hone one's sensitivity to the subtlety of these colorations. A truly great rock, blues or jazz player can intuitively play extremely expressively using such subtle hues of intonation and rhythm. One thing that Indian classical training can do is allow for a greater understanding and appreciation of them, and to that end I would encourage anyone who wishes to deepen their understanding of music, especially in improvisational forms, to get involved in studying North Indian classical music.

**TY:** I like what Jerry said earlier about “sticking with it”. I feel that it is important to follow our dreams and move with small steps that build on enjoyment and inspiration. As players who have been inspired enough to begin the process of learning, we all have to treat it as a long term project. It is truly a labor of love and devotion. I have never stopped treating tabla as a spiritual practice and I will only endeavor to deepen that experience. I feel so grateful to my Guruji, Ustad Zakir Hussain for also having the patience needed to raise me as his student. I feel that I have so far to go, yet, as I relax into the practice and enjoy what I have been blessed with, my gratitude expands to all aspects of my life. My friend Benji is one of my closest Gurubhai, and was actually the first tabla player I ever had the pleasure of hearing - his work in the band Ancient Future and his recent albums are all wonderful! Jerry is also an example of a spirit aspiring towards beauty in their lives and in the arts. I am also thankful to Jonathan Dimond for putting together this project, and hope we all can take a step forward towards following our life’s dreams.

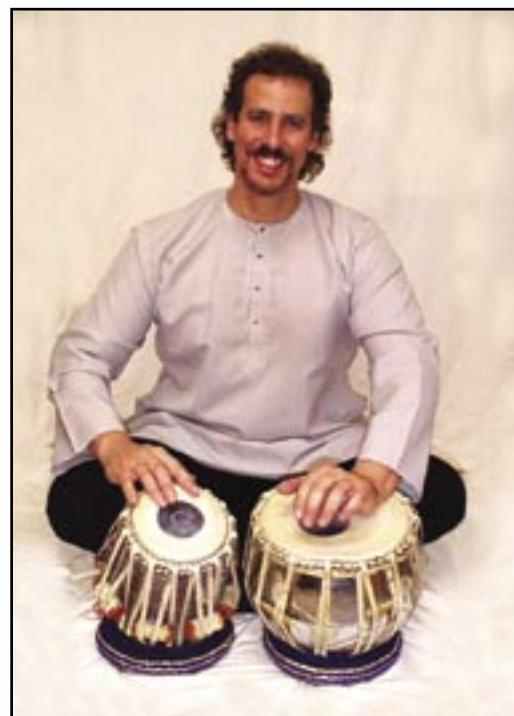
**JERRY:** Consistently endeavoring to express the most profound feelings has allowed artists to tap into fresh territory - to create music that recalls the past, and fulfills the desires of the present, while turning the soil that feeds the future of musical evolution. To quote my friend and colleague, Jonathan Dimond: “The universe is vibration, and the world is sound. It is no wonder that music - intelligent sound - creates such a deep-felt effect.”

## ABOUT THE INTERVIEWEES

**Jerry Leake** began his musical journey as a rock and jazz/fusion drummer in the north suburbs of Chicago. He graduated from the Berklee College of music in 1982, where he studied jazz vibraphone with Gary Burton and West African hand percussion with Pablo Landrum. His extensive tabla studies in Pune, India with Shreeram and Rajiv Devasthalis as well as early studies in Boston have resulted in significant research and playing experience of North Indian classical music. On tabla, he has accompanied such artists as Puriam Sen, Kumkum Sanyal, Sharafat Fateh Ali Khan, Steve Gorn, George Ruckert, Peter Row and Warren Senders. Jerry currently teaches on the faculty of the New England Conservatory of Music in Boston and Tufts University, and presents percussion clinics throughout the Northeastern U.S. He is also former chapter president of the Massachusetts Percussive Arts Society. Jerry co-founded the acclaimed world-music ensemble Natraj, whose three recordings feature his diverse percussion talents. He is also co-founder of the Boston-based group Club d’Elf, and performs regularly with the New England Percussion Trio, R.A.R.E. Ensemble, and the Agbekor Drum and Dance Society. He is featured on releases with the Ken Schaphorst Big Band and the JCA Orchestra as well as numerous freelance projects. Through ongoing travels across the world, Jerry will continue researching and compiling practical hands-on percussion texts which focus on many world music traditions. Jerry Leake’s Percussion Books are published by Rhombus Publishing (see Web Site list). Jerry can be contacted via email at: Rhom3@aol.com

**Benjy Wertheimer** is a founding member of the internationally acclaimed Ancient Future world fusion music ensemble. An award-winning musician, composer, multi-instrumentalist and vocalist (playing tabla, congas, percussion, esraj, guitar and keyboards), Benjy has toured the U.S., Canada, Central America and Japan, and has opened for such artists as Carlos Santana, Paul Winter, and Narada Michael Walden. He now tours and records regularly with Krishna Das.

Beginning his musical studies at age 5 (starting with piano and later studying violin and flamenco guitar), Benjy received his training in Keyboard



**Benjy Wertheimer**



**Ty Burhoe**

Improvisation at the University of Colorado and Composition and Ethnomusicology at the University of Washington. He has studied Indian classical music for over 20 years with some of the greatest masters of that tradition (including Alla Rakha, Zakir Hussain, Ali Akbar Khan and Z. M. Dagar).

For over five years, Benji scored music for the internationally syndicated NBC series Santa Barbara. He has recorded with numerous A&M, Windham Hill, Narada, Nippon Phonogram and Rounder recording artists. His new CD "Circle of Fire" has recently been featured on "Echoes," heard on over 170 public radio stations around North America, and was #1 on the international New Age radio charts in November 2002. He has recorded music for commercials for several international clients (including Master Card and The Nature Company). Benji was also a contributing composer and member of the Zakir Hussain Rhythm Experience (along with Mickey Hart of the Grateful Dead).

Benji can be contacted via email at: benji@benjywetherimer.com

**Ty Burhoe** is a senior disciple of the great drumming legend Zakir Hussain. He is known for his versatility in playing different styles of music and producing unusual collaborations. Ty has worked with Classical Indian artists such as Ustad Sultan Khan, Pundit Ragunath Seth, Roshan Jamal Bhartiya, Steve Gorn. Jazz artists like Art Lande, Kai Eckhardt, Paul McCandless and James Newton. Fusion artists such as Krishna Das, Curandero (Miguel Espinoza), Bela Fleck, Kitaro and many more. He also produces concerts and manages tours for his teacher Zakir Hussain with all of India's premiere musicians. Ty tours in the USA and internationally on a regular basis with various artists, performing, recording and hosting retreats and workshops.

Ty can be contacted via email at tycburhoe@earthlink.net

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