



BONE TIPS AND TECHNIQUES

This column is dedicated to the late great Irish saint, Oliver Plunkett (http://www.louthonline.com/html/oliver_plunkett.html)
May his bones rest in peace ...

BONES - (no big mystery just a little bit of history);

Second to that of the human voice, "bones", stones and wood are the oldest instruments known to man and were possibly first used as tools. To the ancient people surviving in their environment some 2.5 million years ago, these materials not only served as tools but as well communication devices and musical art forms ... it's anyone's guess as to when the "bones" tripled as tool, communicative device and art form. What's your guess?

There are wood, stone and bone players from vast regions around the world. All of the bone players play their instruments using a similar technique, mechanically speaking, yet the finger positioning/manipulation and materials used varies from region to region. Stretching from South India to Mongolia, where they play with stones, to Egypt, where the cult of Hathor, the avenger and daughter of Ram, had a tribe of percussionists who played in her honor, to the six Celtic regions and all the way to Panama, bone playing is alive or has lived in these vast areas of the world at some time or another.

Drums come in a wide variety of shapes and sizes, and each produces sound using different materials which are broken down into sub-categories. A phone is anything that produces sound. Membranophones are instruments that are covered with skin to produce sound, and bones are Idiophones which are things that make sound entirely from themselves. There are only a couple of bone players in the world, if any, who can change pitch while playing bone idiophones.

All drum and percussion instruments require a slight whipping motion to produce the sound. A piano is 88 drums. It requires a similar up and down wrist motion, though slightly varied, however, similar to a drummer/percussionist's limb lifting and releasing the force of gravity. The motion is simply channeled to accommodate differing techniques and styles. The mechanical whipping motion used by the bones to produce sound comes from a flick or rotation of the forearm. The wrist acts as a sympathetic lever and must stay in a vertical position in order to keep the bones vertical, allowing them to hit each other like a pendulum, while the fingers gently cradle over the front rails of the bones, pulling them in, semi-snug, to the palm of the hand.

There are as many rhythms to articulate on bones as there are stars in the sky. Sixteenth notes are produced on the bones by connecting a roll and a tap. Repeat and voila, sixteenth notes ... In other words you produce a triplet and connect that to a single hit all inside of one pulse beat (this all happens very quickly). The combination of the two rhythms or movements in connection with each other produces a group of four sixteenth notes. Repeat these two movements, (rhythms), over and over again and you'll have running sixteenth notes on one hand while the other hand is free to play whatever it wishes - cross rhythms, polyrhythms or simpler rhythms.

For additional sound and dexterity, switch hands and start the sixteenth notes with the opposite hand.

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