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Malik instruments

DARBUKA MASTERY

Level 1: Building Strong Foundations

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Introduction

Welcome to the first book of the Darbuka Mastery series. This book series aims to take a complete Darbuka beginner to a stage where they can comfortably perform and solo with a wide range of Darbuka techniques, in all typical Darbuka applications. In this first book, we will cover the fundamentals of how to play the Darbuka. We will look at the bare bones of Darbuka technique and work our way from the ground up to build a solid foundation, from which you will begin your Darbuka journey.

This foundation will be critical to your Darbuka success.

The reason is simple; you absolutely cannot build on weak foundations, especially in music. These fundamental techniques should be second nature to you if you want to advance quickly and efficiently through your Darbuka studies. Later in your studies, you don't want to stop and think, "What's a Doum again?". You want to be confident that you have the tools you need to play any rhythm that's thrown at you.

Think of it as a toolbox; if you're missing the drill, all of the screws are useless.

To make it easier, I've split this book up into 11 chapters. Many of these chapters cover elements of technique. However, I have included specific sections to help you get used to applying this technique to an actual rhythm. By the end of this book, you should not only know the basic techniques that you require to play the Darbuka effectively, but you should also know the basic forms of one of the most popular Darbuka rhythm families around! That's no small achievement!

Don't progress past any chapter until you've understood the topic entirely.

For example, Chapter 3 (The Doum) cannot be mastered until Chapter 2 (How to Hold the Darbuka) is mastered. The whole book works similarly, and it is critical at this stage not to miss anything. Without these fundamentals, you will struggle significantly later on in your journey. If you have issues with any topics at this stage, don't worry – keep practicing and it will come. If you're really struggling, check out the Darbuka Mastery Program, the instructional video course that goes along with this book. You can find more information about the Darbuka Mastery Program on the Malik Instruments website.

I'll finish this introduction with a thought. When I was at the beginning of my journey, studying Darbuka in London, I asked my teacher how long I should spend practicing.

My teacher replied, "About an hour."

I said, "An hour a week, that's doable..."

My teacher replied, "I meant an hour a day."

"Oh!" I exclaimed.

Let's get started!

Lesson 1

Darbuka Origins and Structure

Introduction

Let's introduce the Darbuka instrument and get to know what it is. The Darbuka has many names, comes in different shapes and sizes and has various parts. In this chapter, we will set the scene and get to know the instrument better.

The Darbuka

The Darbuka is a drum that we typically class in the World Percussion category of musical instruments. It is a goblet-shaped drum that many people consider to be the leader of percussion instruments in the Middle East and North Africa. It is also played widely across South East Asia, namely in Indonesia and Malaysia.



Figure 1 - A Darbuka

The Darbuka is known as a goblet drum because its shape narrows in the middle and widens at the base. This shape is similar to that of a goblet or chalice glass. Historically Darbukas were made of clay or wood with an animal skin stretched over the head; such materials would create high-quality sounds. However, we typically make contemporary darbukas out of aluminium, copper or synthetic fibres, which are ideal as they prevent damage to the Darbuka and don't break as easily as clay. They are also easier to work with and therefore make large-scale production easier.

Darbukas are commonly adorned with beautiful and fantastic designs, differentiating them from almost any other musical instrument. Many would say that a Darbuka isn't complete without a colourful design flaunting the incredible design and technical prowess of the Darbuka's craftsman. One may also note the different designs that the Darbuka can take dependant on its region of manufacture. Darbukas from Turkey use different designs to those from Egypt, which use different designs to those from Indonesia. The Darbuka may well be the best ornamented in the world that is in mass use. We can use

various materials to create these fantastic designs, including paints, glosses, Mother of Pearl gemstones and coloured metals, plastics and stones.

Origins

The Darbuka has been around for millennia. Some have estimated that its origins date back to as far as the Babylonian period. This estimate is likely because hand drums have been an integral part of many cultures and societies, likely since early human history. The Darbuka, a **goblet-shaped** hand drum, has manifested itself in its current form in the Middle East, North Africa, South-East Asia and Turkey. Other instruments such as the African Djembe, Iranian Tombak, and various other West African drums are likely to be different manifestations of the same original Babylonian drums.



Figure 2 - A Djembe

In present times the Darbuka is deeply embedded into Middle Eastern and North African heritage. It is used in countries like Algeria and Syria as a core part of any wedding or celebration. Consequently, most children (male and female) grow up with some education on how to play the Darbuka. It's no surprise then that some of the greatest Darbuka masters alive today hail from such countries.

Different names that the Darbuka can take

The Darbuka can be referred to by many names. The name used can vary by the size of the Darbuka in question, or the region in which the name is used. To make matters even more confusing, most people use various names interchangeably, which makes it harder to identify what someone is referring to. For simplicity, we consistently use the term “Darbuka” to refer to the drum in question. However, the below list should help you understand what other people mean when they use different names.

- **Darbuka** - If you're reading this, you know what a Darbuka is. They are fantastic percussion instruments that create amazing sounds.
- **Doumbek** - Another word for Darbuka. Some would say that Doumbek and Darbuka are different, but in practice, most people use the names interchangeably.
- **Sombaty** - A (slightly) larger sized Darbuka.
- **Doholla** - A very large Darbuka.
- **Tabla** - In India, this instrument is a two-part drum that's part of the Indian musical heritage. In Egypt, a Tabla means a Darbuka.

- **Tarabana/Darabana** - Another word for a Darbuka, commonly used across Eastern Europe.
- **Bongo** - A different instrument that has nothing to do with a Darbuka.

Let's just analyse the above names in a little more depth. Inside Egypt, we use the words Tabla, Sombaty and Doholla primarily. Since Egypt is commonly agreed to be home to the best of Arabic music, this is important to note.

Outside of Egypt, in most Arab and Western countries, we drop the word Tabla, and replace it with Darbuka or Doumbek:

- Darbuka, coming from the Arabic word *Daraba* (to strike) is a widespread name that people use.
 - I use the word Darbuka when referring to this instrument, and many other Westerners will also do the same.
- Doumbek is another popular name that is used. It is likely named as such because of the sounds the instrument makes when played (namely Doum and Tek).
 - The name Doumbek is likely used rather than Doumtek because of the ease of pronunciation.

Finally, within Eastern Europe (Poland, Romania, etc.), it is unanimously agreed that the name Tarabana/Darabana is used.

Note: You should never refer to the Darbuka as a “Bongo drum” or “the Bongos”. Calling the Darbuka by one of these names is a cardinal sin in the Darbuka world.

Different types of Darbuka available

There are many types of Darbuka available on the market today. We have different materials, different sizes, and even different shapes. Let's explore some of these and see what's what.

Wood Darbukas are a thing of the past

These are rare to come by, and when you do find them, they tend to be quite terrible. I wouldn't recommend getting a wood Darbuka. They are often on the shelves of street sellers on the streets of Cairo, and these "instruments" are considered souvenirs at best.

Clay Darbukas can be amazing but are challenging to maintain

Some may say that since Darbukas were traditionally made of clay, that these are the best kind of Darbuka. The reality is that Darbukas were also traditionally played in deserts, where it was always hot and dry. Nowadays, the Darbuka is played around the world where there are a multitude of different temperatures and humidities to consider. Herein lies the core problem of the clay Darbuka; the skin is tied to the body using rope, and the skin is usually a natural animal skin. This type of roped skin clay Darbuka may lose its tension should the humidity increase, which is a real problem in most parts of Europe

and the US. It's also very fragile, which means if you hit it against something hard or drop it, it will likely crack and break beyond repair. If you're a beginner, this choice of Darbuka may be unwise.

That's not to say that clay Darbukas aren't a wonder to play. I personally have a clay Doholla which I use and play all the time. However, it was hand-made, costly and is prone to damage. I, therefore, don't travel with this Doholla where possible. It also requires that an adjustable heat source is placed inside the Doholla (usually a light bulb) to keep the skin tight and playable in all climates. As such, you need a socket available to play this Doholla!



Figure 3 - A Bass Doholla

Metal Darbukas are convenient and sound fantastic

The invention of the metal Darbuka in the 20th century was indeed a brilliant idea. You now no longer have to worry about a Darbuka going out of tune when it's needed most, nor do you have to worry about it dropping and breaking. Parts are easy to find and fit without any professional help, and they generally sound quite good too. I recommend a metal Darbuka to all beginners trying their hand at Darbuka for the first time. After all, I learnt on a metal Darbuka myself.

A note on Turkish flat-head Darbukas

The Turkish Darbuka is an interesting spin on the classic round-headed design of the Arabic Darbuka. The Turkish Darbuka is characterised by its flat head with sharp edges and exposed tuning lugs. This flat head design makes finger snaps, and very advanced Turkish split-hand rolls more comfortable to play. They're also easier to make and so can be cheaper too. Unfortunately, they are not ideal for beginners and are optimised more for someone playing using the Turkish split-hand technique. This technique is quite an advanced style of playing that you should build up towards over some years. As such, a typical beginner would be better off with a standard Arabic Darbuka at the start of their journey.



Figure 4 - A Turkish flat-head Darbuka

Darbukas used in this book series

In this book series (and the Darbuka Mastery Program), I use an Arabic Sombaty Darbuka for all illustrations and teaching. This is my Darbuka of choice, in most matters of teaching and performing. A standard Darbuka is also great. However, it doesn't pack as much of a punch as a Sombaty Darbuka.

Furthermore, I much prefer metal Darbukas to clay Darbukas to teach with, simply because of the ease of not having to tune or heat a clay Darbuka, and the fact that metal Darbukas are lighter and less prone to damage.

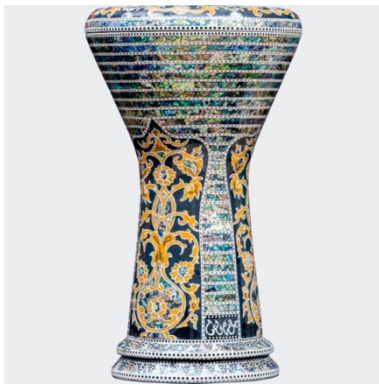


Figure 5 - The Pearl Temple Artisan Sombaty

The specs of the Darbuka I use are below. Note that a model like this can be easily purchased from the Malik Instruments website:

Name: The Pearl Temple Artisan Sombaty

Type: Arabic Sombaty Darbuka

Manufacturer: Gawharet El Fan

Country of Manufacture: Egypt

Weight: 6.1kg

Head width: 23cm

Total width: 30cm

Height: 48cm

Inner shell material: Aluminium

Design Materials:

- White Mother of Pearl (Nacre)
- Blue Mother of Pearl (Abalone)
- Coloured stones
- Coloured gloss

Head Type: Malik Instruments Standard Egyptian Plastic Head

Tuning Lugs: 6

I am 100% confident that this is one of the most fantastic sounding Darbukas available on the open market and would strongly recommend it.

Differentiation from similar musical instruments

The single-headed feature of the Darbuka is what distinguishes it from other similar musical instruments such as the Indian Tabla or the Dhol. Another point of differentiation is that it is played with the hands, rather than with a stick or beater. This design allows us to use intricate finger patterns in Darbuka rhythms, which is what makes it such a popular instrument.



Figure 6 - An Indian Tabla

It is likely that the most similar instrument to the Darbuka is the Djembe, another similarly shaped drum from Africa. The main difference between the Darbuka and the Djembe lies in the Djembe's typically wooden body and natural skin, and the Darbuka's typically metal body and plastic skin. The Darbuka creates a sharper sound of a much higher pitch, whereas the Djembe produces a deeper sound of a relatively lower pitch. As such, a Darbuka will cut through a mix of musicians more easily. I personally very much enjoy a mix that includes both a Darbuka and a Djembe!

Typical structure

The Darbuka body is traditionally made of clay. Ropes are tied over the top of the body to allow a natural skin (such as fish or goat) to cover the large opening. This structure allows for the most powerful and resonant sounds.

In modern times, Darbuka bodies are usually made of metal. Bolts are screwed into the metal shell to hold down the plastic skin. This structure is more practical as leather skin can vary in tightness depending on the weather and humidity, whereas plastic skin will always remain at the same level of tightness. A metal body is also more resistant to damage and will not break as easily as a clay body might.

A plastic skin cannot be used on a clay Darbuka, as the clay Darbuka is quite brittle; drilling holes in it would weaken its structure.

Darbuka Diagrams



Figure 7 - Metal Darbuka diagram

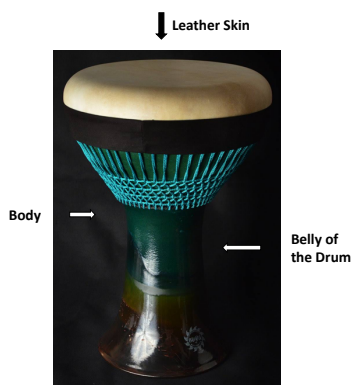


Figure 8 - Clay Darbuka diagram

Chapter 2

How to Hold the Darbuka

Introduction

There are two common sitting positions when playing the Darbuka. Depending on how you will sit when playing, there will be a slightly different technique to hold the Darbuka securely.

Position 1: Sitting on a chair

Sit down on a chair with both of your feet flat on the floor in front of you. The Darbuka should sit on your **non-dominant** thigh with the open-ended side pointing behind you and the skin covered side pointing in front of you at a 45° angle.

You should then adjust your dominant leg so that the bottom part of the Darbuka rim is supported by the inner thigh of your dominant leg to hold the drum in place. You should be able to let the Darbuka rest without needing your hands to stop it from falling over. As such, your dominant foot might be slightly raised, whereas your non-dominant foot should be flat on the ground.

You should then lightly hug the body of the Darbuka with your non-dominant arm to keep it steady while playing. Your non-dominant elbow should keep the Darbuka tight against your side, and your non-dominant palm should rest on the top of the Darbuka rim, without touching the skin.

Remember that anything that touches the skin will affect the resultant sound. If your non-dominant hand is resting on the plastic skin itself, the sound won't resonate properly.

Note: If unsure, your dominant hand is typically the hand you write with.



Figure 9 - Holding the Darbuka sat on a chair (front)



Figure 10 - Holding the Darbuka sat on a chair (side)

Position 2: Sitting on the floor

Sit down on the floor in a cross-legged position. The Darbuka should sit on your non-dominant thigh with the open-ended side pointing behind you and the skin covered side (the Darbuka's head) pointing in front of you at a 45° angle.

You should then lightly hug the body of the Darbuka with your non-dominant elbow to keep it steady while playing. Your non-dominant palm should rest on the top of the Darbuka rim.

The Darbuka may fall inwards into the space between your crossed legs. This position is okay, as long as it doesn't render the drum unplayable. If it is falling too far inwards, you might need to bring the Darbuka back a little, so that it rests closer to your non-dominant thigh.



Figure 11 - Holding the Darbuka sat on the floor

Playing while standing

The only exception I've seen from the above methods is a performance technique of playing the Darbuka while standing. Playing while standing is common if performing in an environment which requires you to move around, or perhaps if you were accompanying a dance or march. While it is possible to use a drum strap to secure the Darbuka to your shoulder while you play, I would not recommend doing this until you are at least an intermediate player with strong foundations. You will have to dynamically

adapt your playing style with the drum's movement, which will be tough for a beginner. My advice would be to learn and practice while sitting on a chair or the floor. This will allow you to build your foundations in a strong position and help you progress through your Darbuka studies. Once you're confident and secured in your basics, grab a drum strap and give playing while standing a shot!

Space allows sound to travel

When you choose where you will sit to play, practice or perform, you should consider how much space there is behind your Darbuka. You need space behind your drum to allow the sound to travel, and you need to ensure that there aren't any thick cloths or materials absorbing your Darbuka's sound. Assess your surroundings:

- Are you sitting on the floor in front of a sofa?
- Are you sitting on a chair with a thick curtain behind you?
- Are you sat on your bed reading this book on your laptop?!

All of these scenarios will kill any bass coming out of the back of your Darbuka and will make your playing sound flat. This is a common problem that beginners face when practicing. The location they have chosen to practice doesn't facilitate sound to travel, and as such, their Darbuka will sound bad even if they're using the correct technique!

If in doubt, go to a location where you are confident there are optimal conditions for good sound to be created. A medium-sized room with wooden or tiled floors and mostly hard surfaces is ideal. Typically, in an ordinary house, most people find the best sound in their kitchen (if it's big enough). Outside the house, a sports hall, performance hall or the like would be fantastic. If you're not sure how good your Darbuka is supposed to sound, find a good room and try it out! You might be surprised how different this space will sound compared to your bedroom!

Chapter 3

The Doum

Introduction

The Doum is the bass stroke. This stroke creates a deep and powerful sound from the belly of the drum that is undoubtedly the core beat of any rhythm. When the Doum lands on the skin of the drum, it bounces and causes the skin to vibrate, creating sound waves that repeatedly shoot off the inner walls of the drum; getting stronger and stronger. Eventually, these sound waves fly out of the back of the drum, creating a deep and powerful sound.

The Doum is the first dominant hand stroke that we will cover. The dominant hand strokes are the strokes that are played with your main playing hand.

Note: If unsure about which hand your dominant hand is, ask yourself which hand you write with. Your writing hand is the hand you will play best with. This hand should thus be the hand that is free to move around, and not in charge of holding the darbuka in place.

Technique

Keeping your four fingers closed, but not tight, strike the middle of the Darbuka. The top two parts of each of your fingers should land on the middle of the Darbuka skin, and the palm of your hand should land on the Darbuka's metal rim. As soon as your fingers have made contact, they should bounce off the drum and pull away immediately. The fingers should not linger on the drum.



Figure 12 - The Doum's starting position



Figure 13 - The Doum's striking position



Figure 14 - The Doum's finishing position



Figure 15 - Parts of hand engaged in the Doum

The sustain

A key point to mention here is that the Doum is characterised by its sustain. The sustain is the elongated sound you will hear after you play the Doum that should last at least one second. You will know that your Doum technique is getting better when you can consistently create a long sustain.

The palm's support

The Doum strikes the skin using the fingers. However, the fingers themselves are a relatively weak part of your hand. The best way to add power and depth to your Doum is to strike the skin with the fingers while your palm lands on the metal head for support.

The palm should make firm contact with the metal head to provide the most support possible. Focus on trying to get the palm and fingers to land at precisely the same time to add power to your Doum.

Practice Tips

There is a methodology that can be followed when practicing the dominant hand strokes, and this methodology was taught to me early on in my studies. When you practice, practice by playing a Doum every two seconds. If you imagine a clock going tick-tock, you should play a Doum on every tick. The reason for this is that you need to allow time to hear and critique your own mistakes. If you play a stroke and you play another one straight after it, you won't have given yourself time to stop and think about the stroke you just played. Ask yourself the following questions:

- How long did the sustain last?
- Which parts of my fingers landed?
- Did my palm land?
- Did the Doum sound flat or bassy?
- Was that the best Doum I've played so far?
- Etc.

By asking yourself these questions and considering your answers, you will get a better understanding of how well you are doing.

A key point to mention here is that initially, you might not be getting your Doum to sound very good, but if you follow the technique tips mentioned, you will probably hit 10% or so of your strokes accurately (albeit by chance). The trick is to identify which Doum you accidentally played which was correct, to recognise that it was correct, to remember the technique you used for that correct Doum, and to try and recreate it. Once you've heard a correct Doum enough times, you will know what it's supposed to sound like, and you will easily be able to reproduce it. If this is the first percussion instrument you're learning, it will take slightly longer to get this right. However, I'm 100% confident that with a few hours of practice, you will master it quickly. If you're really struggling, check out the Darbuka Mastery Program on the Malik Instruments website.

Note: Self-criticism is imperative when practicing by yourself without a teacher. You need to understand when you're doing well, and how much progress you are making. It gets easier with time. When you're experienced, you can learn dozens of new Darbuka rhythms just by reading a book, and you will know you're playing it correctly because you'd have had plenty of experience critiquing your own sound.

Common Mistakes

There are some common Doum mistakes you can watch out for. The result of these mistakes is almost always a Doum which is flat and without any bass. If you feel like your Doum falls into this category, be sure to read through this section carefully.

Palm not landing

Without your palm landing, the fingers have no support. Fact. You will likely cause your fingers to hurt/bleed because of the lack of support to your fingers, and you won't be able to produce a good, strong sound from your Doum. The palm is the key to the Doum, as it allows the Doum to strike with solidity and power. Ensure that your palm lands firmly on the metal head of the Darbuka.



Figure 16 - Palm not landing properly in the Doum

Playing too far in the middle

A common mistake – playing too far in the middle of the skin. If you strike the skin of the Darbuka with your whole hand, including your palm (i.e. your palm lands on the skin), you might be setting yourself up to fail. While initially, this will create a slightly better sound than what you've been doing before, the reality is that the effect of the palm landing on the skin is that the Doum will not boom properly because the fleshy part of your palm has killed all of the sounds. Think about how the Doum is created; it relies on the vibration of the skin to create the sound waves that get sent through the hollow section inside the drum. If you land your palm on the skin, you will reduce how much the skin is vibrating, and therefore reduce how strong your Doum sounds. Ensure that your palm doesn't land on the skin.



Figure 17 - Playing too far in the middle in the Doum

Not enough finger landing

I've seen this commonly with people who aren't using the correct hand position when making contact with the Darbuka. If you are only landing the tips of your fingers and not two whole parts, you will not be able to create a powerful sound. The resultant effect will "strike" too much, creating a very hard sound that sounds like you're smacking the skin, rather than a deep and bassy Doum. Ensure that you land the correct parts of your fingers. Review which parts of the hand should be landing on the skin to understand this issue further.

Not bouncing properly

Two issues can occur here with the bounce of the Doum:

The first issue is that you don't bounce at all, and your hand falls flat on the Darbuka skin. If your hand falls flat on the skin, you will not allow the skin to vibrate and therefore create a strong Doum. You must bounce the hand away from the skin after making contact to "push" the Doum through the body of the drum.

The second issue is bouncing too much and hitting the drum overly hard when you make contact, so much so that you can start to hear a high-pitched sound coming through in the overtones of the Doum. This problem is caused by too much of a "striking" effect on the metal section of the drum, which is what causes the high-pitched overtones. When you hit the drum, you should land your fingers and palm, make contact with the drum, and then bounce the fingers away, resulting in skin vibrating properly the Doum being "pushed" through the drum. By hitting the drum with too much force and "attack", you will reduce the effectiveness of your Doum.

Wrong room

I'll be honest; I didn't notice this as an issue until relatively late in my studies. I was with one of my very close friends, and we were about to perform at an event. It was a small event with some friends, and the room we were in was furnished with Moroccan sofas, which are sofas which sit only a few inches from the floor, so you when you sit down you end up sitting almost cross-legged on the floor. The event started, and the Doums on our Darbukas just weren't booming, and we couldn't work out why! My friend said it was because there were Jinn (evil spirits) in the room, and it became a running joke that every time we performed at that particular venue, our Darbukas didn't work because of the Jinn. It was only when I gained some more experience that I realised that it was just because I was sitting on a sofa and the cushioning on the sofa was blocking the sound! It turns out the venue wasn't haunted after all...

While I only noticed this quite late on, I have seen that many of my students have encountered this issue fairly early on so I've mentioned this early on in this book. For a full understanding of the problem just re-read through the last section of Chapter 2, titled "Space allows sound to travel". The long and short of it is that if you're sitting on a bed, sofa, or in front of a heavy curtain etc. you might block the bass sound of your Darbuka.

Bad tuning

This issue is less common on the Doum than on other strokes of the Darbuka, but if your tuning isn't great, or your Darbuka is of very low quality, your Doum might not boom properly. Some of the first Darbukas I ever owned were from Fez, in Morocco, and the skins were so tight that they didn't boom properly. I only realised this later on in my journey when I played one that I bought from the internet and realised the apparent difference in quality.

Chapter 4

The Tek

Introduction

The Tek is a high-pitched and sharp sound that is played on the rim of the Darbuka head. The Tek is a core part of a Darbuka rhythm. The differentiation between the Doum and the Tek allows rhythm to be created. The Tek is the second stroke we are learning with the dominant hand.

Technique

To play the Tek, let two of your fingers (the two between your index and your little finger) hit the part of the Darbuka skin that is closest to the rim with your dominant hand. The top part of each finger is the only part that should land on the Darbuka. It is essential to ensure that the Tek is played on the skin, not on the metal/clay rim itself. It is equally important to ensure that the Tek is not played so far away from the rim (towards the middle of the skin) that it starts to resemble a Doum.



Figure 18 - The Tek's starting position



Figure 19 - The Tek's striking position

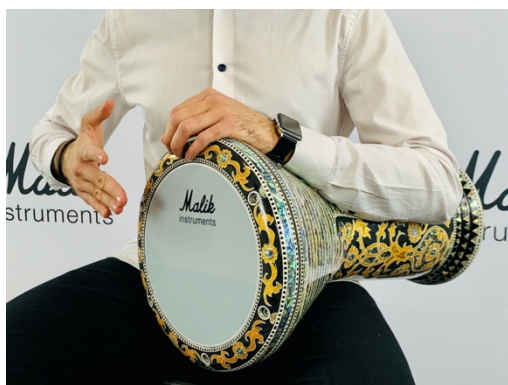


Figure 20 - The Tek's finishing position



Figure 21 - Parts of finger engaged in the Tek

The differentiation between the Doum and the Tek

The gradient between the Doum and the Tek is where the real magic in the Darbuka lies. The Doum is deep and powerful, whereas the Tek is high pitched and sharp. Playing the Darbuka with a wide gradient between the Doum and the Tek will create a strong rhythm. If your Doum and Tek sound very similar, you might have some issues

Practice Tips

The technique to use when practicing the Tek is very similar to that when practicing the Doum. Ensure to practice allowing yourself enough time to critique your Tek and give yourself constructive feedback. Some questions to ask yourself include:

- How well does the Tek ring?
- Are you hitting the same point each time on the skin?
- Is each Tek identical to the last?
- Are you engaging the correct parts of your finger? (see diagram)
- Is your wrist doing most of the work and your arm staying still? Or are you correctly using a good combination of wrist and forearm?

Another great exercise is to alternate playing Doum and Tek strokes on each second. So every time a clock goes Tick, you play a Doum, and every time the clock goes Tock, you play a Tek.

Common Mistakes

Let's look at some of the most common mistakes that are made with the Tek. Overall the Tek is one of the easiest strokes to play on the Darbuka so you shouldn't have too much difficulty. However, it's worth reading through the common mistakes and issues to see if there's anything you're doing wrong.

Weak overtones

The overtone is the ringing sound that is created after the Tek has been played. Listen to any Arabic Music track featuring a Darbuka, and you should instantly recognise the Tek from its bright overtones that create the signature Darbuka sound. The overtones are essential to get right and can initially be challenging to control.

The trick to understanding and mastering overtones is to assess how quickly your fingers bounce away after they make contact with the drum. Typically, the faster they bounce away, the stronger the overtone that is created (the ringing sound).

To see the difference, play one Tek that bounces away quickly, and then one Tek that doesn't bounce away, instead it should remain pressed to the skin. You should find that the Tek that bounces away creates a strong and clear overtone, whereas the Tek that remains pressed to the skin doesn't create any overtone, and instead creates more of a pressing sound.

This exercise should demonstrate how overtones are created, but there is another element to consider; controlling the overtones based on the sound you are trying to create. Later on in this book, we will look at strong Tekes that are part of the core rhythm (Iqa'), and weak Tekes, which we use to make the rhythm sound better. Core Tekes should have strong and clear overtones, and weak Tekes should have weaker overtones. For this chapter, you should focus on getting the ring as strong and clear possible, and create powerful overtones.

Playing too far in the middle

A widespread issue with the Tek is using too much of your finger and as such, playing too far in the middle of the skin. An example of this might be using two parts of your finger rather than just one part. This creates a deeper and more bass-heavy sound, as you're closer to the middle of the skin where the Doum is typically played. If you create this deeper and more bass-heavy sound, you will not be able to produce the correct overtones of the Tek. It is crucial to ensure that the right parts of your fingers are hitting the skin. See the above diagram for a reminder on the correct parts of the finger to use.



Figure 22 - Playing too far in the middle in the Tek

Bad tuning

Bad tuning can manifest itself clearly with the Tek, and it can get ugly. A poorly tuned Darbuka might be able to produce a decent Doum, but the Tek can sound awful if the Darbuka isn't tuned well. For example, when the tuning is too tight, the Tek will sound choked. When the tuning is too loose, the Tek will sound like a church bell, rather than a Tek. The trick is to get a balance between the two. Read Appendix C for a good understanding of when to tune your Darbuka.

Chapter 5

Reading Drum Tabs

Introduction

Drum tabs are simplified ways for drummers to read and notate rhythms. They replace traditional sheet music for many drummers who want to start playing and practicing but have not gotten to the point in their studies where they have learnt how to read musical scores. In this book, I will use drum tabs to notate the rhythms we will learn.

It's essential to read the following section slowly to understand precisely what a drum tab is and how it's supposed to be read. This understanding will make it much easier for you to read the rhythms that we'll cover later on.

Counting beats

If we were learning proper musical theory and reading from sheet music, we would start this section with an understanding of time signatures. However, drum tabs simplify this for us by allowing us to use beat cycles to just count beats to help us determine the length of a rhythm.

A beat cycle is the repetition of a specified number of beats. For example, the number of beats in a 4-beat cycle is... 4! So, to count out a 4-beat cycle, we just say:

1, 2, 3, 4, 1, 2, 3, 4, 1, 2, 3, 4, 1, 2... etc. Simple!

Let's look at how this looks on a drum tab:

Drum Tab with a 4-Beat Cycle												TS: 4/4	
1				2				3				4	

This drum tab shows a 4-beat cycle, which means we count upwards to 4, and then repeat.

Let's look at a few more examples:

Drum Tab with a 2-Beat Cycle								TS: 2/4	
1				2					

Drum Tab with an 8-Beat Cycle								TS: 8/4
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	

Rhythmic emphasis (Iqa')

There is another vital element of a drum tab, specific to Arabic Music. This is referred to as the Iqa', or rhythmic emphasis. We will refer to this as rhythmic emphasis in this book, however, note that the word Iqa' will be commonly used by most experienced Darbuka players. Please carefully read and understand this section, as it is critical to your Darbuka success.

Rhythmic emphasis is used in most forms of music; it helps us understand where the points of emphasis are in the rhythm and to understand the rhythm better. We will look at examples of where this is **essential** later on in the book. However, there is a critical concept for Arabic Music that must be understood to read drumming tabs properly.

An Arabic rhythm is defined by its *ruh'* (*soul*), not it's notation.

This is especially the case in non-percussive rhythms, like Arabic Maqamat (scales), where there are noticeable tonal variations between what's written on the sheet and what's played in real life. In drum rhythms, the concept of ruh' is used. However, it is used to define what notes of the rhythm constitute the “core rhythm”, to allow for good ornamentation (covered later on in this book).

Let's look at the below rhythm, the Heavy Sa'idi:

Heavy Sa'idi								TS: 4/4
1	2	3	4					
D	D	D	D	T				

This rhythm is 4-beat rhythm, as we can see (there are only four beats in the second row).

However, there are 5 points of rhythmic emphasis in the rhythm (there are 4 Doum notes and 1 Tek note).

For this rhythm to **be** the Heavy Sa'idi in practice, these Doum and Tek notes need to hit exactly where they are supposed to hit; otherwise, the Ruh' will be lost. If the Ruh' is lost, we lose our rhythm. The location of these five beats is known as the rhythmic emphasis.

Multiple notes within each beat

The only problem is, there seems to be space for four gaps underneath each beat! Take a look at the 1st beat of Heavy Sa'idi for example:

Heavy Sa'idi First Beat			
1			
D		D	

Within the first beat of this rhythm, we have space for **four** notes. At the moment, two of them are filled with Doum notes, and two of them are empty. Let's look at how this works.

To help us notate what notes we are going to play within each beat, we can split every beat into several different notes. For the sake of simplicity, I have divided all of the beats in this book into four notes. This means that within each beat, four possible notes can be played. We can count this as follows:

If counting just the 4-beat cycle, we can count as follows:

1, 2, 3, 4, 1, 2, 3, 4, etc.

If counting the 4-beat cycle, including the four parts of each beat, we can count as follows:

1, e, &, a, 2, e, &, a, 3, e, &, a, 4, e, &, a, 1, e, &, a, 2, e, &, a, 3, e, &, a, 4, e, &, a, etc.

This will be difficult to get your head around initially. To understand this better, try saying the above count-cycle in time with a clock. At every second, you should be saying a number. Between each number, you should be saying "e & a". Remember to repeat after every four counts! You can check out the Darbuka Mastery Program on the Malik Instruments website to see me demonstrating this in action.

Chapter 6

The Heavy Sa'idi

Introduction

Let's get down to business and put some of what we have learnt into practice. We are going to look at our first Darbuka rhythm, the Heavy Sa'idi.

The basic form of the Heavy Sa'idi

The basic form of Heavy Sa'idi includes only Doum notes and Tek notes and is a straightforward rhythm to learn. I almost always start with this rhythm when teaching Darbuka because of its ease to play. The drum tab looks like this:

Heavy Sa'idi										TS: 4/4	
1		2		3		4					
D		D			D	D			T		

As you can see, the Heavy Sa'idi is a 4-beat rhythm, with five notes in it; 4 Doum notes and 1 Tek note.

However, to get us playing this rhythm quickly and decently, I'm going to present it differently for you.

Internalising the Heavy Sa'idi rhythm

Look at the following drum tab:

Heavy Sa'idi (X means space)										TS: 4/4	
1		2		3		4					
D		D		X		D		D		X	
									T		X

If you notice, the rhythmic emphasis is still the same, i.e. the highlighted Doum and Tek notes haven't moved at all. However, I have added three instances of the letter "X" into the rhythm. These "X" notes stand for a Space. All I want you to do is remember that when you see the letter "X", there is a space there. If you're confused, don't worry! We are going to internalise this rhythm using the "X" notes to help us.

I'm going to introduce two ways to internalise this rhythm. Note that this doesn't work for every rhythm, and we shouldn't need to internalise more complicated rhythms like this later in the book. We are just going to try a few things to make it easier for us to learn our first rhythm.

Internalising the Rhythm by saying it

One of the easiest ways to internalise a rhythm and get used to it before playing it on the Darbuka is to say the rhythm and get used to its flow. I want you to say the rhythm like this:

Doum
Doum
Space
Doum
Doum
Space
Tek
Space
REPEAT

Each Doum, Space and Tek should be said with an equal amount of time between them. I want you to tap repeatedly and evenly on something (like a table, or even your leg) while you say this rhythm. Each time you tap, you should be saying one of Doum, Space or Tek. After every eight taps, you should be repeating the rhythm. Once you can do this, move on to walking the rhythm.

Internalising the Rhythm by walking it

Once we can say the rhythm, we are going to practice the rhythm by saying it while walking. It might seem a little strange at first, but it is a fantastic way to get used to the timing in this particular rhythm.

Step 1: Find a place where there is space to walk around (a garden, a street, a park etc.)

Step 2: Start walking at a constant speed, not too fast, not too slowly. About the same speed you would walk when regularly going about your day.

Step 3: Start repeating the rhythm, saying a note every time you put your foot down and take a step, as follows:

Footstep	Note that you say
One	Doum
Two	Doum
Three	Space
Four	Doum
Five	Doum
Six	Space
Seven	Tek
Eight	Space

Step 4: Once you can do this, and you are comfortable with it, I want you to stop saying “Space”. This means on your 3rd, 6th, and 8th footstep, you just take a step, without saying anything. It should sound like this:

Footstep	Note that you say
One	Doum
Two	Doum
Three	
Four	Doum
Five	Doum
Six	
Seven	Tek
Eight	

Congratulations, if you can do this, you’ve been saying the Heavy Sa’idi rhythm correctly! That’s a fantastic accomplishment. It’s now time to start playing this on the Darbuka.

Playing the rhythm on the Darbuka

Now that you can say the rhythm correctly, we're going to start playing it.

Note: You should be able to make a decent sound with your Doum (if not, revisit Chapter 3) and you should also be able to make a good sound with your Tek (if not, revisit Chapter 4).

Here’s how I want you to start playing the Heavy Sa’idi:

1. Before you start playing, just practice the Doum Doum sound. Just get used to playing two Doum’s right after each other.
2. Once you're confident at this, ensure you are in the optimal sitting position (either on a chair or on the floor) to start practicing.
3. Start saying the Heavy Sa'idi rhythm, as you've been practicing.
4. Once you are saying the rhythm in a nice flow, start playing the Doum and the Tek strokes along with your voice.
5. After a little practice, and a maybe more than a few mistakes, you should be able to play the Heavy Sa'idi confidently!

Note: If you are struggling, you can watch the instructional videos in the Darbuka Mastery Program.

Chapter 7

The Ka

Introduction

The Ka is the first stroke we will learn with the non-dominant hand, and this stroke is used primarily for ornamentation.

The Ka stroke is very similar to the Tek. Even though it is played with the left hand, there shouldn't be any significant differences in the sound produced by the Ka and the Tek.

The Ka can be played much faster and more regularly than the Tek, as the Ka is played with the non-dominant hand, which plays relatively fewer strokes than the dominant hand.

Technique

When setting up for the Ka, you should ensure that your non-dominant elbow is holding the Darbuka in place appropriately so that your non-dominant arm is free to move.



Figure 23 - The Ka's holding position

The palm of the left hand should sit on the top of the Darbuka rim. The Ka is played with your ring finger. To play the Ka, you should raise your wrist and swing it down, onto the part of the skin that is closest to the Darbuka rim, hitting the skin at roughly a 45° angle. This produces a sharp and high-pitched sound.



Figure 24 - The Ka's starting position



Figure 25 - The Ka's striking position



Figure 26 - Parts of hand engaged in the Ka

Note: When the Ka is not being played, the fingers should rest on the Darbuka's metal/clay rim, not on the plastic/leather skin. Also, make sure that the Ka isn't played too far into the middle of the skin, or it will create a deeper sound than it should.

Ornamentation

The Ka is primarily used to add ornamentation to a rhythm. Ornamentation can transform a basic rhythm into a complex and unique rhythm that brings out the individual character of the drummer. Ornamentation is like a sweetener, through which a drummer can create a musical flavour that is unique to their playing style.

Practice Tips

The Ka can mostly be practiced through applying it to a rhythm, just as we will do in the next chapter. As such, you don't have to practice the Ka as extensively as you needed to practice the Doum and Tek, however, you should still get in a little practice moving around the drum and including the Ka. An excellent exercise to do is to sit in front of a clock and play a stroke on every second, in the following order:

Second	Stroke
One	Doum
Two	Ka
Three	Tek
Four	Ka
Five	Doum
Six	Ka
Seven	Tek
Eight	Ka
Repeat	Start again from the top of the table.

Common Mistakes

The Ka is a difficult stroke to play. Full stop. Beginners do tend to struggle for a while with playing the Ka correctly, but with proper practice, it will come. At this stage in your learning, I'd recommend trying to get a strong as sound as you can from Ka as possible, through whatever means. You can use more fingers if need be and even raise your hand a little more to create a stronger sound. However, you should always remember that the Ka is meant to be played with just the ring (fourth) finger, by itself. If you get used to playing the Ka with more than one finger, you will have to train yourself out of this habit later on in your learning, because more advanced techniques rely on the Ka being played with one finger only. Nevertheless, there are some issues you can watch out for:

Not playing at the top of the drum

Playing at the top of the drum is essential to perform the Ka correctly. Your hand must land at the top of the drum, not on the sides of the drum. See the below picture for a demonstration of the common beginner mistake of not playing at the top of the drum.



Figure 27 - Not playing at the top of the Darbuka in the Ka

Pointing the fingers straight down

While the stroke is played right at the top of the drum, the fingers do not land in a position where they point straight down to the floor—instead, the fingers land pointing at an angle. I like to say that they are pointing towards to the Tek when they land, which usually helps students visualise where the Ka should point when it lands. See below picture for a demonstration.



Figure 28 - Pointing the fingers straight down in the Ka

Lack of wrist engagement

Without engaging the wrist, the Ka becomes a challenging stroke to play. The Ka needs to use the power and "flick" generated by the wrist to make a powerful sound. Without this power, the Ka will tire your hands very quickly, and you'll struggle to play at any speed. Ensure that the power of your Ka comes from the wrist, and not just the fingers. Look at the below picture and how large the gap is between my wrist and the drum. My wrist should be touching the drum, not 10cm away from it.



Figure 29 - Lack of wrist engagement in the Ka

Chapter 8

Basic Ornamentation

Introduction

Ornamentation is the act of making something prettier. As such, we can make our Darbuka rhythms prettier by ornamenting them!

While the next book in the Darbuka Mastery series is dedicated to ornamentation, we are going to introduce some primary forms of ornamentation to our repertoire, by utilising the Ka stroke that we have just learnt.

The Ka stroke is known as an ornamentative stroke, because it is almost exclusively used for ornamentation, and very few rhythms use the Ka for rhythmic emphasis. Let's look at how we can ornament the rhythm that we've just learnt, the Heavy Sa'idi!

Adding ornaments to the Heavy Sa'idi

Let's get started, the ornamented version of the Heavy Sa'idi we are about to learn looks as follows:

Heavy Sa'idi with Basic Ornaments											TS: 4/4
1			2			3			4		
D		D	k		D	D		k	T	t	k

Now, upon first glance, that is quite a complicated rhythm! We've added four notes into the rhythm we were playing previously, and the last section is relatively advanced to play. Nevertheless, I'm confident you will be able to play this rhythm.

For us to play this rhythm, let's break it down into some more accessible versions so we can progress up to this rhythm. Since this is one of the first rhythms we are learning, we're going to break this down a lot more than we usually would, so if you're finding it easy, you might get through this chapter quite quickly! If you're struggling a little, don't worry. Take your time, practice, and it **will** come.

Progression 1 – Adding a single Ka

In our first progression, we are going to start by taking the standard Heavy Sa'idi and adding a single Ka.

Heavy Sa'idi with Basic Ornaments (Progression 1)										TS: 4/4
1		2		3			4			
D		D		k		D		D		T

I'd like you to get used to walking this rhythm also (like we did with the basic Heavy Sa'idi). However, there is a slight twist in this scenario. I want you to split the rhythm into **two** distinct sections. The first section is Doum – Doum, and the second section is Doum – Doum – Ka – Tek. Walk the rhythm out like this:

Footstep	Note that you say	
One	Doum	Section 1
Two	Doum	
Three		
Four	Doum	Section 2
Five	Doum	
Six	Ka	
Seven	Tek	
Eight		

Note that on the 3rd and 8th footsteps, you should stay silent and not say anything. After a few minutes or so of walking out this rhythm, you should have it memorised. Remember to think of the two separate sections, as we will use these later on when building up our rhythm.

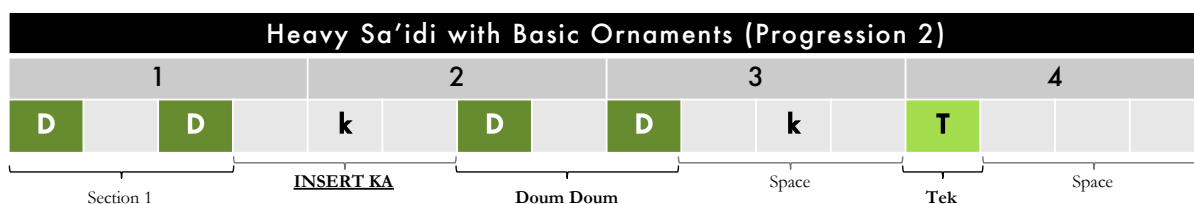
Once you are confident with saying the rhythm and understand the two sections, play it on the Darbuka! I'm confident that with some practice, you'll get it.

Progression 2 – Joining our two sections

Once you've mastered the first progression, it's time to move on to the second progression. This progression involves joining the sections you have previously practiced and feel confident with. Let's first look at the drum tab for the next progression:

Heavy Sa'idi with Basic Ornaments (Progression 2)										TS: 4/4
1		2		3			4			
D		D		k		D		k		T

For this progression, we are going to join the sections we learnt last time with a Ka. As follows:



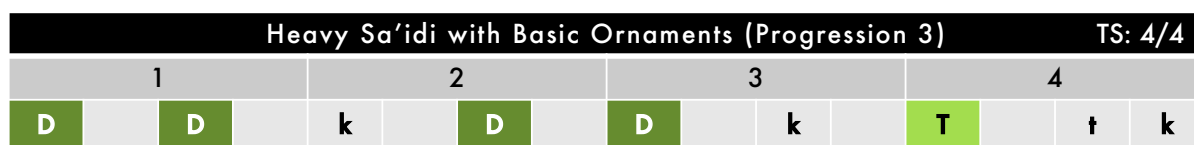
It might help to walk out the rhythm as you did for the previous progression. You can find the notes below:

Footstep	Note that you say
One	Doum
Two	Doum
Three	Ka
Four	Doum
Five	Doum
Six	Ka
Seven	Tek
Eight	

If you can master saying this rhythm, and you're comfortable with it, give it a shot on the Darbuka! This one should drop into place nicely if you've gotten this far.

Progression 3 – The Teka

Congratulations on making it to the final progression. In this progression, we will look at the “Teka” stroke that needs to be played at the end of the rhythm, to join the end of this rhythm with the start of the next rhythm. This is the fastest series of strokes we have played so far, a “Tek Ka”, or “Teka”. The drum tab looks like this:



As you can see, the end of the rhythm contains a Tek and a Ka. However, these have some previously unseen characteristics:

- The Tek is in lower case and is not highlighted. This is because it's an ornamentative Tek, and hence should be played more lightly than a standard Tek.
- The Tek and Ka are very close together – and they are played immediately after each other (at twice the speed that you play the Doum Doum!). To help us with this, we will refer to them as a "Teka", rather than a "Tek Ka".

Mastering this Teka stroke is essential to play this rhythm properly. For us to learn this Teka, let's take a little break from the Heavy Sa'idi rhythm and study a more straightforward phrase:

Teka Practice			
1			
D		T	k

This is a phrase that needs to be played multiple times to feel it properly. Note that it only lasts one note, which means that we repeat on every beat. It sounds like this:

TekaDoum - TekaDoum - TekaDoum.

To internalise this rhythm, I'd like you to walk the rhythm out, just as we've done previously. This time though, you're going to do something slightly different:

- On each footstep, you should be saying Doum.
- Before each Doum, there should be a Teka.
- The Teka and the Doum should be so close together that it's almost as if it were one word: TekaDoum.
- So, every time you take a step, you should say TekaDoum, while ensuring that your foot only actually touches the ground when you say the Doum part of TekaDoum.
- Try and walk for a few minutes while saying this phrase! By the end of this exercise, you should understand how this TekaDoum is used in action.
- After you've walked this exercise, try and play the rhythm on your Darbuka. TekaDoum, TekaDoum, TekaDoum, etc.

From this exercise, you should notice that the Teka is directly connected to the Doum, even though the Doum is at the beginning of the next line. This is precisely the case in our Heavy Sa'idi Rhythm:

Heavy Sa'idi with Basic Ornaments (Progression 3)										TS: 4/4
1		2		3		4				
D		D		k		D		D		T
								k		t
										k

At the end of the rhythm, we are going to play a Teka which leads directly into the Doum of the repeated rhythm. Let's play this rhythm in sets of four so that we can get used to joining the rhythms together with this "Teka" sound:

Heavy Sa'idi Practice Piece															
1															
D		D		k		D		D		k		T		t	k
5															
D		D		k		D		D		k		T		t	k
9															
D		D		k		D		D		k		T		t	k
13															
D		D		k		D		D		k		T			

Notice how the 16th beat (the very last beat on the bottom line) finishes with just a Tek. This is because we aren't going to join this final rhythm onto anything, so we don't need our Teka.

There we have it, practice this ornamented Heavy Sa'idi and feel proud that you can play such a complicated rhythm! It's no easy accomplishment!

Remember, if you're struggling you can always check out the Darbuka Mastery Program on the Malik Instruments site for further clarification.

Chapter 9

Use of a Metronome

Introduction

Let's look at how to use a metronome in our practice. If you're not familiar with what a metronome is, the definition from the Oxford dictionary is:

“A device used by musicians that marks time at a selected rate by giving a regular tick.”

A metronome can take many forms. The most popular I have seen used today are the traditional metronome and a metronome app on their phones:



Figure 30 - A traditional metronome

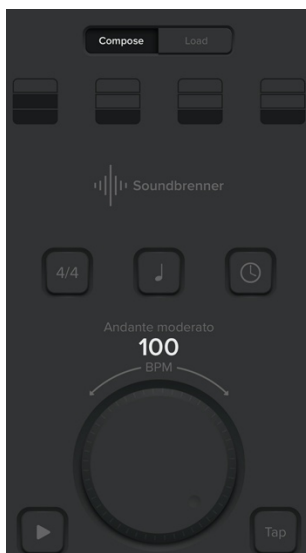


Figure 31 - The SoundBrenner metronome app

How to use a metronome

We've established what a metronome is, but how do we use one? It's quite simple in concept (although it can be challenging in practice). Let's walk through how we can use a metronome app to improve our playing.

1. Download a metronome app

The first thing you need to do is download a metronome app. I like to use “The Metronome by SoundBrenner”. It is a fantastic app that does exactly what it says on the tin. I know they also have various accessories, but I haven't personally used these. The app is available on both iPhone and android.

2. Set the time signature and tempo

We now need to set up the metronome to play the beats we want it to. We need to set 2 crucial things:

- i. The time signature
 - A time signature is a number that looks like a fraction. It has a numerator and a denominator. Examples of time signatures include 4/4, 2/4, 8/4, 10/8, 6/8, etc.
 - To set the time signature, you should find out the time signature of whatever rhythm it is you are practicing and trying to play. The time signature can usually be found next to the rhythm you're learning, or by Googling the rhythm. Any of the rhythms that I teach will have a time signature clearly mentioned. The time signature of the Heavy Sa'idi, for example, is 4/4.
- ii. The tempo
 - The tempo is the speed at which a passage of music should be played. We typically express the tempo as a number of Beats per Minute (BPM). For example, common tempos include 80 BPM, 100 BPM, 120 BPM and 150 BPM.
 - To determine the tempo to practice, we need to estimate how fast we want to play. Start playing the rhythm and assess whether the tempo you've chosen is too fast or too slow. If we are learning a rhythm together, I will include the recommended practice tempo.

3. Play the metronome

This one is a fairly straightforward step, but I'd like to just mention a point here regarding best practices:

- i. Let the metronome play for a few cycles first, just so that you can hear what the rhythm is like.
- ii. Try saying the rhythm in time with the metronome so that you get a feel for the timing and speed of the rhythm.

If you're struggling to say the rhythm, don't worry, keep practicing and it will come.

4. Start playing in time with the metronome

Here is the important step. The set-up is done, our metronome is playing, let's get into time with the metronome!

For us to do this, we must first identify where the strokes we are playing fall in relation to the metronome's beat. Let's use Heavy Sa'idi as an example of this:

Heavy Sa'idi												TS: 4/4
1			2			3			4			
D		D			D	D			T			

Exercise practice tempo: 80 BPM

Time Signature: 4/4 (this can also be found in the top right corner of the drum tab)

Now, since this is a 4/4 rhythm, our metronome will sound like this:

Tick – Tock – Tock – Tock – **Tick** – Tock – Tock – Tock – etc.

We can hear in our metronome that there is 1 Tick, followed by 3 Tocks. Our rhythm will start perfectly in time with the first Tick, and when we repeat the rhythm, we should again start on the first Tick of the next cycle. This means that we have to play our rhythm between the Tick of the first cycle and the Tick of the second cycle.

To do this, I want you to play a Heavy Sa'idi on the first Tick. Just play one, and play it as well as you can, and see whether you finish before the end of the cycle, or whether you finish after the end of the cycle.

If you finish before the end of the cycle, you've played the rhythm too quickly and need to slow down. If you finish after the end of the cycle, you've played the rhythm too slowly and need to speed up.

Let's just look at how the Heavy Sa'idi looks in time with a metronome:

Heavy Sa'idi in time with metronome												TS: 4/4
Tick			Tock			Tock			Tock			
D		D			D	D			T			

If you notice, the first Doum lands on the tick, as we previously mentioned. However, an interesting feature in this rhythm is that the Tek lands on the last tock! This means that you must time your rhythm so that you play the Tek on the last tock.

Give it a shot, it will take a few tries to get used to it – but that's okay. If you've tried for a good 30 minutes and you still get the hang of it, watch some YouTube videos on

using a metronome or check out the Darbuka Mastery Program on the Malik Instruments website.

Benefits of a metronome

A metronome helps us keep time when we are practicing and playing. It is an essential part of any musician's toolkit, and every **competent** musician out there **must** have the skills and ability to play in time to a metronome, in my personal opinion. If a musician can't play to a metronome, I don't think he or she can call themselves a musician! Let's look at a few benefits of a metronome:

1. Improves timing

The primary purpose of the metronome is to provide a base tempo for you to keep in time to. As such, improving your timing is arguably the most crucial benefit of a metronome. It allows you to understand where each note in your rhythm is. This becomes especially important for drummers where they must repeat rhythms over and over in perfect timing, to keep other musicians in time.

2. Slows you down

A metronome helps to slow you down to focus on building technique. Beginner Darbuka players tend to speed up a lot, especially when ornamenting. Ornamentation by its very nature causes you to play more strokes in a shorter space of time, and as such, it can cause you to speed up your rhythm. This means that when you return to a slower rhythm after having done some fancy ornamentation, your rhythm is actually much faster than when you started playing! This is a big problem because eventually, you'll be playing so fast that you can no longer ornament properly. A metronome dramatically helps with this by forcing us to play at a slower speed to build technique, and then helps us stay in that slower rhythm so we can practice for extended periods with good timing.

3. Improves recording skills

If you ever decided to record something, perhaps either your own solo composition or a song along with other musicians, you'd almost definitely need to play to a click track to ensure that the timing was perfect. Most popular music editing software revolves around all instruments being in perfect timing with not only each other but also with the electronic click track, to edit appropriately after the track has been recorded. Practicing with a metronome means that when you get to a stage where you are ready to record something, you can very easily match your rhythm to a click track.

4. Builds inner tempo

Your inner tempo is one of your most essential skills as a musician. Tempo will start to become ingrained in your body and mind after you play for long enough. A metronome helps you build this inner tempo. For example, I am confident that if I estimate an 80 BPM click cycle without a metronome, I'll get it right. I'm also confident that if I heard a rhythm in a 100 BPM cycle, I'd be able to recognise the tempo instantly. This helps when playing and practicing with other musicians. If you know how fast they are going,

you can easily join in at the same speed. You might think to yourself, I know that Maqsum (a popular Darbuka rhythm) might be a little too fast for this 120 BPM song, so I'll play Malfuf (another popular Darbuka rhythm) instead!

5. Improves performing skills

Aside from the previously mentioned points that also improve performing skills, a metronome and strong understanding of time signatures are essential if performing live in a formal setting with other musicians, for example when everyone is reading from sheet music. Being able to follow the timings defined in the sheet music is something you may well need to learn to do if you were to ever be in this environment, and your training with a metronome will help you with precisely that.

General metronome advice

I think it's worth a small disclaimer in this section regarding the metronome. Metronomes have their uses, at certain places and at certain times. You should have various kinds of practice session:

- In some practice sessions, you should focus on technique and timing, ensuring you have perfect technique and you are bang on time with any rhythm you are playing. In these kinds of focused practice sessions, you should definitely have a metronome playing. I like to use headphones where I can put one headphone in and leave the other out (so I can hear my Darbuka), so I can practice appropriately in time with the metronome.
- In other practice sessions, you should allow yourself to freestyle. Don't tie yourself down with a metronome; allow yourself to go wild and ornament your rhythm as best as you possibly can. These practice sessions will allow you to uncover different aspects of a rhythm you previously didn't know and will help you along your Darbuka journey greatly. If you find yourself coming up short on what you can do to ornament, it might be worth studying some fancier ornamentation techniques or listening to some Arabic music songs where they play the Darbuka. Listen to the way they ornament and see if you can copy some of their techniques. In these kinds of practice sessions, a metronome would only constrict you. Turn it off for the time being and go wild with your practice!

It's also worth noting that when you play with other players, you don't typically use a metronome, so if you rely on the metronome to keep you in time, you should keep practicing so that you can stay in time without a metronome to help you.

Finally, it's worth noting that playing with a metronome is usually harder than it is to play with other musicians. Metronomes require you to get every single stroke perfectly correct and in time with an electronically set tempo. Usually, in a live performance, you ebb and flow the tempo a little, which gives the music more flavour. This isn't a bad thing, but if you find yourself increasingly frustrated with the metronome, remember that

it's just for training purposes and when you go out into the real world, the rhythm will be much easier to play!

Chapter 10

The Maqsum Family

Introduction

The Maqsum family! A group of some of the most famous and popular Darbuka rhythms that have ever existed. The Maqsum (or one of its derivatives) can be heard in musical tracks throughout all of the Arab world, and it is a critical part of the heritage of Arabic music. If you don't believe me, listen back through the tracks of the greats of Arabic Music, the likes of Umm Kulthum, Asmahan, Fairuz, Farid Al Atrash and you will hear the Maqsum in so many of their compositions. It is the bread and butter of Darbuka rhythms, and any Darbuka player worth their stuff should know and be able to bang out a great Maqsum!

Rhythm families

To make it slightly easier to remember all the different kinds of rhythms that we have available in our arsenal, and to make ornamentation and rhythm switching easier, I like to group rhythms into families. I typically group rhythms by their rhythmic emphasis (Iqa'). If the emphasis is at very similar points in multiple rhythms, I group them under a family to simplify this. I'm not sure whether I'm the first person to have done this, I assume not, however not everyone will refer to these families as "families". Just keep that in mind!

However, for the purposes of our learning, we will treat the Maqsum family as a collection of rhythms that sound very similar and share similar emphatic points. The good thing is, you have already studied a member of the Maqsum family, the Heavy Sa'idi. Let's take a look at the Maqsum and see how similar it is to the Heavy Sa'idi.

Maqsum

Maqsum, the big daddy itself. Maqsum is the king of all Arabic rhythms, and it is one of the most fun to play rhythms you will ever come across. Maqsum, in its most basic form, looks like this:

Maqsum												TS: 4/4
1			2			3			4			
D		T			T	D			T			

Notice the similarities between the Maqsum and the Heavy Sa'idi. The Maqsum has two extra Tek notes compared to the Heavy Sa'idi. This gives the Maqsum more of an

aggressive sound. It's more of an "attack" sound, and it can sound faster because of this. However, it's this sound that is prevalent through so much of Arabic Music.

Let's also take a look at a slightly ornamented version of the Maqsum. This version of Maqsum uses the same basic ornaments that we learnt for the Heavy Sa'idi. The drum tab looks like this:

Maqsum with Basic Ornaments												TS: 4/4
1			2			3			4			
D		T	k		T	D		k	T		t	k

The Maqsum has many derivatives, but we are just going to look at the most popular of them for this chapter. I have included two versions of each rhythm, a basic rhythm and an ornamented rhythm.

Baladi

Baladi is very similar to the Maqsum, but it has a Doum-Doum at the beginning rather than a Doum-Tek:

Baladi												TS: 4/4
1			2			3			4			
D		D			T	D			T			

Baladi with Basic Ornaments												TS: 4/4
1			2			3			4			
D		D	k		T	D		k	T		t	k

Sa'idi

Sa'idi shares very similar characteristics to the Maqsum also, however, it has a Doum-Doum in the middle, rather than a Tek-Doum:

Sa'idi												TS: 4/4
1			2			3			4			
D		T			D	D			T			

Sa'idi with Basic Ornaments												TS: 4/4
1			2			3			4			
D		T	k		D	D		k	T		t	k

Note that the Sa'idi and Heavy Sa'idi are different rhythms. Heavy Sa'idi includes two sets of Doum-Doum's, whereas a standard Sa'idi only has one set of Doum-Doum's.

Chapter 11

Jumping between rhythms

Introduction

By this point, we've learnt a great deal, well done. In this section, we are going to bring together a lot of what we've learnt. Let's consolidate some of our rhythms and turn them into something a little longer by looking at how we can link different rhythms together.

Basic and ornamented rhythms

It's essential to understand the difference between basic and ornamented rhythms and to understand where and how to play them. We cover this in much more depth in the Darbuka Mastery 2 book; however, let's understand a few basic concepts.

Firstly, there are times where you should play basic rhythms and times where you should ornament. For example, if you were playing a song, it's best to keep a stark contrast between the rhythm you play in the chorus compared to the rhythm you play during a verse and to contrast this further with a solo (although I wouldn't recommend soloing at this stage). For example:

- In the chorus, generally, if it is louder or more emphatic (e.g. more instruments or singers joining in), we should play a more ornamented rhythm, for example, an ornamented Maqsum.
- A verse in a song, generally involves a singer or instrument soloing and delivering the verse in an ornamented, improvised way. At this time, you should switch your rhythm into something basic, without too much ornamentation, to help accentuate the lead singer or instrumental soloist. Something like a standard Heavy Sa'idi would be great.

The above example illustrates just one scenario, and there is no right or wrong answer for this scenario either. Choosing the right rhythm to play will come with time and experience and is very situational. However, the key thing to understand here is that you have to adapt your rhythm to your circumstance dynamically, and you will have to switch regularly between different rhythms. It is for this reason that I like grouping rhythms into families because you know that it will be easy and seamless to switch to any other rhythm in the family you are playing in.

Use of a metronome

A metronome is one of our greatest allies when training ourselves to switch between rhythms. As a beginner, when you switch into a different rhythm, it may well confuse you and cause you to either pause, slow down or speed up, or a combination of these.

You must get used to seamlessly switching between rhythms, and this is where a metronome can help. The metronome's steady beat should allow you to judge what speed you will enter the new rhythm at, and how fast it should be played. It should also keep you in time. Using a metronome is highly recommended when practicing switching between rhythms.

Rhythm switching drills

Here are some drills you can practice to help you switch between rhythms:

Basic to ornamented switches

In the first instance, just get used to switching between the basic and ornamented versions of rhythms we have learnt. Practice this at 80 BPM. The tabs are below:

Heavy Sa'idi Basic to Ornamented Switch											
1											
D		D			D		D			T	
5											
D		D		k	D		D		k	T	t k

Maqsum Basic to Ornamented Switch											
1											
D		T			T		D			T	
5											
D		T		k	T		D		k	T	t k

Baladi Basic to Ornamented Switch											
1											
D		D			T		D			T	
5											
D		D		k	T		D		k	T	t k

Sa'idi Basic to Ornamented Switch											
1											
D		T			D		D			T	
5											
D		T		k	D		D		k	T	t k

Sa'idi with ornamented fourth bar

In this exercise, we're going to play 3 bars of basic Sa'idi, and then play an ornamented Sa'idi for the fourth bar. Practice at 80 BPM, then go to 100 BPM when you are confident.

Sa'idi with ornamented fourth bar															
1															
D		T				D		D					T		
5															
D		T				D		D					T		
9															
D		T				D		D					T		
13															
D		T		k		D		D		k			T		t k

Heavy Sa'idi to ornamented Maqsum switch

In this exercise, we are going to switch from a Heavy Sa'idi rhythm into an ornamented Maqsum rhythm, playing one bar of each. Practice at 80 BPM, and then 100 BPM when confident.

Heavy Sa'idi to ornamented Maqsum switch															
1															
D		D				D		D					T		
5															
D		T		k		T		D		k			T		t k

Ornamented Baladi to ornamented Sa'idi switch

This is a really tough one and will test your skills a lot. Switch between two ornamented rhythms and build up to as fast as you can. Start on 80 BPM and keep increasing by 10 BPM when you feel confident with the previous speed. If you can reach 150 BPM, hats off to you! That's a **huge** accomplishment. If you can't do 150 BPM, don't worry, because it's pretty damn hard!

Ornamented Baladi to ornamented Sa'idi switch															
1															
D		D		k		T		D		k			T		t k
5															
D		T		k		D		D		k			T		t k

Closing

If you've made it this far, **CONGRATULATIONS!**

It's no easy feat to play an ornamented version of some of the rhythms we just looked at. It's even harder to switch between them and maintain control and speed while doing so. However, it's not impossible and is definitely in your grasp. Keep trying, and you'll get there.

Let's just recap what we've covered:

- What the Darbuka is
- How to hold the Darbuka and play basic notes
- How to read drumming tabs
- How to turn these basic notes into a rhythm (the Heavy Sa'idi)
- How to ornament this basic rhythm with the Ka stroke
- How to use a metronome to practice
- How to switch between rhythms

This has given us a solid foundation for us to work from and build upon. To all of the students I teach, I almost always choose these topics as the first three months or so of lessons, because they're just so important. If advanced rhythms or ornamentative techniques are introduced too early, the student can get overwhelmed and end up sacrificing a lot of their basic technique.

For this reason, I would recommend that you spend a good amount of time practicing these rhythms. If practicing, say, an hour a week, I would expect it to take around 2-3 months to get the last ornamented rhythm switch at 150 BPM. If practicing more regularly, you could probably do it in a month or so, but I would be amazed if someone managed to get to that stage in such a short space of time (unless they've had previous musical experience).

I'd like to close this section with a story. The great Russian weightlifters of old times, who could lift enormous weights and manipulate them in such complicated manoeuvres, used to have a policy whenever a student would come to learn advanced weightlifting from them. They would teach them a manoeuvre and then tell them to go away and practice that manoeuvre until they could lift a ridiculously high weight. Only when the student could lift this enormously high weight with perfect technique, could they return to the teacher and receive further instruction. That's when the training begins, when the basics are solid. So, practice hard, get this bit sorted and then move on to the second book in the Darbuka Mastery series to learn how to unlock even greater highs in the Arabic style of Darbuka playing.

The rest of this book is filled with various appendices to give you some general Darbuka guidance regarding the instrument itself.

Appendix A

What Makes a Good Darbuka

Ideal size

This is a question that needs some careful consideration. There are several sizes available, and they range from around 13.5cm (5.3") to around 28cm (11"). Note that when we look at sizes, we are referring to the diameter of the skin - the plastic section at the top of the Darbuka. Here are a few general good rules of thumb:

1. Anything below 20cm is too small.

The logic behind this is that you need space on the Darbuka head for both your hands to fit and move around the drum and you need the Darbuka to be big enough to sit comfortably on your lap. Also, if it's too small, it won't create good sounding notes! Do it properly and get yourself a bigger drum than this.

2. 22cm - 23cm is the most popular and ideal range

22cm is by far the most popular size of Darbuka, and it's a delight to play for everyone from a 10-year-old child to a large adult. The bass and high notes are also good enough that a competent player would be comfortable performing professionally with a decent 22cm model.

The 23cm Darbukas are a little bigger and about 2kg heavier. This is, in my opinion, a perfect size for a Darbuka and it gives a significantly better sound. I much prefer a 23cm to a 22cm Darbuka as my go-to instrument. Another point to note here is that a 23cm Darbuka, as previously mentioned, is known as a Sombaty Darbuka.

3. Darbukas bigger than 24cm are called Dohollas.

You need to know what you're doing before venturing into the Doholla world! A Doholla is a large Darbuka, and they can be loads of fun to play. However, if you pick up a bad one, this big Darbuka will burn a big hole in your pocket!

The reality is, Dohollas can be expensive, they can be challenging for beginners to manage, and changing parts can be a nightmare. On the flip side, a well-made Doholla can be a dream to play and produce amazing sounds. However, for a beginner, our recommendation would be to keep to the 22-23cm range!

Ideal material (and weight)

Most Darbukas available on the market are made of Aluminium. Aluminium is chosen because it is light and easy to work with. Aluminium is the material of choice for most Darbuka makers, and as such, it is commonly used throughout workshops in the Middle East, North Africa and South-East Asia.

There are a few points to note:

1. Some manufacturers use copper to make their Darbukas. This can come out nicely, and craftsmen in Turkey do use copper a lot in the construction of their instruments. However, copper tends to be more expensive than aluminium, and as such craftsmen might skimp on weight to save money on costs. As we will discuss in the second point, weight is significant!
2. The weight of a Darbuka directly affects its sound. There is a fine line between being too light and being too heavy. If a Darbuka is too light, the Doum is overpronounced and overly bassy, while the Tek sounds very muted because the metal is so thin. If a Darbuka is too heavy (relative to its size), the Doum may have some bass issues, but the Tek won't ring as well as it should. For this reason, best practice is a double-layered aluminium shell, an outer layer and an inner layer. Both layers are finished and smooth (so the sound isn't affected by imperfections), and the drum weights **at least** 3.5-4kg for a standard drum. In my opinion, a 22cm standard Darbuka that weighs less than 3.5-4kg isn't a proper Darbuka. I've seen some Turkish Darbukas that come in around 3kg; it's simply too light. The Sombaty Darbuka is the perfect weight in my opinion, weighing in at around 6kg.

Mother of pearl

Let's take a step back and look at how pearls are created. They are formed inside the shells of pearl oysters and freshwater pearl mussels (both sea creatures). Now, a pearl is produced inside the shell of both of these animals, but the inner lining of that shell also shines a beautiful iridescent white. This is known as Mother of Pearl (Nacre).

Take a look at the below picture. It shows a pearl oyster shell, with a perfectly formed pearl oyster inside it. Now look at the inner lining of the shell itself and see the beautiful white iridescent lining. This is Mother of Pearl.



Figure 32 - A pearl oyster

White Mother of Pearl vs Blue Mother of Pearl

You will also notice when looking at Darbuka designs that there are different types of Mother of Pearl colours. They usually come in shades of white, green, blue and purple.

While they are all known as Mother of Pearl, we typically make some distinctions in the Darbuka world depending on where we get the shells from:

Colour	Name	Technical Name
White (like a normal pearl)	White Mother of Pearl	Nacre
Blue/Green/Purple	Blue Mother of Pearl	Abalone

Blue Mother of Pearl, like White Mother of Pearl, is formed in an animal shell. While White Mother of Pearl is formed in pearl oyster or freshwater pearl mussel shells, Blue Mother of Pearl is formed in abalone shells. An inner abalone shell looks like this:



Figure 33 - An abalone shell

The difference is purely aesthetic, but it's important to know that White Mother of Pearl is fairly easy to get hold of and is available in large quantities. Blue Mother of Pearl, on the other hand, is relatively quite rare, which is why it's harder to get Blue Mother of Pearl pieces, and why they are more expensive. Blue Mother of Pearl comes in shades of blue, purple and green, so there are more possibilities of what can be done with it.

How are the fantastic Mother of Pearl Darbuka designs created?

The Mother of Pearl pieces then have to be applied to the aluminium shells of the Darbuka. Here is an excerpt of how Malik Instruments make their stunning Mother of Pearl Darbukas:

- From our studios in London, we liaise with expert craftsmen and designers from Egypt to render stunning designs that we can then overlay over a Darbuka body.
- We then forward these designs on to our crafting workshops in Egypt, where the designs are then reviewed by our master Darbuka craftsmen, who confirm that the designs can indeed be recreated on the Darbuka body.
- Our craftsmen then get to work. Taking a plain aluminium shell, they sketch the design over the aluminium body to provide a guideline to work with.
- They then cut the Mother of Pearl pieces to size, and manually, piece by piece, attach each Mother of Pearl piece to the Darbuka body, creating the design that was initially sketched on to the Darbuka.
- Then they apply any finishing touches, any paint overlays and ensure that the design on the Darbuka matches the expected design.

- Finally, the design is sealed to the Darbuka by applying a gloss layer over the Darbuka body, creating the beautiful finish you find on all good quality Darbukas!

As you can tell, it's a relatively long process. Typically, a craftsman can make maybe 2-4 Mother of Pearl Darbukas per week. In contrast, multiple low-quality Darbukas can be made per day. So much extra time is given to making sure that the Mother of Pearl Darbukas that are made perfectly, and this reflects in the quality of the finished product. Some of our Sombaty Darbuka craftsmen at Malik Instruments can take almost 2 weeks crafting a single instrument, for example those from our Artisan Designs collection.



Figure 34 - The Pearl Peacock Artisan Sombaty

Appendix B

Where to Buy a Good Darbuka

Introduction

This is a slightly controversial topic for me to write about because I'd recommend Malik Instruments as the number 1 place to get a fantastic Darbuka. However, I have been in the Darbuka business for a while so you might get some pearls of wisdom from me!

A disclaimer on price vs quality

I feel that it's essential to mention something on price when purchasing something more popular in the Eastern world than in the West. The reason is that many people assume that since a product is made in a country like Egypt, it can be purchased cheaper there. Let's say someone is selling a Darbuka in a street market in Egypt for \$25 and someone is selling a Darbuka online for \$250. Is the online seller priced extortionately? The answer, in my opinion, lies solely in one word:

Quality

Yes, you may well be able to get a Darbuka cheaper in Egypt, and yes it may also be Mother of Pearl. However, it may well also be of a **significantly** lower quality to what you can purchase online in a Western country! Many manufacturers only send the **absolute best** of their production models to Western countries and sell the lower quality models locally in their own country.

For example, my first Mother of Pearl Darbuka was a Gawharet El Fan 22cm Darbuka I purchased from a street vendor in Fez, Morocco. I thought it was decent. Years later, launched Malik Instruments and started sourcing Darbukas directly from Gawharet El Fan, ensuring that they were of the highest possible quality. I realised that the Darbuka I bought from the street vendor in Morocco wasn't half as good as the Darbukas that we were getting directly from Gawharet El Fan. This is true even though the Darbuka from Morocco was also made by Gawharet El Fan and was also Mother of Pearl.

The conclusion is simple. Focus on getting the **best quality** Darbuka for the money you can spend, regardless of where you are buying it from.

Online

Online is a popular way nowadays to purchase a Darbuka. I think the following online platforms are appropriate places to find a decent Darbuka:

1. A retail website (like Malik Instruments)

2. An online marketplace (like Amazon or eBay)
3. A classified advertisements website (like Gumtree, Facebook Marketplace or Craigslist)

Each has its pros and cons.

A retail website may well provide the best quality instruments, with excellent service and genuine care for the instruments they are sending out; however, it may be challenging to choose a reliable website.

An online marketplace will usually provide a decent quality instrument for a reasonable cost and will typically have reviews for products which enable easier decision making. The customer service is generally reliable, and the transaction is safe. The downside is that big brands with lots of backing tend to do better on online marketplaces, and smaller brands which may be much better get pushed to the bottom of the search results. For example, global percussionist Meinl sells strongly on most online marketplaces; however, their Darbuka models are... not of the best quality. Yet, since they do the job at a low cost, they have high rankings!

A classified advertisements website will usually provide the cheapest way to purchase online and may involve collecting locally or getting a seller to post to you. This can be a fantastic way to find a good deal, however typically there are no review systems in place, and no guarantee of quality. You may end up with a very low-quality instrument, and you wouldn't even know. I recommend steering clear of these places until you are confident in your ability to tell a good Darbuka from a bad one.

In-Store

I know that online is a popular way for people to purchase instruments nowadays, but a retail store isn't to be messed with. I know from experience that many store owners take great pride and care in the products that they stock and sell. If you can find a store like this, you should give them a visit! Some things to look for when choosing a store:

Typically, big warehouses that stock generic products don't have good quality Darbukas, from my experience. This because they usually hold high stock numbers of generic mass-produced products, not more unique instruments like the Darbuka.

A general music store may well have a decent Darbuka model around. They're usually worth a look to see if they have anything interesting available. You might want to call ahead to if they have Darbuka models in stock. If they only have generic models available, play a few and have a go at what they're like, however, try and find something a little better!

A percussion store will usually have at least a couple of different Darbukas in stock. I know that percussion stores in London do stock decent Darbuka ranges, and I would

always check out these stores if I had access to them. If you were to visit a percussion store in Istanbul or Cairo, you would find some fantastic Darbuka models.

If you visit a percussion store and find a decent selection, and an owner or employees who seem to genuinely care, make sure you say hi and keep a good relationship. Support local businesses! It's what makes innovation and development possible in the music community.

At a souq

Well, this section just wouldn't be complete without a mention of buying from souqs, or markets, in Arab countries. It's straightforward to find a Darbuka at a souq; however, be warned; they are usually of very low quality. Very, very low quality. I would recommend only buying with the utmost caution and care, and once you have an understanding of what it is you are looking for. It's easy to get ripped off if you don't know how to haggle, and even if you can haggle well, it's difficult to judge the quality of what it is you're buying. Proceed with caution!

A note on Darbuka sizes

A small point worth mentioning here is on Darbuka sizes. Typically, standard-sized Darbukas are much easier to find in a store, whereas a Sombaty or Doholla would be much more difficult to find. For one of these models, I would recommend online shopping as the ideal way to get one at the best convenience. The only exception would be if you could get one directly from Cairo, Istanbul or the like.

Appendix C

When to Tune a Darbuka

Introduction

Caring for and maintaining your instrument is an essential part of being a musician. When your instrument is in tune, it will sound significantly better and allow you to create a more beautiful sound. For example, have you ever heard a piano out of tune? It sounds terrible! So much so that even someone who is not a musician will quickly understand that something is wrong. A Darbuka, being a percussive instrument, allows for a little more leeway. However, it is still essential to keep your Darbuka in tune and sounding perfect.

There are several reasons you might need to tune or change a Darbuka skin.

The Darbuka sounds out of tune

Often if a Darbuka goes out of tune, it's because of the Darbuka skin. Now if it is a plastic Darbuka skin, you may not need to change it, you may well be able to retune the Darbuka by tightening (or loosening) the bolts at the top of the Darbuka with an Allen Key (full tuning process is covered in Appendix D). It is recommended to always try this before going out and purchasing a new skin.

Note: You can retune the Darbuka by going in a clockwise direction and tightening each bolt with an Allen Key by a quarter turn. Keep tightening by a quarter turn on each bolt until the Darbuka reaches a sound profile you are comfortable with. If re-tuning a plastic skin on a metal Darbuka does not put the Darbuka back in tune, you will need to buy a new plastic skin.

If it is a clay Darbuka (with a natural leather skin) that goes out of tune, you can usually get the roping redone to resolve the problem. However, unless there is an actual problem with the leather skin on the clay Darbuka, you will not need to purchase a new skin.

The Darbuka skin has warped

As an extension to the Darbuka skin going out of tune, it might warp due to inadequate storage conditions. Note that this only typically applies to plastic skins. The most common cause of this we see is leaving the Darbuka exposed to direct sunlight, which causes the plastic in the middle of the Darbuka skin to loosen, while the plastic that is around the sides remains tight. There is no coming back from this, and the skin will need to be changed. Another thing that people can overlook is leaving their Darbuka in the boot of their car when it's hot. The boot of an average car can typically get quite warm,

and sometimes if its 35+° Celsius, you can have some melting of the plastic Darbuka skin which again, will require it to be changed.

There is apparent damage to the Darbuka skin

If you stick a knife through your Darbuka skin, you will need to change it. 100%. If you stick any sharp object through your Darbuka skin, you will need to change it. There is no coming back from a tear or a hole in the Darbuka's skin. We advise keeping your Darbuka safe so that you are not in a position where the skin needs to be changed. It's best to transport the Darbuka using a case at all times, and ensure that when you play, you are not wearing any rings etc.

It has been a long time since you last changed it

A Darbuka skin should easily last for several years. However, if it's been over, say five years, it might need to be changed. You can assess it by seeing if the Darbuka sounds out of tune or not. If it does, and it's been a long time, change the skin.

As an aside, if your metal Darbuka has been sitting out of tune for a long time, it will be harder for you to retune it as the molecules in the plastic skin will have set in an uneven position – it will probably just need to be changed.

Appendix D

How to Tune a Darbuka

Introduction

This section refers to tuning a metal Darbuka, not a ceramic Darbuka. A ceramic or clay Darbuka is tuned with glue and an intricate roping system which usually requires an expert to do. A metal Darbuka, on the other hand, can easily be tuned by anyone. To tune a standard Egyptian Darbuka (like a Malik Instruments Darbuka), you will need a 5mm diameter Allen Key.

Before you start tuning

Before you start tuning, you will need an idea of what exactly needs doing. There are typically three problems that someone might have that would require them to tune their Darbuka:

1. The Darbuka sounds too high pitched or sharp

Problem: The Darbuka sounds sharp or high pitched. The Tek strokes have lost their ring because they are being "choked" by tight tuning on the Darbuka. The Doum strokes are sounding flat because the skin is so tight that it can't vibrate properly.

Solution: To fix this problem, we have to tune the Darbuka to a lower pitch, by loosening the tuning bolts.

2. The Darbuka sounds too low pitched or boomy

Problem: The Tek is not ringing correctly because the skin is too loose. The Tek's pitch will resemble more of a church bell and may even sound bassy (note that the Tek should never be producing bass sounds!). The Doum shares similar problems; it sounds very boomy and bassy, overly so. The skin is so loose that it vibrates way too much when a Doum is played.

Solution: To fix this problem, we have to tune the Darbuka to a higher pitch, by tightening the tuning bolts.

3. The Darbuka sounds unstable

Problem: Instability occurs very regularly with cheap drums from Arab markets and the like. It can also happen when someone who doesn't know what they are doing has tried to tune a Darbuka. In this scenario, the Darbuka sound is unstable. The Tek is not ringing properly because the head is uneven. The Tek is also changing pitches as it rings (it should typically ring in one clear tone). The Doum may have a little bit of an unhealthy bounce to it, as the head is uneven (but this may not always be the case). It is usually much easier to spot any instability from the Tek (or Ka).

Solution: To fix this problem, you will first need to identify the cause of the problem:

1. Your Darbuka's head might be fitted unevenly. You can assess this yourself by looking at the distance between the head and the Body of the Darbuka.
2. If the gap is uneven, for example, it is larger on one side of the Darbuka than the other side. Your head has been fitted unevenly, and your first point of action is to stabilise the Darbuka skin by tightening or loosening the tuning bolts until this gap is entirely even around the entire circumference of the Darbuka.
3. If this gap is even, and your Darbuka still sounds unstable, you will have to replace the Darbuka skin. This is because the plastic molecules in the skin have set unevenly, such as because of excessive heat exposure. You can purchase a replacement skin from Amazon, a local drum store, or the Malik Instruments website.

The tuning process

Once you have identified what needs to be done, you have three tuning actions you can take. You either need to tighten, loosen, or stabilise the Darbuka skin.

Process A: To tighten or loosen the Darbuka skin

1. Place your Allen Key on the first tuning bolt
2. Loosen (anti-clockwise) or tighten (clockwise) by 1/4 of a turn on the first bolt
3. Go around the Darbuka and loosen or tighten each bolt by 1/4 of a turn
4. Keep going around the drum and repeating steps 1 to 3 until you reach a sound profile you are comfortable with (read on in this article if you need help choosing a sound profile)

Process B: To stabilise the Darbuka skin

1. Identify which bolts you need to loosen, and which bolts you need to tighten to ensure an even gap between the head and the body around the entire circumference of the Darbuka (if there is a large gap, you need to tighten, if there is a small gap, you need to loosen)
2. Tighten the necessary bolts and loosen the necessary bolts by as much as is necessary to make the gap even
3. Now re-assess the tuning to see which of the three scenarios above that you are in. If it's too loose or too tight, follow the steps in Process A to adjust the tuning. If it is still unstable, you will need a new Darbuka skin

And there you have it, by following these steps, your Darbuka should be nicely in tune!

Top Tip: Tuning to the Ka

Here's a top tip when it comes to tuning a Darbuka. In my opinion, the Ka is by far the best stroke to tune to when tuning the Darbuka. The reasons for this are below:

1. The Ka is played with the non-dominant hand, which means you can tune with the dominant hand while repeatedly playing Ka strokes to see how the sound changes with the tuning
2. If the Ka is in tune, the Tek will be in tune. And the Doum will almost always be in tune if the Ka is in tune. The Doum usually falls into tune the easiest.

When tuning to the Ka, you hold the drum on your non-dominant leg, as if you were about to play. You then hit the Ka repeatedly to see what it sounds like. If it sounds too low, you start tightening the screws by a quarter turn around the drum until you fall into tune. If it sounds too high, you loosen. You use your dominant hand for the tuning.

Top Tip: Finding your perfect sound

It is crucial to find a sound profile you like, and you are comfortable with. It is also important to remember there is more than one way to tune a Darbuka, and that each Darbuka will have a slightly different sound profile based on its size, it's quality, it's build material, it's skin type, etc.

For example, a Sombaty Darbuka is bigger than a Standard Darbuka, so it will have more powerful Doum's, and also more powerful Tek's depending on its tuning. If you try to get a standard Darbuka's Doum to sound as powerful as a Sombaty Darbuka, you will have to tune the Doum quite low, which will jeopardise the Tek and Ka. This is an excellent example of a reason it's essential to tune to the Ka, as mentioned above.

Typically, people have different sound profiles that they like. Some people prefer a slightly lower sound with a bit more of a bell to the Tek. Some people prefer a tighter tuning with more of a crispness to the Tek. If you tune slightly lower, your Tek will have a slight bell to the sound, but your Doum will be very powerful. If you tune slightly higher, your Tek will sound crisp and strong, but your Doum may suffer a little.

You should ask yourself whether you prefer a slightly higher or lower tuning, then tune your Ka to that pitch. Listening to someone else's Darbuka, which is in tune, will help with this.

The best of both worlds is possible when the perfect size Darbuka is created using high-quality materials by an expert craftsman. We take pride in saying that all of our Sombaty Darbuka models meet this standard as some of the best Darbukas available on the market. The Standard models, while also fantastic drums, are just slightly too small to maintain a strong Tek as well as Doum. Our Sombaty Darbuka models, on the other hand, are perfect. Check out our Sombaty collection on the Malik Instruments website.

Top Tip: Avoiding extremes in tuning

It is particularly important when tuning a Darbuka to avoid extremes, such as tuning too low or tuning too high. It will very clearly sound out of tune and may damage your Darbuka skin.

For example, if you tune a Darbuka too high (the skin is too tight), you will not be able to lower the pitch very easily, as the molecules in the plastic skin have been stretched too far and have "set" in that position. When you do end up loosening the bolts, it will jump to an overly low tuning. As such, we wouldn't recommend tuning too tightly.

Which plastic Darbuka skin sounds the best?

There are many kinds of Darbuka skin out there; however, the best kind for you will typically depend on your circumstances. Nevertheless, there are some rough guidelines you can follow.

The Darbuka can create fantastically deep Doum sounds, and impossibly high Tek sounds. A plastic skin will produce higher Teks than most natural leather skins. However, not all skins are created equal, and it becomes essential to choose one that will bring out the best in your Darbuka.

Build quality

This is a big one, so much so that it can be split into two parts:

1. **Plastic quality** – If the quality of the plastic used is low, for example, it has lots of scratches on it, it won't sound as good. Think about this; sound comes from sound waves, which are effectively vibrations. You want your Darbuka skin to vibrate as evenly and clearly as possible to create the most resonant and best quality sound.
2. **Metal crimped hoop** – The crimped metal hoop of the Darbuka skin is the metal piece around the plastic skin that allows the skin to be fitted to the Darbuka. The metal hoop fits snugly inside the internal tuning mechanism which allows the skin to be stretched across the Darbuka head. Consequently, this also needs to be of good quality. If the metal hoop is of low quality, it will not fit evenly inside the internal tuning mechanism. Say, for example, one part of the metal hoop was thicker than another part. It would result in the sound being imbalanced, which might create a problem when playing.

Let's take a look at the different Darbuka skins there are available on the open market:

- **Alexandria Darbuka skins** – Absolutely terrible! Poorly made with lots of scratches and sound miserable!
- **Gawharet El Fan Darbuka skins** – These aren't that great; they are also badly made and have lots of scratches.
- **Stagg Darbuka skins** – Decent, but definitely on the lower side of the quality scale. They are cheap, though.

- **Meinl Darbuka skins** – These can sound reasonably good - however they only come in Meinl's 8.5" Darbuka size, which makes them unusable on most Darbukas.
- **PowerBeat Darbuka skins** – These are excellent quality; they sound great and are made well. Plus, they come in black or white.
- **Malik Instruments skins** – These are optimal all-round skins. They are upgraded versions of standard Egyptian Darbuka skins, which means they're affordable and sound great.
- **REMO Darbuka skins** – These are the best skins we have come across. They sound incredible, they look fantastic and are available in every size you could need. Be warned; they are expensive!

Are plastic Darbuka skins reusable?

The short answer is, no – we would not recommend re-using a plastic Darbuka skin. It is possible, but not recommended. Firstly, let's clarify what we mean by reusability. If you fit a Darbuka skin to a Darbuka, and then you remove the skin from the Darbuka after it has been tuned, you will struggle to re-use that same skin.

The reason for this is simple – a plastic skin stretches when it is fitted to a Darbuka and then tuned. Usually, the skin has to be stretched quite tightly to get it tight enough to play properly. When it is stretched to this degree, it will not return to its original looseness when it is unscrewed; it will still be quite tight. As such, to tighten it onto a new Darbuka will be quite tricky. Think of it this way:

- Imagine a Darbuka skin is at 0% tightness when you buy it
- You then tighten it to 100% tightness when you fit it to a Darbuka
- When you remove it from the Darbuka, it will reduce to about 50% tightness, not the 0% tightness that it was initially
- When you fit this skin with 50% tightness to a second Darbuka, you will have to tighten it to 150% tightness to get good sound (which is impossible)
- Since this is impossible, you will only be able to tighten from 50% tightness to 100% tightness, which is not enough to get a good sound. As such, the Darbuka skin will be too loose and hence will sound terrible!

My Darbuka skin tore when I fitted it to my Darbuka

This is a common occurrence with poorly made Darbukas (although it can occasionally happen on a good quality Darbuka too). Let's take a step back and look at the reason this happens.

When a plastic skin is fitted to a Darbuka, it should perfectly fit on the opening at the top of the Darbuka (if it doesn't, the skin is the wrong size). The head should then be placed on the skin and screwed into the Darbuka body. As it's screwed in, the skin will become tighter and tighter. While the skin is tightening, it is in direct contact with the internal tuning mechanism at the top of the Darbuka. If the skin gets trapped inside the

mechanism, for example, it catches on a protruding bit of metal, it will tear. This is the most likely reason for the skin to tear, with the only other common reason being the skin itself is faulty.

Now, provided you have a good quality Darbuka and a good quality Darbuka skin, you should be able to fit your skin to your Darbuka without any significant issues. For example, all of our Malik Instruments Darbukas should not have any problem when being re-fitted with a new skin.

The major issue that causes this problem is a badly finished internal tuning mechanism, and this comes back to the quality of the Darbuka that you purchased. The reality is that the internal tuning mechanism is not outwardly visible. So some lesser Darbuka manufacturers would not ensure a high level of quality on the inside of this mechanism. As such, we often find that the internal mechanism is in awful condition if the Darbuka has not been made well. If this is the case with your Darbuka, be extra careful when attempting to fit a Darbuka skin to the Darbuka and ensure that you tune it very slowly to avoid it catching on something and ripping. To make it easier, there are a few techniques that you can use to soften the plastic on the Darbuka skin so that it doesn't tear as easily if you are worried!

The hairdryer method

Disclaimer – Malik Instruments do not take any responsibility for any damage to your Darbuka or Darbuka skin caused by use of the “hairdryer method”. It can be dangerous, and you should only use this if you know exactly what you’re doing. This method should not be used on Malik Instruments Darbukas – our Darbukas are of high enough quality that a normal Darbuka head should fit without any difficulty.

It is possible to loosen the plastic molecules of the Darbuka skin using the heat from a hairdryer. All you have to do is put the hairdryer on the lowest heat setting (but make sure it is heating and not cooling) and heat the Darbuka skin for between 5 and 10 seconds when you feel that the skin is becoming challenging to tighten. The heat from the hairdryer will loosen the molecules and allow them to be tightened more easily. It is essential not to overheat the skin, or you will cause irreparable damage to the plastic head.

When I first started teaching Darbuka, I bought 8 Darbukas to use with my students. They were badly made and very sharp around the head. Getting the skin on the Darbuka without tearing it was looking challenging, so I heated the skin with an iron. I managed to get the Darbuka skins on without tearing them, but a few days later I realised that all 8 of the Darbukas were sounding terrible. I realised I'd overheated the skins and ruined them! Make sure you're very careful when using this technique!

Can you fit a natural leather skin to a metal Darbuka?

A question we are often asked is can you fit a natural leather skin to a metal Darbuka. The answer is yes, it is possible to fit a natural leather skin to a metal Darbuka body. You can do so by removing any current skin fitted to the metal Darbuka, and then using a rope to tie down the natural leather skin to the metal body. You should get an expert to

help you with this, as if the knots are not tied correctly, it could lead to the head being imbalanced and creating an uneven sound! It is also important to note that while a natural leather skin can be fitted to a metal Darbuka, a plastic skin cannot be fitted to a clay Darbuka – for obvious reasons (you can't screw bolts into clay, or it will crack)!

How do you measure a Darbuka head?

To measure a Darbuka head, you must measure the diameter between the insides of the Darbuka head. Like this:

What if the skin I'm using is too big or too small?

If your Darbuka skin is a different size to your Darbuka head, you may have a problem.

In a clay Darbuka, it's not too bad, and as long as they are roughly the same, you will still be able to fit the Darbuka skin to the head with an appropriate knot pattern.

However, if you try to fit an incorrect sized plastic Darbuka skin to a metal Darbuka, you will not be able to screw the head back onto the body, because the crimped metal hoop will get in the way of the bolts that will screw through the Darbuka. If the head is too small for the Darbuka, it will simply not fit onto the internal tuning mechanism. It is therefore essential that you get the correct size plastic Darbuka skin. The good news is, as long as you measure your head correctly, you should easily be able to purchase the right size Darbuka skin!

Appendix E

A Reader on Clay Darbukas

In a clay Darbuka, a leather skin (often goat or fish) is placed on top of the body and tied (with rope) around the top section of the Darbuka body with an intricate series of knots. The below points are common questions I get asked specifically about clay Darbukas.

Best natural leather skins

The best natural leather skin to use is fish skin, as a good general rule of thumb. Fish skin is very thin, which means it creates the most powerful and clearest sound. Fish skin is also relatively more difficult to come by, which makes it more expensive. While fish skin itself isn't that hard to find, you would need an unblemished and even piece of skin wide enough to fit over the Darbuka head, which reduces the choice you have. However, most Darbuka makers will have a supplier where they can acquire a nice piece of fish skin suitable for use on a Darbuka. Fish skin is widely regarded as the best skin to use on a Darbuka.

Another fantastic option to use on a Darbuka is goatskin. Goatskin is strong but supple, allowing for a good resonant sound to be created. It's also not too thick that its thickness interferes with getting a good amount of vibrations going through the Darbuka. Goatskin is also much easier to find in a size large enough to fit a Darbuka, and hence it makes it much cheaper than fish skin. On the whole, goatskin is a great all-round choice for skin to use on your Darbuka.

Choosing between goat and fish skin

Choosing between the two can sometimes be quite tricky. Should you go for goat, or should you go for fish? Well, there are a few good rules of thumb that we can follow here too, depending on the size Darbuka you are playing:

Solo Darbuka (20cm – 22cm head diameter)

If your Darbuka is intended as a solo Darbuka, i.e. it's a smaller size Darbuka with strong, high pitched Teks, fish skin is by far the better option. It will allow you to create a great sound and will work very nicely with your Darbuka to create that solo sound you are aiming for. Goatskin will also work, but it will just be average, not amazing.

Bass Doholla (25cm+ head diameter)

If your Darbuka is intended as a background bass instrument, for example, a Bass Doholla, acquiring a fish skin might be quite tricky. A skin that big will cost a lot and will likely be a challenge to get hold of. Goatskin, on the other hand, would be relatively easy to acquire and not cost too much. Goatskin might also arguably create a better sound! The reason being that the increased thickness of the goatskin will create a deeper and more bassy sound. Fish skin might be a bit overkill!

Medium size Darbuka (22cm-25cm head diameter)

A standard medium size Darbuka or Sombaty Darbuka could work well with either fish or goatskin. It will again really come back to what kind of sound you want to create. If you want to create a sharper and more striking sound, you would be better placed with fish skin. However, if you want to create a more bassy and deeper sound (the difference will be noticeable but only slightly), go for a goatskin. In these situations, we would recommend just going with what you can acquire without spending too much time or money. Both skins would work well, and you probably won't regret the fish skin if you go for goatskin.

How do I stop a natural leather skin from going out of tune?

This is an issue which is more common in countries with cooler climates. When playing a natural skin Darbuka, the skin may not be tight enough to produce an appropriately good sound if the humidity is too high. This is because when a natural leather Darbuka skin is exposed to a humid environment, the leather increases in water content, sags and becomes loose. You can stop a natural leather Darbuka skin from going out of tune by using a Darbuka lighting tool. This is a light that is fitted to the inside of the Darbuka body that creates heat, thereby drying up the natural leather skin and making it tight. This will assist in getting the best sound from your Darbuka with natural leather skin. If you don't have a lighting tool to hand, your best bet is to heat it over a gas cooker (or fireplace if you have one of those handy). Note: it's not advisable to use a lighter to heat a Darbuka skin.

Are natural Darbuka skins reusable?

In most cases, yes, a natural leather darbuka skin would be reusable. Unless there is damage to it, they should be fine to be removed and refitted to another Darbuka.