

FOREWORD

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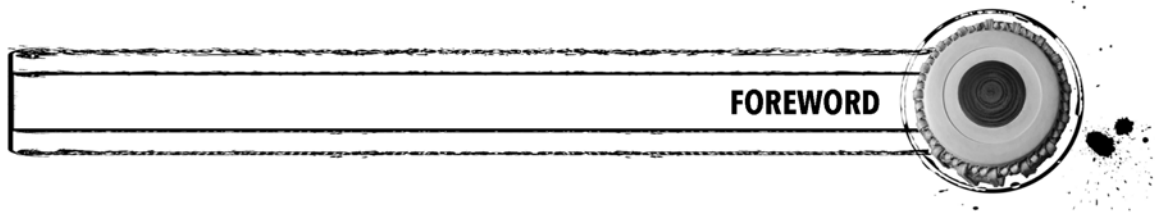
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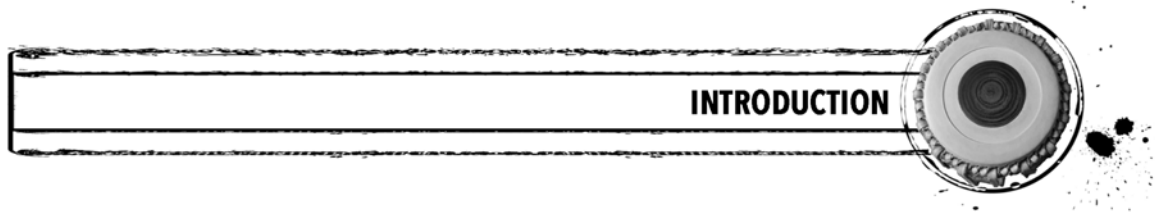
I feel so blessed to have discovered Tabla all those years ago in my twenties. Little did I know but having the great fortune to accidentally stumble into a free concert that featured the great Zakir Hussain on Tabla and the late great Ali Akbar Khan on Sarod, my life would be changed forever. The studies that followed with Yousuf Ali Khan in London were completely inspiring and influenced the whole of my future career.

Starting out on such a 'complete' instrument is no easy task, especially if one has no knowledge of the techniques, music or culture. The mysteries and marvels that unfold though are a treasure trove of experiences. The magic of the music that reveals itself is something incredible indeed. This book is designed to help the novice on the very first part of that journey.

The attention to microscopic detail in the musical systems and playing techniques of India is something that has been finely tuned over many centuries. I consider it to be the most advanced rhythmic and technical percussion in the world. My studies in the area gave me a profound and solid bedrock in the art of percussion and I would genuinely and wholeheartedly suggest that by embracing and studying this system yourselves, you could benefit equally.

Whether your goal is to 'start out' with this book as primers for a deeper classical study, or else, 'dabble' with a surface exploration to add another diverse string to your musical bow, you will find this book an excellent starting place. It will help you to develop an in-depth awareness of the basic techniques, musical systems and procedures involved.

Words are very incomplete messengers to explain the fullness of the rewards of bringing these drums and this music into your lives. Time spent with this instrument will reveal its endless diamonds and gems.



This book represents a completely fresh approach to learning Indian Tabla and applying it in more familiar Western contexts. The book covers the subject in such a way as to make the techniques and rhythmic frameworks totally accessible to anyone and comes with all examples represented as easy-to-follow audio files. We look at a brief history, general information on the instrument and culture, sections on playing styles, the phonetic vocal system, tuning and maintenance. We then move onto the individual strokes on the drums with concise, yet detailed illustrated descriptions. It is a completely transparent, step-by-step method.

Each new stroke is introduced and is then incorporated into a set of patterns combining it with other strokes. No knowledge of sight-reading is required for these patterns, although I do use some notation to reinforce some concepts for those that do read Western music. When all the primary strokes on the instrument have been covered, there are a number of sections dedicated to developing rhythms more applicable to Western styles of music, be it jazz, classical, contemporary, fusion, pop or whatever.



WAYS TO PRACTICE THE MATERIAL

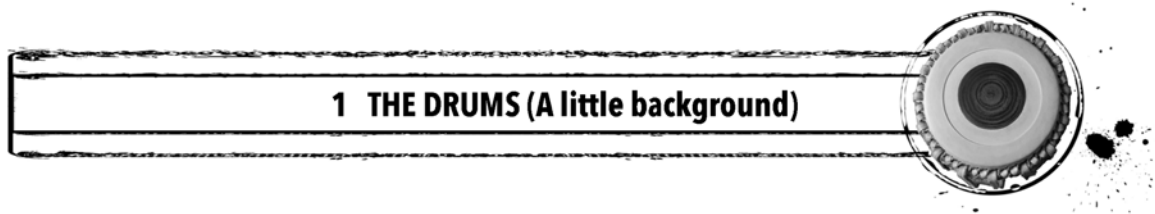
To get the maximum benefit from this book, I suggest you work on each example thoroughly, concentrating on sound production and clarity. Only move up to a faster speed when you feel each example is strong and clear at a slower tempo.

Each rhythmic theme has numerous variations. Begin by practicing each of these separately and then move on to playing the variations one after the other in a sequence, repeating each variation 1, 2 or 4 times. Slowly build up the speed and try to memorize all the sections. (You'll be surprised at how useful a long train journey can be when trying to memorize Tabla patterns.)

It is important to practice the material in the following three ways:

1	Syllables only
2	Drums only
3	Drums and syllables together

In the audio files, the initial theme and each variation are demonstrated very slowly, once with the syllables and then just the drums. Then, the theme and its variations are repeated at faster tempos in a continuous sequence, with each variation repeated twice.



1 THE DRUMS (A little background)

Tabla originates from North India and consists of a set of two drums: treble and bass. They are distinct from most other drums in the world in that each drum is played with a different hand. Very seldom do you see both hands playing on one drum, although, there are exceptions for certain specialist compositions. The drums have a regal history dating back centuries to the time where all palaces had their own set of full-time musicians, including Tabla players.

The performer sits on the floor with the drums in front of them, nestled in two supporting rings. The high-pitched drum is cylindrical in shape and stands about 10 inches high. It is made from wood, usually shisham or nim, and is hollowed out from the top like a big cup, remaining sealed at the bottom. The drum has only one skin, generally about 5 inches in diameter. The shell is wider at the bottom than the top by about 1½ inches.

The bass Tabla is basically a small single headed kettledrum made from nickel alloy. (It is sometimes possible to find them made from clay.) Both drum heads are made from goat skin and have a complicated hoop rim which is woven around the edge of the skin. The skins are fixed to the drum with a long leather strap. This strap is threaded through the hoop and underneath the drum through a small ring. This makes re-heading Tabla very time consuming and complicated and is best done by a specialist instrument maker. Both inside and outside the skin there is a thin rim, about 1 inch wide, running around the edge. This is also made of goatskin.

The long leather strap is pulled tight, bringing the drum skin to tension. The treble drum is pulled a lot tighter than the larger drum and needs small wooden blocks inserted between the shell and the straps to get it up to the pitch required. Sometimes you see smaller wooden blocks used for the bass Tabla. (In Benares a completely different method is used for the bass Tabla. They use rope and metal rings to get the tension.)

The skins then have paste patches applied to give the skins the resonance required. These patches are made from a paste of iron fillings, flour and ground hill stone. In India a chemical is also sometimes added to stop ants from eating the patches. The treble drum is tuned by knocking the wooden blocks with a small metal hammer. Finer tuning is then carried out by hitting the leather hoop of the skin, either up or down depending on the pitch required.

The small drum is tuned to the tonic or dominant note in the scale of the piece of music to be played. It is important to bear in mind that classical Indian music does not change key and so, if you play music that does change key then you will need more than one high-pitched Tabla at hand. The bass Tabla is generally not tuned to a particular pitch, largely because of the glissando technique that is used on that drum.



We can now look at the first basic stroke played on the larger drum.

'GE' Also sometimes called GA/GHE/GHIN

This is the main resonating stroke produced on the Byha. It is the stroke most often associated with the glissando, pitch-bending sound you hear on Tabla. What is especially attractive and characteristic about this stroke is the deep ringing, resonant tone. Once we have this basic sound then we can manipulate it in a tasteful way. It is interesting to note that folk players and classical players execute the glissando in a completely different fashion. Folk players do a very quick movement of their hand on the drum, which is derived from Dholak playing. Classical players meanwhile have far more subtlety and skill in their Byha technique.

Refer back to the playing position picture and see how the drum is angled away from the player and slightly towards the smaller drum. The black spot should be nearest the smaller drum and, if you look at the drum as if it were a clock face, your arm should enter from approximately 7 o'clock. (5 o'clock for left-handed players.). The arm is resting on the drum, palm down. Be careful not to drop your elbow too much because this will cause the wrist to lift off the skin. The underside of the wrist rests on the skin, but not too heavily. Remember, subtle Byha playing comes when the wrist glides like a hovercraft, only pressing when necessary to raise the pitch.

Next, cup the hand as if you were holding a pool ball. Relax the thumb and try not to point it outwards or upwards. The fingers are bent, and the stroke is played by striking the fingertips on the drumhead in a hammer-like striking motion. It is important to see that the bottom portion of the fingers are at right angles to the drum skin when they strike—this is what gives you the power in the stroke. Long fingernails will hinder this. The fingers are divided into two striking units:

UNIT 1 - The index finger

UNIT 2 - 2nd, 3rd and 4th fingers. (NB Because of the length of our fingers, the little finger does not reach the head, but it is important to involve it in the motion because you will be using the full muscle bank in the back of your hand to add strength to the striking unit.)

THREE FINGERED GE STROKE



ONE FINGERED GE STROKE

