Drumming for Dancers - *by Arwa al-Jinniyya (Jennifer Siegel) and Charles Thomas (Director and Lead Drummer of Twisted Gypsy and of The Rhythm Caravan)*

Drummers! Learn how to handle your drum and care for your hands. Build a basic library of rhythms.

Dancers! Learn how to recognize and ask for different rhythms so you don't end up dancing to three hours of Beledi.

Rule #1: **Have fun.** Congratulations! You are now a drummer. Keep drumming!

Rule #2: **No jewelry on the hands or wrists.** Hard objects can damage the drum and your hands, which will swell during drumming.

Rule #3: **Tone is more important than speed.** Don't rush it. Keep it groovy.

Types of Drums:

Wikipedia lists 60 types of drums, which is a good start (though, in truth, a drum is anything that makes a good sound when you hit it). The same drum can be called by many names depending on where you are in the world. If we look instead at the shape of the drum, the list becomes much more compact. For the purposes of this class, we will further narrow the field by concentrating on the two most commonly used types of hand drums found in Europe and the Middle East.

Frame Drum - A drum that has a drumhead width greater than its depth. Some have jingles, ringlets, or snares. It is the earliest skin drum known to have existed and examples are found in many places and cultures. Ireland (Bodhrán, played with a tipper), North Africa/Turkey (Bendir, with snare), Middle East/India (Daf, with ringlets), Mexico/Spain/Chile/Puerto Rico (Pandero, with jingles), Arabic world (Riq, with jingles), Europe/USA (Tambourine, with jingles).

Goblet/Chalice Drum - A single head membranophone with a goblet shaped body used mostly in the Middle East (darbuka/doumbek/tabla), North Africa (djembe-wassolou), and Eastern Europe. The origin of the term darabukka probably lies in the Arabic word "darba" which means "to strike". The original use of goblet drums in Babylonia and Sumer may date from as early as 1100 BCE.

Taking Care of Your Hands:

Build hand strength gradually. It takes time and repetition to strengthen the bones and condition the muscles and ligaments in your hands to accept the pounding they take during a performance. If you are only playing casually, just picking up the drum for five or ten minutes a couple times a week, and then you play a forty minute set you have a much greater chance of injuring yourself than if you are conditioned by practicing thirty minutes a day, every day. For new drummers, start with ten minutes at a time, three times a day. Don't practice too much. Tired and sloppy practice is not helpful.

Learn, develop, and practice precision. Learn to hit the drum in the correct spot, with the correct part of your hand. This is what drummers mean when they talk about precision. Precision will lead to two very desirable outcomes. Precision creates good and deliberate tone. Make the sounds you want to make, on purpose, consistently. But of equal, if not greater importance, is that precision prevents injuries. Hitting the Tek with the muscle that covers the underside of the distal phalanx of your finger tip (which creates good tone and doesn't hurt) instead of hitting the Tek with the bone that is not protected by muscle on the inside of your knuckle (which creates bad tone and leads to screaming swear words) is a difference of maybe a quarter of an inch in position. Precision matters.

Play with the proper amount of power. Do not hit the drum hard. Force does not equal volume. Technique does. Smashing the drum with an open hand as hard as you can is going to get you nothing but a loud and muddled slapping sound. And also get you hurt when you miss and smack your finger tip against the rim. Hold your hand in the correct position. Strike firmly, but with control. Make sure that you are rebounding to allow the sound to expand, instead of holding your hand onto the drum head by hitting too hard and choking the sound off. You are playing the drum, not beating it into submission.

Keep your hands loose and relaxed. This is crucial. If your hands are clenched tightly into claws and you hit something your hands will have no give, and they will break and not bend. Be soft. Be flexible. Stay relaxed. Warm your hands up before you play. Not only will you be preventing injury, but your tone will dramatically improve, your speed will increase and you will suddenly have far more stamina than you did before when you were clawing at the drum.

Hand Stretches:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wq7rsoCplu0

1. Close your hand, turn the fingers to the right and make a hitchhiking motion with your thumb, then slowly open your hand and put your pinky finger all the way up in the air so your hand is twisted all the way in the opposite direction. Do this a few times. The passive pronation version is to open your hand as if it's grasping a baseball and quickly twist back and forth at the wrist letting your fingers and hand relax, letting your wrist do the work. You can also point your index finger so the weight of the thumb is helping the hand pronate to its full extent.
2. Turn your hand up as if you're going to slap a drum. With your other hand, pull back gently on the fingers. Then make a fist and turn your wrist down, gently assisting with your other hand. Keeping your hand closed, move your thumb to the inside and turn your wrist down again without the second hand assisting.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=hUyMNyrOHJQ

1. Keeping your shoulders relaxed and your arms straight, reach forward with your hands open, palms facing each other. Tucking your thumbs inside, close your hands and tilt them down along the same axis as your outstretched arms. Hold for 8-10 seconds.
2. Hold one arm forward with your hand open, palm facing in. Keeping your fingers flat, fold your hand in at the wrist and then again at the fingers. Reach around with your other hand and pull it. Hold for 8-10 seconds. Switch sides.
3. Hold one arm forward with your hand open, palm facing up. Lower your fingers and place your palm against the wall, fingers pointing down. With your other hand, stretch your thumb up and away from the fingers. Hold for 8-10 seconds.
4. Hold your arms forward with your hands open, palms facing down. Keeping your fingers flat, rotate your palms up in a "stop" gesture. Hold for 8-10 seconds. Rotate your palms back to neutral, make a fist and hold for 8-10 seconds. Rotate the fists down and hold for 8-10 seconds.

Drum Sounds:

Doum - The deep bass sound produced by striking the head near the center with the length of the fingers and palm and taking off the hand for an open sound. Keep your fingers flat and extended, and your hand slightly cupped and relaxed. Let your hand bounce off naturally. The tone should be a deep DOUM sound, with a little reverberation and sustain.

Tek - A higher-pitched sound produced by hitting near the edge of the head with the pads of your middle and ring fingers, just above the first knuckle. Try to strike cleanly, with a bit of a whipping motion from the wrist. The motion is very similar to turning a doorknob. The sound is a sharp, snapping TEK, with no sustain at all.

Ka - Similar to the Tek, but played with the off-hand. The off-hand and arm rest on the top of the drum, relaxed and with your fingers straight, but loose. Lift your hand up and let it fall onto the edge of the drum, striking on the padded bottom of your palm. This should snap your fingers down onto the rim of the drum head. The important thing is to only strike with the ring finger. Keep the index, middle, and little finger up and out of the way. The resulting sound is a sharp, snapping KA, with no sustain at all. To get a clear, sharp, and consistent Ka takes most drummers months, if not years, of daily practice.

Mute - This is a variation of the Doum. Keep your fingers flat and extended, and your hand moderately cupped. With your fingers apart strike the drum head with the pads of your fingertips. Try to keep your hand "stuck" to the drum head. You don't need to hit hard, just make sure your fingers are apart and your hand is cupped and loose. The tone should be a medium THUNK sound, with no reverb and sustain.

Rizz - This is another variation of the Doum and can also be used in place of Teks. Keep your fingers flat and extended, and flex them back a bit. With your fingers spread wide strike the drum head, hitting with your small finger first. The force of the strike should cause your other fingers to fall into place, striking one at a time. Pinkie. Ring. Middle. Index. You don't need to hit hard. The tone should be a medium BRZAP sound, with no reverberation and sustain.

There are more complex techniques including snaps, slaps, pops and rolls that can also be used to ornament the basic rhythm. In addition to drum head sounds, hand clapping and hitting the sides of the drum can add even more variety.

Basic Rhythms:

(4/4) **Beledi** - Generally the first rhythm taught to a new drummer. If you get lost, go back to the Doums, then add the Teks and Kas as you become more comfortable with the rhythm and are ready to add fills.

1	&	2	&	3	&	4	&
D	**D**		**T**	**D**		**T**	

Other rhythms in the Beledi family include:

Ghawazee [TD-DD-T-], Maqsum [DT-TD-T-], Nawari [TD-TD-T-], Saidi [DT-DD-T-], and Sombati [D-TTD-T-].

(2/4) **Ayoub** - This simple rhythm is very easy to run away with. Pay close attention to your tempo so you don't burn yourself out or kill your dancers. Watch the lead drummer for cues and, if you are the lead drummer, watch the dancers for cues. If your dancers are only hitting every other beat, it's probably time to slow it down. If you get bored, you can also spice this up by interjecting a “polly-want-a-cracker” on the fourth repeats.

1	E	&	A	2	E	&	A
D			**K**	**D**		**T**	

(2/4) **Bayouk** - A bouncier version of the Ayoub. Be cautious about playing it for too long because it can start to feel heavy.

1	E	&	A	2	E	&	A
D			**K**	**D**		**D**	

(2/4) **Kartachi** - A simple inversion of the Ayoub.

1	E	&	A	2	E	&	A
T			**K**	**T**		**D**	

Drill 1: Ayoub, then Bayouk, then Ayoub, then Kartachi. Repeat.

Drill 2: Practice using Tek in place of Ka (right hand only). Good practice for speed in switching from Doum to Tek. It also frees up the off-hand for fills.

(2/4) **Malfuf** - A very basic 2/4 groove that complements the Ayoub very well and just begs for ornamentation. One thing to keep in mind is that the base beat is all you want when you are playing under other instruments or any player that is performing a solo. Keep your Malfuf spacious with a solid pulse and a nice groove and you will be well on your way to having the other performers love you.

1	E	&	A	2	E	&	A
D			**T**			**T**	

(2/4) **Malfuf Ornamentation** - This ornamentation is very busy, and good for building up speed and stamina for your Ka.

1	E	&	A	2	E	&	A
D	**K**	**K**	**T**	**K**	**K**	**T**	**K**

(2/4) **Kahleegi** - The companion of the Malfuf, it has the same feel. Just like with the Malfuf, if you start to confuse it with the Ayoub (which is very easy to do at first), slow down and work on the basic tones.

1	E	&	A	2	E	&	A
D			**D**			**T**	

(2/4) **Kahleegi Ornamentation** - A Mute is played in the same spot as the Doum, but keep your fingers spread, strike with your fingertips gently, and try to keep your fingertips on the drum head after the strike. This variant has a bit of a swing feel, and it is very easy to find a slow groove with it. Tempo is important.

1	E	&	A	2	E	&	A
D	**K**		**D**			**M**	

Deliberate Rhythms:

(8/4) **Three Doum Masmoudi** - The second half of this rhythm is essentially made for solos, rolls, and fills. It is also called a Walking Masmoudi, as it can bring to mind a person striding at a deliberate pace. Masmoudi should be slow, but not lazy; powerful, but not loud. It's a good test of a drummer's ability to generate emotion in the audience.

1	&	2	&	3	&	4	&	5	&	6	&	7	&	8	&
D		**D**		**D**		**T**		**D**				**T**		**T**	

(8/4) **Three Doum Masmoudi Ornamentation**

1	&	2	&	3	&	4	&	5	&	6	&	7	&	8	&
D		**D**		**D**	**K**	**T**		**D**		**T**	**K**	**T**	**K**	**T**	

(8/4) **Two Doum Masmoudi** - Known as the Warring Masmoudi because it can be thought of as a man and woman arguing back and forth. This version should feel a bit groovier. You want to create a deliberate, honeyed space for the dancers.

1	&	2	&	3	&	4	&	5	&	6	&	7	&	8	&
D		**D**		**T**		**T**		**D**				**T**		**T**	

(8/4) **Two Doum Masmoudi Ornamentation**

1	&	2	&	3	&	4	&	5	&	6	&	7	&	8	&
D		**D**		**T**	**K**	**T**		**D**		**T**		**T**	**K**	**T**	**K**

(8/4) **Chiftitelli** - Traditionally used as a wedding song in some cultures, it is meant to be a slow, deliberate beat. As with Masmoudi, dancers love this because it allows them to time to make slow, sensuous movements, and move about the stage with the challenging, playful strut that really gets an audience's attention.

1	&	2	&	3	&	4	&	5	&	6	&	7	&	8	&
D			**T**			**T**		**D**		**D**		**T**			

(8/4) **Chiftitelli Ornamentation [D-kT-kT-D-D-T-Tk]**

1	&	2	&	3	&	4	&	5	&	6	&	7	&	8	&
D		**K**	**T**		**K**	**T**		**D**		**D**		**T**		**T**	**K**

Stopping The Groove Train:

How does one stop a drum circle smoothly? Watch the lead drummer. Common cues include a big hand gesture, a vocal 3-2-1 call, or (my favorite) a drum call such as tktkt-tktkt-D-D-T!

Transitions:

Transitions between rhythms and tempos CAN be done and done well. All it takes is a lot of practice. Make the most of it by forming good communication between drummers and dancers!

Additional Resources:

http://threewinds.wordpress.com
http://www.twistedgypsy.com
http://percussion-net.com/index.php/tutorials/middle-eastern
http://maqamworld.com
http://www.khafif.com
http://alsiadi.com/Arabic_Rhythms.html

Technique Drills:

Go slow! Focus on your tone. Drills are meaningless if you are not practicing clear tone.

Drill 1 (Switching)

1	&	2	&	3	&	4	&	1	&	2	&	3	&	4	&
Dominant Hand															
D		**T**				**T**		**D**				**T**			
				K						**K**				**K**	
Top Hand															

Drill 2 (Switching Doubles)

1	&	2	&	3	&	4	&	1	&	2	&	3	&	4	&
Dominant Hand															
D	**D**	**T**	**T**			**T**	**T**	**D**	**D**			**T**	**T**		
				K	**K**					**K**	**K**			**K**	**K**
Top Hand															

Drill 3 (Stamina)

1	&	2	&	3	&	4	&	1	&	2	&	3	&	4	&
Dominant Hand															
D	**D**	**D**				**T**	**T**	**D**	**D**	**D**	**T**	**T**	**T**		
			K	**K**	**K**									**K**	**K**
Top Hand															

The Three Simple Rules of Practice:

Learn to Love Your Time Alone.

1. **Stay Relaxed.** It is very important to focus on proper technique. That includes posture, hand position, and breathing. Do not get so focused that you become tense. Good practice is relaxed practice. Drumming is not a competition. Have fun. Stay relaxed.

2. **Tone Is More Important Than Speed.** The goal of practice is to develop good tone. Do not rush. Your practice will be much more productive if you play slow, but with good tone, than if you play quickly, but with poor tone. Practice in groups of four. If you can run through the exercise without mistakes four times, then feel free to speed up a bit. When you make a mistake reduce your speed and focus on your tone. Tone is more important than speed.

3. **Less is More.** Never practice too much. I recommend practicing no more than ten minutes at a time for new drummers. You will get far more out of your practice if you focus on good tone for ten minutes, rather than practice for thirty minutes and tire and get sloppy. Try to practice for ten minutes at a time, two or three times a day. Less is more.