



TAMBOURINE TECHNIQUE

BY JOSH GOTTRY

Unlike most popular rock artists would have you believe, the tambourine is not an instrument you will regularly shake and bang against your hip. On the contrary, as with many percussion accessories there are techniques you should use to achieve a clear and precise performance on tambourine in the concert setting.

HOLDING THE TAMBOURINE

The most obvious (and correct) place to grasp a concert tambourine is in the section where there are no jingles - but don't stick your finger in the hole (we'll get to that later). The tambourine should be held at eye level to create a single sight line between the instrument, music, and conductor. This will also allow the audience to see what you are playing. Hold the tambourine at a 45° angle with the head up to create the best sound. If you need to mount the tambourine for multiple percussion setups, the hole can be used to attach the tambourine to a cymbal stand.

STRIKING THE TAMBOURINE

The method of striking the tambourine will vary depending on the speed and volume of a passage. Here are three different scenarios . . .

Slow to Medium Speed Passage - all dynamics

Hold the tambourine as indicated above. For soft to medium volume passages, bunch the fingers tightly into a single striking unit (hammer). Strike the tambourine approximately 1" from the far side. Add or subtract fingers as dynamic levels change. For louder passages consider striking the tambourine in the center with either spread fingers, flat fist (to avoid damage to the head, your knuckles should never strike the head), or flat hand. Note that the fist and hand also create different contact noise or articulations which may be desired or avoided depending on the situation.

Fast Passage - soft dynamics

Mount the tambourine on a cymbal stand or music stand, or brace the tambourine on your leg with your foot on a chair or stool (to make your thigh as flat as possible) and your forearms stabilizing the tambourine. Bunch the fingers in both hands into a hammer and strike the tambourine near the far edge of the instrument. Again, subtract or add fingers as necessary.

Fast Passage - loud dynamics (fist/knee technique)

Turn the tambourine upside down and grasp with your left hand. Place your foot on a chair to raise the position of one knee. Make a flat fist with your right hand. Strike the inside of the tambourine head with your hand for as many notes as possible. For weak beats (i.e. "e's" and "a's") use the left hand to strike the outside head of the tambourine against your leg.

ROLLS

There are two types of tambourine rolls. The choice is primarily dependent on the indicated dynamic.

Shake Roll - primarily for loud dynamics

Hold your forearm up and perpendicular to the ground. Rotate the wrist as quickly and evenly as possible to perform the roll. For softer dynamics, the speed and amount of rotation should be minimized and the tambourine may be lowered behind a stand to assist in reducing the volume. You may also articulate the beginning or end of a shake roll with your free hand.

Finger or Thumb Roll - primarily for soft dynamics

Hold the tambourine in the standard playing position. Gently press the middle finger (braced by the thumb) or thumb around the edge of the head. The finger or thumb should be as flat as possible on the surface and apply just enough pressure that it "skips" along the head. Increase the speed of motion to increase volume. To release the roll, skip out of the roll to another finger or the palm of the hand.



Josh Gottry is an active percussion instructor, performer, and composer in Gilbert, Arizona. He serves as an instructor for several local percussion ensembles and private percussion students, and performs regularly as both a soloist and ensemble member. As a composer, Mr. Gottry is a three-time ASCAP grant recipient with seventeen works published for percussion. Josh Gottry is a clinician for Mike Balter Mallets, Pro-Mark Sticks, and Yamaha Percussion.