

Cajon FUNdamentals

Josh Gottry

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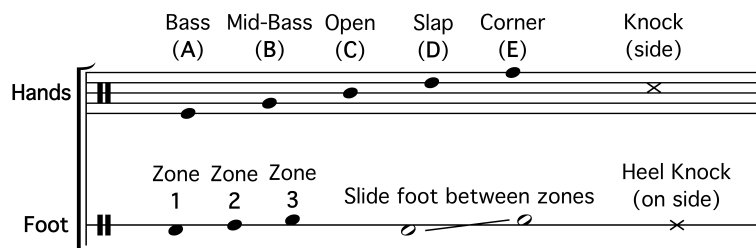
The History

The cajon is a hand percussion instrument which likely originated in Peru approximately 500 years ago. Searching for anything that might substitute for African drums, imported slaves converted readily available shipping crates into both a seat and an instrument. The cajon was eventually integrated into Spanish flamenco music, with the addition of an internal wire snare, and within the last decade or so, has become a popular “drumset in a box” used in pop, rock, and country music, Broadway shows, and contemporary percussion and chamber literature.

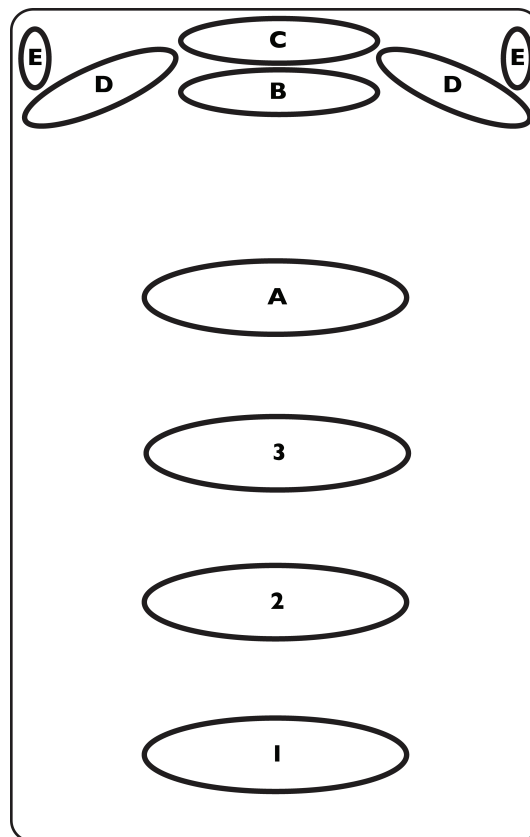
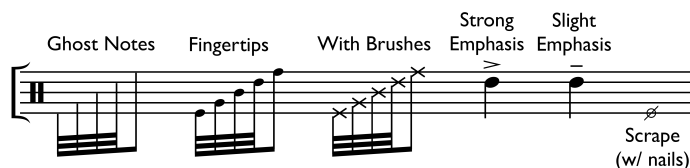
Playing Spots & Notation

The cajon is typically played with the hands, fingers, and feet, but it can also be struck with a variety of implements to create any number of different sounds. The front panel of the instrument is a thin, resonant wood and is the primary playing surface. The most common playing spots are indicated in the following illustration. Zones A through E are hand positions, each generating a slightly different sound. Zones 1 through 3 are foot positions that can be used to change the timbre of the hand sounds.

Cajon music is often improvised and not notated. In order to create performance literature for the instrument, a notation system was required. For this collection, the following notation system will be used, which corresponds to the playing spot illustration (to the right).



Additionally, several different articulation markings and notehead shapes will be utilized to specify degree of emphasis, part of the hand or fingers used, and/or the use of a brush.



Special thanks to C. Alan Publications and Meinl Percussion who were instrumental in making this clinic possible. Additional thanks to Chandler-Gilbert Community College for supporting my participation in this conference, PAS for inviting me, and to Klint McInturff for creating the guitar play-along tracks for this clinic and the book.



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Basic Exercises for Cajon

(excerpted from 'Take a Seat')

Basic Two

This exercise combines the primary two sounds on the cajon and should be practiced with alternating hands. Strive to strike the same spots every time, and practice starting this exercise with either hand.



Escalator

This exercise includes all five hand positions in a straight-forward up-and-down sequence. The first two measures should be practiced with each hand independently and be performed as smoothly as possible. The third & fourth measures offer an alternating hand variation on the previous exercise, again including all five hand positions. It should be practiced starting with both the right and left hand and be performed as smoothly as possible.



Drumset in a Box: Groove Adaptations for Cajon

(excerpted from 'Take a Seat')

Rock ♩ = 80-120



Half-Time Shuffle ♩ = 116-152



Two-Beat ♩ = 72-112 (swing or straight eighths)



About the Clinician

A respected educator and internationally recognized composer, **Josh Gottry** has been working with the next generation of percussionists for over 20 years. He earned his BM in Percussion Performance at Northern Arizona University and his MM in Composition at Arizona State University and is currently part of the music faculty at Chandler-Gilbert Community College and Grand Canyon University, teaching courses in percussion, composition, and music theory. Additionally, he works with percussion ensembles and students at all grade levels as a clinician and within his private lesson studio. Mr. Gottry is an ASCAP award-winning composer whose works have been credited as engaging, pedagogical, and brilliantly creative. His pieces have been performed extensively at universities, junior high and high schools, and multiple national conferences. He is a member of the Percussive Arts Society and the American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers. He serves as a clinician for Meinl Percussion, Mike Balter Mallets, ProMark Drumsticks, Remo Drumheads, and Yamaha Percussion, and has presented clinics at the Arizona Music Educators Association Conference, Arizona PAS Day of Percussion, New Mexico PAS Day of Percussion, and PASIC.

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