Check List for Starting to Play

1. The Chair

The chair you use while practicing must work to support your playing. When you sit in the chair, your femur bone must be parallel to the floor Insisting on this height of chair or stool ensures that the drum will fit properly into your rib cage and your internal hand will be comfortable.

If you can't find a stool or chair with the right height, put something under your foot to elevate your femur bone. A stack of books or a yoga block elevate your leg properly.

Once solution is to Buy a drummer's stool. However, these stools have no back support. Best advice: go to a flea market or yard sale and buy a sturdy, wooden, straight back chair of the proper height. That may cost $10. A drummer's stool may cost hundreds of dollars.

2. Your Posture

Straight posture. Straight back. Feet flat on the floor (a prop-up). Shoulders relaxed. Arms relaxed. Head up

3. Be Intentional About the Skin of your Bodhran

The skin used for the bodhrán head is a critical factor in the sound of the drum. Many (most?) bodhrans with tape on the head use thin hides and often use lambeg skins. Those skins tend to be thin. Medium thick skins produce a "traditional" sound. That is more punch, less tone.

The "old school" traditional bodhráns generally had thick skins. These drums produce hard, percussive sounds. It may take a couple of years to break in these drum heads and require the use of lotions and oils.

You should prepare for a break-in period for all drums. This make take a few months for a thin skin and perhaps six months to a year of regular playing for a medium thick skin. The voice of the drum will improve after the break-in period is completed.

If you are deeply unsatisfied with the character of your bodhrán's voice, the cause may be the kind of head on the drum. The sound of a drum is largely determined by the type of skin and type of tipper used. Listen to other drummers. If you admire the voice of their drums, ask what kind of skin is used for the head.

4. Striking force and Angle of the Tipper

A 45° angle, or less, between the tipper and drum head is essential for many reasons. But no more shallow than 20°. An angle below 20° will produce a scratchy sound.

a. The striking angle will change depending upon a specific playing techniques .

b. A shallow attack angle prevents scratching and damage to the drum head. Using a shallow playing angle will extend the playing life of the drum head. An angle below 20° will produce a scratchy sound.

c. Always use a tipper with a rounded head. Never play with a tipper that has a ragged end or sharp hot rod dowels.

d. Don't always play the drum in the same spot. Periodically move the contact point around the drum head. While playing, rotate the drum a small amount between tunes. This helps to distribute the mechanical force of the tipper strikes evenly around the drum head. Rotating the drum to move the strike point also helps stabilize the tuning of the drum. Rotating the drum periodically also prevents a build up on sweat in one spot of the interior of the drum head.

5. Look at the bodhran when you are practicing
Watching the tipper, your hand, your wrist, your forearm and linking movement with the character the sound you make is vital feedback and essential in making improvements in your playing.

6. Your elbow is not your wrist
The wrist makes the music. The elbow positions the tipper on the drum head and provides accents. Make the wrist and elbow stay within their prescribed roles.

7. Active listening
Listen critically to the bodhran players you admire.

Listen just as critically to your own playing and analyze what techniques need work.

8. Be intentional about your choice of tipper

Skinny tippers deliver a tight sound – a sharp transient. Wide diameter tippers deliver mellow sounds. Bundle tippers (aka hotrods) can deliver a clear sounds with added texture. The size of the drum, the type of skin used on the head will cause the same tipper to deliver different sounds on different drums. Be prepared to experiment with tippers to find what works for you and your bodhran.

9. ALWAYS use a metronome during practice times.
Keep the bpm at a rate that allows you to play patterns accurately. Gradually increase the tempo in small amounts,perhaps 5 or 10 bpm, as you build confidence and accuracy.

Tunes have unique personalities. So do sessions. So, any advice about the tempo of a piece of traditional music has to be a range of values. Here are some starting points.

Reels: between 110 and 120 bpm
This bpm is based upon 4l4 time. That implies eight 1/8 notes in each measure.

A hot session or a band might use a bpm between 130 to 170.

Jigs: between 90 and 110 bpm.

10. ALWAYS do the stretching exercises before you practice or play.