

The Strike

Key Points

- The bottom of the tipper is used for most strikes.
- The top of the tipper is used for triplets.
- The side of the tipper is used for rim shots.
- Contact with the drumhead is always with the side of the tipper.
- MOST strikes will be made in the front half of the drum head – that part most distance from the drummer

To execute a single down stroke

- Hold the tipper close to the drumhead and at an angle of about 20 degrees with the head.
- Point the tipper and the fingers of your hand over your shoulder
- In a single, smart snap, move the tipper so that your fingers point toward the floor. Don't try to stop the tipper immediately after you strike the head. Follow through the strike until your fingers point toward the floor. Only a portion of this arc will be used when playing. The motion centers in the wrist and fore arm. Move as though you were mixing pancake batter. Do not move your fore arm up and down. That movement will make a loud noise, but this coarse movement does not allow the play to create any finesse. Techniques including triplets and dynamics will not be possible.
 - RIGHT-HANDED PLAYERS: The arc of the tripper will begin at 1 o'clock on the drumhead and end at about 4 o'clock.
 - LEFT-HANDED PLAYERS: The arc for left-handed players will start at 11 o'clock and at about 8 o'clock.
- Put your hand inside the drum on the drumhead to stabilize the drum.

To execute a single up stroke

Reverse the directions for the down stroke

- With the tipper and fingers pointed toward the floor, execute a single, smart snap that ends with your fingers pointing over your shoulder. Follow through with the motion. Don't stop the motion after striking the head. This description is somewhat exaggerated. However, it accurately describes the arc followed by the tipper. In practice, you will use only a section of this arc. The faster the tempo, the smaller the section of the arc that will be used.

For both the down-stroke and the up-stroke, the movement must be fluid and relaxed. Look at the way a rhythm guitar player works the right hand. Think about how your wrist moves when you are beating egg whites into a meringue. Move your wrist as though you were trying to shake off water. These are the kinds of fluid motions needed to play the bodhran. At the same time you work to be fluid, the strike on the head must be smart and snappy. Make it pop! Aim for a glancing blow on the head. Remember to follow through on the strike.

Problem Solving

1. Sliding tipper:

- Put a rubber band at the center of the tipper
- Apply grip tape to the center of the tipper. Grip tape used on snare drum sticks or tennis rackets or bicycle handlebars can work. Even cloth-based adhesive tape can work. Do not use compounds like “gorilla grip”. That just makes every thing you touch sticky!

2. That awful scratchy sound

- Every player begins with a scratchy sound. This will pass.
- The drumhead may need sanding and/or moisturizing. See the section on drumhead care.
- Your strike may be tentative. Hit the drumhead smartly and get the tipper off the head. Don’t drag the tipper along the head. Smack that thing! The strike should be an arc. The apex of that arc is where the strike occurs. That contact point should be small even though the arc of the strike may be rather large. Be assertive.
- If the drumhead has a tattoo, that may be the source of the problem. Painted logos or symbols on the drumhead of a bodhran can deaden the voice and cause a scratchy sound. If the drum is a wall-hanger, that’s fine. If you are going to play the drum, forget the corporate symbols and cute paintings.
- A drum will “play in”. That means as you play the bodhran the tipper will polish the head. The more you play, the smoother and quieter the head will become. High-end drums rarely suffer a scratchy head sound. The builders usually take great pains to treat the skins they use so that they are really smooth.