

Tone on the Bodhran

Prepare the Drum Head

NOTE: Many players do not tape the drum head. They achieve similar results by tucking the drum firmly against the rib cage. I prefer to tape the head. It's more reliable. For some drums, notably the inexpensive drums from Pakistan, tape on the head is the only way to bring the drum into good voice. The choice to tape or to not tape is yours to make. All of my drums have tape on the heads.

The first step toward getting great tone out of a bodhran is to tape the head. This simple procedure is done to focus the tone of the drum. When the head is struck a wave goes out from the point of contact with the tipper and strikes the rim of the drum. It is then reflected back toward its point of origin. The interaction between the original wave and its reflected wave commonly produces spurious sounds and unwanted overtones. These overtones and spurious sounds make the drum voice muddy or pingy. The tape damps out the reflected wave and focuses the sound of the drum.

Here are two how-to video on taping a drum head

<http://preview.tinyurl.com/bodhranCGOTHtape>

This video does a before-and-after comparison. Very impressive!

<http://tinyurl.com/commonground3>

I recommend using Scotch Brand, or 3M wide electrical tape. Look for Scotch brand 88. The wide tape makes the work go faster. Find Scotts 88 online or at an electrical supply store.

Getting different tones from a bodhran is a key technique for intermediate and advanced players. Great tone is produced by drums with natural, hide heads. It is difficult to impossible to get much pitch change out of synthetic heads. If you want to play bodhran with distinct pitch changes, you will need to invest in a drum with a natural head. It is not necessary to spend hundreds of dollars on a drum. See the notes on how to make a cheap drum sound great.

The Interior Hand

Changes in pitch on the bodhran are largely the work of the interior hand. You will need to experiment with your drum and playing style to find how to produce the best sound from your bodhran. Generally players use some version of a "C" formation with the heel of the hand and finger tips touching the drum head. As you develop your style of tonal playing, remember to minimize the distance your interior hand as to travel. At fast tempos it may be impossible to cover so much distance and keep the beat.

Here is a five minute video showing how to produce pitches on the bodhran. It's more effective to watch a player than read pages of instruction!

<http://tinyurl.com/bodhranCGOTH>

Or, (same video)

<http://tinyurl.com/bodhranCGOTH2>

More details about the bodhran are available at this link: www.billtroxler.com