

Generating Tonality in the Bodhran Hand pressure inside the Drum

*NOTE: artificial drumheads don't produce much tonality.
To vary the pitch of a bodhran, a hide-head is essential*

Vary the shape of your hand and the pressure applied to the head to generate different sounds.

Players may use the flat of the hand, the heel of the hand, or the edge of the little finger side of the hand. A “C” shape formed by the heel of the hand and the fingers tips is a favorite of many players. Sometimes only a single finger is used.

Experiment to discover the different tonal qualities of your drum. Each drum will produce different sounds depending upon the amount of pressure applied, the amount of skin contact, the position of the interior hand, and the relative location of the interior hand versus the tipper strike. There are no set rules. It is impossible to generalize for all drums and all players.

Start with these combinations of hand and tipper locations. Modify these to fit your style and your drum.

Low Pitch Sound

- Hand in the drum at either 12 o'clock or 6 o'clock.
- Tipper between 2 and 5 o'clock for right hand players 10 and 7 o'clock for left hand players
- Rest the interior hand lightly on the drumhead. Position the hand so that at 1 o'clock only the pad of the middle finger lightly contacts with the drumhead. The object is to dampen the drum, not to alter the pitch of the drum. This light contact damps out reflection on the head and makes a coherent sound. Often only a finger touch produces the best sound. Some drums respond nicely to a flat palm at about 6 o'clock.

High Pitch Sound

- Hand at the top of the drum
- Tipper at 3 o'clock for right hand players and 9 o'clock for left hand players
- Press against the drum head firmly with the palm of the interior hand
- The object is to push hard enough to tighten the drum head and thereby change the pitch and timbre of the drum.

Exercise

Run this exercise producing a low pitch on two strokes and then a high pitch on the following two strokes. Keep at this until you are comfortable doing this at about 120 bpm.

