



Didgeridoo Skills Course

Intermediate Level Workbook

Tools you will need for *The Didgeridoo Skills Course*

- Metronome
 - On iPhone a good app is *Pro Metronome*.
 - On the web: <http://a.bestmetronome.com/>

Beginning metronome exercises

- Set your metronome on a 4 beat cycle at 80 beats per minute. On didge play a note on beat 1 and then rest for beats 2, 3 and 4. Repeat.
- Now play notes on beats 1 and 2 and rest for beats 3 and 4. Repeat.
- Now play notes on beats 2 and 3 and rest for beats 1 and 4. Repeat.
- Now play notes on beats 1 and 4 and rest for beats 2 and 3. Repeat.
- Do this for all possible two note combinations: 1 and 2, 1 and 3, 1 and 4, 2 and 3, 2 and 4, 3 and 4

Voice Work

- Acknowledge the range of your voice. Try singing with your natural chest voice (low-mid range notes) and try singing with your falsetto.
- Practice singing while playing didgeridoo using both of these voices.
- The vocal scan. Sing from your lowest note to your highest note.

Metronome exercises

- Set your metronome on a 3 beat cycle at 80 beats per minute. On didge play a note on beat 1 and then rest for beats 2 and 3
- Now play notes on beats 1 and 2 and rest for beat 3. Repeat
- Now play notes on beats 2 and 3 and rest for beat 1. Repeat.
- Now play notes on beats 3 and 1 and rest for beat 2. Repeat.
- Play for 3 beats and rest for 3 beats

Playing with Dynamics

From wikipedia: "In music, **dynamics** normally refers to the volume of a sound or note, but can also refer to every aspect of the execution of a given piece, either stylistic (staccato, legato etc.) or functional (velocity). The term is also applied to the written or printed musical notation used to indicate dynamics. Dynamics are relative and do not refer to specific volume levels."

Abdominal Rhythm with Dynamics

- Use your abs to create rhythmic notes that are alternately soft and loud
- Start at 80 bpm and gradually increase
- The rhythm looks like:
 - **soft-LOUD-soft-LOUD**
- This rhythm as circular breathing (inhale thru nose) looks like:

- *soft-inhale-LOUD-inhale-soft-inhale-LOUD-inhale*
- The punchiness of the abdominal notes have more to do with quickness and less to do with how hard you push. The dynamics (volume) of each note is controlled by the intensity of the abdominal thrust.

Subdividing the beat

- Start with your metronome on a 4 beat cycle at 80 beats per minute and gradually work up to 100 bpm.
- Study all combinations of two consecutive beats
 - 1 2, 2 3, 3 4, 4 1
- Now take those same combinations and add the upbeat in between
 - 1 and 2, 2 and 3, 3 and 4, 4 and 1
- Use dynamics to accent certain beats within the beat.
 - Examples: 4 and **1**, 2 **and** 3, **1** and 2

Circular Breathing

The Basic Circular Breathing Rhythm

Start by practicing this without the didgeridoo. The goal is to have air continuously flowing out your mouth while taking regular inhales through the nose. Conceptually, air is stored in the mouth, a reservoir of air separate from your lungs. Constricting this air reservoir (using the cheeks and jaw) allows you to inhale while air is still flowing out your mouth.

1. Fill the cheeks
2. Exhale out the nose, emptying the lungs
3. With the lips tight, squeeze the cheeks and get the lips to make a light buzzing sound (simulating the resistance of the true lip buzz). Inhale through the nose without losing the sound from the lips (air flowing out the mouth).
4. Exhale out the mouth fully, catching air in the cheeks so they are filled again.
5. Repeat steps 3 and 4 continuously.

Blend the two sources of air together by overlapping them. Squeeze the cheeks before you are finished exhaling. Conversely, start exhaling before you finish squeezing the cheeks. The goal is to continuously be sending waves of air through the instrument such that air pressure is maintained and a clear drone is heard throughout.

Bounce Breathing

Bounce breathing is a brisk circular breathing rhythm in which you do not contract your cheeks. The emphasis here is on maintaining a constant rhythm with the breath while keeping the cheeks full the whole time. The rhythm is (1) in through the nose (2) out through the mouth. Steps 1 and 2 get equal duration and the tempo should be brisk. Set the metronome at 100 beats per minute and exhale on each click, inhale between the clicks. It may be easier to set the metronome at 200 and inhale and exhale on each click. Try this first without the didge and then play it on didge aiming to keep the rhythm going without breaking the drone.

Playing in a 3-beat cycle

The triple meter has a unique feel that is utilized in almost every musical tradition. In western music, the triple meter is known as the *waltz*. By accenting different parts of the 3 beat cycle we can break up the rhythm a number of different ways.

*Set your metronome at a medium tempo and say or sing each of the following numbers on the click: 1 2 3, 1 2 3, 1 2 3, 1 2 3. Now do the same but accent beat one (say it stronger than the others): 1 2 3, 1 2 3, 1 2 3, 1 2 3.

3 can be doubled to create 6, or quadrupled to create 12.

*Using the metronome again, say: 1 2 3 4 5 6, 1 2 3 4 5 6. Now do the same but accent beats 1 and 4: 1 2 3 4 5 6, 1 2 3 4 5 6. Now try a lesser accent on 1 and a greater accent on 4: 1 2 3 **4** 5 6, 1 2 3 **4** 5 6. This last one is the foundation for 6/8 swing.

HA-we-ha

This 3 beat circular breathing rhythm is a powerful foundation for higher level playing. **HA** is a breath out that fills the cheeks. **We** is the sound your cheeks make when they squeeze allowing for a simultaneous nostril inhalation. Repeated it sounds like:

HA-we-ha, HA-we-ha...

Note the two exhales right next to each other. The **HA** (in capitals) should have the louder sound.

Tu-wa-ki

By adding tongue accents to **HA-we-ha** we get **Tu-wa-ki**. In addition to the abdominal attack used to generate the sound **HA**, the front of the tongue makes the sound **Tu**, adding extra emphasis to the downbeat. The sound **Ki** is generated by the back of the tongue resisting airflow at the roof of the mouth. In addition to added emphasis, the *ee* sound in **Ki** change the harmonics that are coming through the instrument. In short, **Tu-wa-ki** is the same rhythm as **HA-we-ha** with added layers of sound.

African Clave

The 6/8 clave from Africa is a very powerful trance inducing rhythm. The 6-beat cycle must be subdivided to fully embrace the rhythm:

1 + 2 + 3 + 4 + 5 + 6 +, 1 + 2 + 3 + 4 + 5 + 6 +...

The clave goes:

1 + 2 + 3 + 4 + 5 + 6 +, 1 + 2 + 3 + 4 + 5 + 6 +...

Afro-Cuban Rhythms

The following rhythms are bell patterns essential to Afro-cuban music. Originally brought to the Americas by African slaves, these rhythms are still found in most traditional sub-Saharan African music.

1. Tresillo (Caribbean Clave) - The tresillo is a common rhythm found throughout Latin music. Use strong exhales (abs) to play notes on beats **1, & of 2** and **4**. When you do this

rhythm with circular breathing you can inhale in any space between the strong beats. Try to hear your inhales as a rhythmic element.

1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &, 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &...

2. Habanera - Now take the *tresillo* and add a note on beat 3 for the variation commonly known in Cuba as *Habanera*.

1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &, 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &...

3. Cinquillo - Another variation on *tresillo*, this time adding notes on beats 2 and the & of 3

1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &, 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &...

4. Variation units can be thrown in to spice up your rhythm. Try playing 3 bars of *tresillo*, *habanera* or *cinquillo* and then throwing in one of the following on the fourth bar:

1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &

1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &

Whole note (1 long note over all four beats)

Adding overtone and vocal sounds to rhythms

A complete drone-based (as opposed to trumpet-based) didgeridoo sound is comprised of the drone, the overtones, the rhythm and the voice. To master this style, study these elements and begin to fuse them together as overlapping and complementary layers of sound.

HA-in-wee-you, HA-in-wee-you...

Combining abs, cheeks and tongue harmonics to create the rhythm **HA-in-wee-you**. **HA** is a strong exhale, **in** is a short nostril inhalation with cheek or jaw squeeze, **wee-you** is tongue movement. Now **Add the voice** now over **wee-you** to create color and melodic movement. Mastery of this rhythm shows control over all the elements that comprise the drone-based didgeridoo playing style.

Middle-Eastern Rhythms

The following rhythms are designed for the drum known as dumbek or darbuka (shown at right). The following rhythms are noted in terms of two predominant drum hits: **dum (D)**, the bass drum sound and **tek (T)**, the snare, or higher pitched sound. For didge we have the option to use a different sound (such as the trumpet or voice) for each of these hits. To start we play all pulse beats with notes generated by abdominal rhythm.

1. Maqsum/Maksum - A middle-eastern 4-beat rhythm often used for bellydance.

D	T	-	T	D	-	T	-	D	T	-	T	D	-	T	-
1	&	2	&	3	&	4	&	1	&	2	&	3	&	4	&

2. Malfuf - The main pulse of Malfuf sounds just like *tresillo* (Lesson 6), the variations,

however, are quite different. The basic rhythm is:

D	-	-	D	-	-	T	-	D	-	-	D	-	-	T	-
1	&	2	&	3	&	4	&	1	&	2	&	3	&	4	&

For circular breathing we subdivide the malfuf rhythm using the following symbols:

Ha = exhale while engaging abs, **we** = inhale while squeezing cheeks:

Ha	we	ha	Ha	we	ha	Ha	we	Ha	we	ha	Ha	we	ha	Ha	we
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The most common variation you will usually hear in Maksum is:

								3x															
D	-	-	D	-	-	T	-	D	-	D	-	T	-	-	-	D	-	D	-	T	-	-	-
1	&	2	&	3	&	4	&	1	&	2	&	3	&	4	&	1	&	2	&	3	&	4	&

Integrating Trumpet Sounds with Rhythm

Now you can take advantage of the polyphony of rhythm by substituting different didge sounds for the different drum hits. Play the above rhythms, using your abs for each **dum** and a trumpet sound for each **tek**

Compound Meter (Advanced)

Simple Meter

Almost any rhythm can be broken down into segments of 2 and 3 beats.

1	2	3
Ha	we	ha
Out	in	out

1	2
Ha	we
Out	in

Compound Meters

Cycles of 2 and 3 beats can be combined to create compound meters. The most common compound meter is **6**, two sets of three (or three sets of two)

1	2	3	4	5	6
Ha	we	ha	Ha	we	ha
Out	in	out	Out	in	out

Five or Ten

Five can be created most simply by combining two and three in one of two ways:

1	2	1	2	3
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1	2	3	1	2
Ha	we	ha	Ha	we
Out	in	out	Out	in

Ha	we	Ha	we	ha
Out	in	Out	in	out

For most odd meters, doubling the phrase into an even number (such as 5 + 5 = 10) makes a more musical phrase. To create 10 we have a number of options:

1 2 3 1 2 3 1 2 1 2 OR **1 2 3 1 2 1 2 1 2 3** OR **1 2 1 2 3 1 2 3 1 2**

Seven or Fourteen

Seven is created by a combination of one unit of 3, and two units of 2. The following sequences add up to seven:

1 2 3 1 2 1 2 OR **1 2 1 2 1 2 3** OR **1 2 1 2 3 1 2**

Fourteen may seem like a daunting number but once you internalize the phrase it becomes quite musical.

1 2 3 1 2 1 2 3 1 2 1 2 1 2

Make Your Own: Now that you have the tools to build your own compound rhythm, build it. There are an infinite number of possibilities.