

A Jembe Lesson with Yaya Diallo

By B. Michael Williams

YAYA DIALLO, MASTER JEMBE artist and author of *The Healing Drum* (Destiny Books, 1989), is also a gifted teacher. In February of 1995, I had the pleasure of taking a jembe lesson with this Minianka master drummer from Mali, West Africa.

The thirty exercises presented in this article, gleaned from that singular encounter, represent a systematic approach to developing the essential techniques of jembe drumming. The three basic strokes ("bass," "tone," and "slap") are presented in a thoroughly logical sequence with the intent of developing clarity of sound and ambidexterity. In addition to the basic developmental exercises, Yaya includes some typical accompaniment patterns (exercises 19 and

20) and a composition from his native village of Fienso in Mali ("Outeme," exercises 25-30). "Outeme" is recorded on Diallo's recent CD, *Dounoukan* (Everyone's Drumming ED 1195, P.O. Box 361, Putney, VT 05346, Ph/Fax (802) 387-2249).

It is of utmost importance to maintain a sense of rebound (what Diallo refers to as "up and down" motion) in both tones and bass strokes. The broken 8th-note patterns that accelerate (exercises 4, 5, 7, 10, 11, 13, 15 and 16) should create a sensation of "churning" from the elbow as the hands lift off the surface of the head. The faster one plays these exercises, the more the 8th notes should "straighten out," until they eventually sound as straight 8ths in 4/4 time. The exercises marked "cross" re-

fer to crossing from one hand to the other, rather than literally crossing the hands.

Diallo describes the tone stroke as the most difficult and encourages careful attention to the rebound in developing a full sound. Slaps should be approached in a relaxed manner, with a whip-like motion "at the last second." Like a Zen master, Diallo advises: "Don't think about it, then you will see." He also stresses the importance of practicing tones and slaps with the weak hand (for which exercises 6, 8, 14 and 16-18 are especially helpful).

These exercises will improve any hand drummer's technique, and can be applied equally to conga drums as to jembe or other similar drums. As Diallo concludes: "Practice these exercises every day, and you will



SoundArt Series 12" Single-Row tambourines with jingles of German Silver, Phosphor Bronze, Beryllium Copper, and our exclusive Chromium 25th alloy. And of course, all BSP tambos are made with a solid, steam-bent shell (and always have been).



*Bamboo Timpani Sticks
Custom crafted from choice bamboo and fine wool felts*

Tune in to the true sound of quality.

Contact us for a free catalog
info@blackswamp.com
www.blackswamp.com/bswamp

*World-class percussionists are choosing
Black Swamp instruments...shouldn't you?*

BLACK SWAMP PERCUSSION 2341 Linden Dr.
Adrian, MI 49221 U.S.A.
voice/fax: 517-263-1364

Frank Giorgini's UDU DRUMS
UDU CLAYTONE DRUMS with electronic capabilities
UDU Inc. Rt. 67 Box 126, Freehold, NY 12431
(518) 634-2559 - Fax: (518) 634-2488
1-800-UDU-DRUM





RHYTHM FUSION

Import and Export Percussion Instruments of the World

Congas	Shakers
Djimbes	Rattles
Frame Drums	Whistles
Doumbeks	Sound Makers
Rain Sticks	Gifts & Art
Tapes & International CDs	

1541C Pacific Ave. • Santa Cruz, CA
Mail order: P.O. Box 3226, Santa Cruz, CA 95063
(831) 423-2048 Fax: (831) 423-2073 Dealers Welcome!
E-MAIL: Rhythm@cruzio.com HTTP://www.Rhythmfusion.com

EQUILIBRIUM
 CREATIVE INNOVATIVE EXCITING UNIQUE

QUALITY CDs

- EQ 1 *The Shattered Mirror* - Music of Michael Udow - Percussion Ensemble
 Rock Ensemble #7, Timberlake Quartet, Big Music, Bird Whispered and The Shattered Mirror
- EQ 2 *Border Crossing - Percussion Ensemble*
 Rouse - Opus Antigoni, Hollinden *The Whole Top Lay Down*, Udow - *Fleshback*,
 Daugherty - *LEX*, Vava - *Border Crossing*, Shapiro - *Sister*, Kavalakis - *Vapor Trails*
- EQ 3 *Imaginary Landscape - Percussion Ensemble*
 Rouse - *Ka-Ki-Umoku*, Spencer - *Freddie Sunflower*, Ishii - *Movmentstück*, Blaine - *Why*
 Cage - *Imaginary Landscape No. 3*, Precht - *A Card of Three Strands*, Beavers - *Shadowplay*
- EQ 4 *Moon Rise - Chris & Shaka - Japan's Unique Marimba & Percussion Duo*
 Saitanaris - *Alpha Blue*, Hardy - *Moon Rise*, Coma - *Sister Musee*, Araya - *M. Touboro*,
 Fisher - *Like breathing out and breathing in*, and more!
- EQ 5 *Verdieris - Payton MacDonald & Jessica Johnson - Percussion & Flute Duo*
 Harman - *Concerto #1*, Udow - *The Enchanted Sea*, MacDonald - *Devil Dance*,
 MacDonald - *Tales of Conquest*, Levin - *Violet Night*
- EQ 6 *Transmutations & Metamorphoses - Barry John Mizelle's - Percussion Ensemble*
- EQ 7 *Unicycle Man - Ted Fitzrecker - Vibraphonist/Composer*
 A distinguished jazz quartet featuring Ted with Bob Mintzer, James Williams,
 Harvie Swartz and Dave Meade excels in mostly Fitzrecker originals
- COLLECTOR'S LP**
 EQ-SM LPI *Music of Michael Udow* - Includes a 16 Page Photo/Text Booklet
Rock Ensemble #7, Timberlake Quartet, Big Music, Bird Whispered

VISIT EQUILIBRIUM'S WEB SITE AT:

<http://members.aol.com/equilibri>

or reach us by mail: EQUILIBRIUM, P.O. Box 305, DEXTER, MI 48130
 or by phone or FAX: (313) 426-5814

MUSIC BY MICHAEL UDOW

FOR A FREE ANNOTATED CATALOG: download www, call or fax

FANTASTIC PICCOLO WOODBLOCKS NOW IN 8 SIZES - GUARANTEED

TIMBREL CONCEPT: CREATED AS A MOUSSHO SUBSTITUTE

Ideal for *Marimba Spiritus*, *Marimbastic*, *Music of Chris Rouse* & your creative improv

SPECIALTY BRASS MALLETS THREADED & EPOXIED

DESIGNED BY MICHAEL UDOW AND JOE FERRARO

- > #1 & #2 *The Magic Flute Mallets*
- #3 *New Available in Britain* - superb weighted brass Orchestral Glock mallets,
- > #4 & #5 great for contemporary percussion - bell plates, iron pipes etc.
- > #6 Chimes - *Haltz The Planets*, Backstage m's when tone & articulation are essential

CYMBAL ATTACHMENTS - for Suspended Bass Drum Hoop Stands

Freelance Adjustable: Perfect for freelance [suspended hoop bass drum] attached cymbal gigs
Metropolitain: Designed exclusively for the Alan Abel Model hoop/bass drum stand

- **NEW - LOG DRUMS** Designed for full volume university percussion ensemble use - 1 tone/drum for superior resonance. Rack mounted, interchangeable drum configurations, played standing. Accurately tuned in pentatonic sets of five or seven pitches (CDFGA/CD) or special order chromatic octaves

EQUILIBRIUM DANCE & PERCUSSION THEATER

- NANCY & MICHAEL UDOW -

25 Years of University and Community Residency. Touring at over 250 venues

PHONE/FAX (313) 426-5814

"Dynamic Music & Dance Duo" *"Not to Missed"* *"Perfect Equilibrium"*



PERCUSSIONS

journal of studies and information
 on the world of percussion arts

- atelier
- classique
- concours
- interview
- jazz
- métissage
- musée
- nouveautés
- notes
- portrait
- organologie
- pédagogie
- répertoire
- steel drum
- tradition

BIMONTHLY...

... with its monthly supplement : *brèves*

1 year : 230 F (France) - 280 FF (foreign)

Sample copy : P.S.F. - 18 rue Théodore-Rousseau -
 F--77930 CHAILLY - EN - BIÈRE, France

Phone & Fax : [+ 33] (1) 60 66 46 95

Yaya Diallo

Jembe Exercises

Transcription by Michael Williams

Notation Key

Bass Tone Slap

1 Bass

2

R L R L L R L R L R L R

L R L R R L R L R

3 Tone

4 Bass/Tone

accel.

R L R L R R L L R R L L R

L R L R

5 Tone/Bass

accel.

6

R R L L R R L L R R R R R L L L L R

7 "Cross"

accel.

8

accel.

R L L R R L L R R R L R L R L R L R L

9 Slap

10 Bass/Slap

accel.

R L R L R R L L R R L L R

L R L R

11 Slap/Bass *accel.* 12

R R L L R R L L R R R R L L L L R

13 "Cross" *accel.* 14 *accel.*

R L L R R L L R R R L R L R L R L R L

15 Tone/Slap *accel.* 16 *accel.*

R R L L R R L L R R R L L R R L L R

17 18 Bass/Tone/Slap

R L R L R L R L L R L R L R L R L R

19 Typical accompaniment patterns 20

R L R R L R L R R L R L R R L R L

21 Additional Tone/Slap Exercises 22 23

R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L R L

be able to play anything. In two months you will be able to play percussion, and people will say, 'Wow!,' because you will be able to play the bass, the tones and the slaps and know how to control them."

As with the study of any musical instrument, the development of technique on the jembe should not be viewed as an end in itself, but rather as a means to the greater end of artistic expression. "Rapid,

dexterous playing fascinates youth but represents only a stage through which a musician passes," says Diallo in *The Healing Drum*. "Playing the instrument should look easy. It is art."

24 Tone/Slap with Ghost Strokes

R R L R (L) R R L R (L)

25 "Outeme" (wo-TIM-ee)
Introductory Exercises

R R R L R

26 Outeme (skeleton)

R R R L R

27 Outeme - Running with Ghost Strokes

R R R L R R L L R

28 Variation 1

R (L) R (L) R L (R) (L) R (L) R L (R) L R (L)

29 Variation 2

R (L) R (L) R L (R) (L) R (L) (R) L (R) (L) R L

30

R (L) R (L) R L (R) (L) R (L) R L (R) L R L PN



"The Minianka appreciate a musician who has internalized his skills to the point that he can relax while playing." **B. Michael Williams** teaches percussion at Winthrop University in Rock Hill, South Carolina, where he also directs the Winthrop Percussion Ensemble. He holds a BM degree from Furman University, MM from Northwestern University, and Ph.D from Michigan State University. Williams is active as a performer and clinician in symphonic and world music, and his compositions are published by HoneyRock Publications.