

Very Simple Samba

Bass drum (or surdu) on booming "Three" of the four beat measure. (Muffling the boom on the 4 or 4x with your non-stick-holding hand and tapping a rim or the drumhead very softly on One is a secret of good samba grooving, because stopping that booming "Three" just before the first beat of each measure creates a kind of propulsion by omission, a key pause, space, gap, or "participatory discrepancy".)

Set up a conga (or dzembe or dumbek) tone on "Four" with grooving and time-keeping filler beats. (I still teach four different ways to do this that I picked up from Synyer Hanesworth 35 years ago [an African-American version of a Cuban version of playing Brazilian samba?]: 1) two thumps on 1 and 3 to cue up a 4 tone – bass bass tone bass bass tone bass. . . etc. all with the right hand; 2) same as in #1 but with a left thump on 2x added before the bass on 3; 3) playing all 8 eighth notes as muffled or filler beats with accented bass pattern of #2 cuing up the tone on 4 (or two tones on 4X as a variation); 4) creating the same pattern as #3 using palm-tip or 'pitter-patter' technique palm palm tip tip palm palm TONE tip R L R L R L R L. Remember, whichever of the four ways you choose, the tone is on 4, closed fingers, bouncing the hand off the drum head for maximum ringing tone. Eventually you want this to be the loudest sound and the thump-bass sounds or pitter-patter to be softer and insinuating the groove.

Practice the basic agogo and tamborim "bell beats" with variations by listening to Brazilian recordings.

If you can't find a Brazilian pandera player to supply and teach the best possible high-frequency groove, you could try learning pandera from an Airto or Brazilian instruction video, or you could try shaking shakers to the "AH-hoc-key-stick" chant. AH is a 4x (filling that precious little space that occurs when you muffle the booming "Three" of the bass drum) and "hock" is on One. AND one and 2 AND three and 4 AND one

Try to find an improvising expert snare drummer and/or a guica (friction drum) player and/or a reco-rico specialist to fill in the growing "samba school."

Often a samba specialist like Geoff Johns (CDs and workshops) or the video of a Brazilian expert like Airto is closer at hand than you think.

Pat Campbell:

Mused defeatists, sit down. Musicians who teach and have hope that children can learn, stand up and take a chance. Get an artist to teach you and your children the mechanics and nuances of making the sound in sync and in style. Lose your ego, become a student again, and get a fresh and new musical grip. The time of stepping on eggshells ("we can't teach what we don't know") is past, because everyone can learn new music at any time, so long as the desire is there.

* Intrigued with samba drumming? If you pair Lee Higgins' Samba Drumming (Norfolk: Norfolk Educational Press, 1995) with your favorite samba recordings, you'd find yourself playing samba in time. Lee's work in the Community Music movement in the U.K., as well as his expertise and enthusiasm for samba, has helped to bring about the phenomenon of samba bands in England (and more recently in parts of Ireland where he has been workshopping).

