

Cajon Essentials

PART 5 BY BYRON MARK



Do you know the origins of the Cajon? We all take for granted the power and simplicity of this box drum, but once you understand its history, it makes it even more impressive!

Made from old drawers and packing crates, the Cajon actually originates from Peru, created by the West African slaves as an alternate drum-like instrument to use after they were banned from using their native drums. It wasn't until 1977, when flamenco guitarist Paco de Lucia visited Peru, that the potential of the Cajon to join the world of flamenco was realised. Paco took a Cajon back to Spain to experiment using it as the rhythmic base for flamenco music, alongside the palmas of course. The organic blend of guitar and Cajon soon became a solid part of flamenco ensembles. It has since spread to many other musical genres, making it perhaps the most versatile percussion instrument.

Have you played a flamenco rhythm before? Since flamenco helped the Cajon make a worldwide presence, I thought I would share with you my knowledge on one of my favourite flamenco palos (rhythm): the Bulerias. This is a very deep rhythmic form and takes time to master, but I will introduce some of the key elements of this palo here for you.

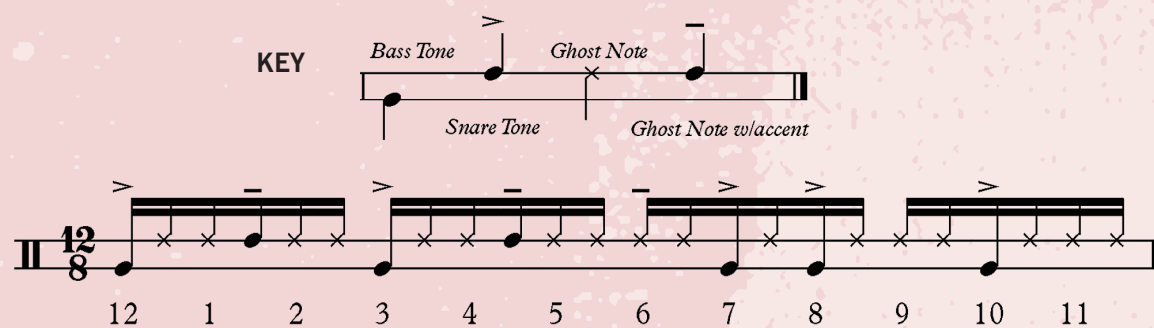
How does the Bulerias work? The Buleria is a lively form in 12/8 meter, with an interesting and varying accent structure that allows endless possibilities of phrasing and composition. Some say the rhythm is in 6/8 or even 3/4 – both of these can be seen as correct, but the 12 beat cycle will always remain. Actually, you must *'feel' the rhythm in 6 when playing this pattern*, so your foot will be tapping the pulse on all the **even counts** (below).

The initial Buleria rhythmic cycle is shown below, with the **accents in bold**, and **foot pulse scored as the star**. One way to think of it is starting with 2 groups of 3, followed by 3 groups of 2. The biggest difference to note is that the cycle **DOES NOT start on the ONE!**

12 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11
Pulse * * * * *

However, this has evolved over time, and now it is very common for the accent on the '6' to be *shifted to the '7'*, giving the Buleria a more *funky modern edge*. Numbers and notation below.

12 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11
Pulse * * * * *



NOTE: The above is to be played all as *single strokes*.

Such a small shift of accent makes a BIG difference in the feel of the groove. As you can see, the pulse doesn't change – so the more you place accents on the **odd beats** of the compas (bar), the more funky and syncopated the rhythm becomes.

The Remate: this is the 'close' of the compas; how you finish off the bar. In Bulerias, it's on the last accent of the bar (6th beat), which ends up being on the 10th beat in the cycle. This is where it can become confusing I know, but this is extremely important to understand, as flamenco guitarists, dancers and singers will usually finish their phrases at this point in the Bulerias palo, (or any other 12 beat palo for that matter). However with practice, it will feel normal and all make sense, trust me! An example remate (think of it like a drum fill to end a song) is shown below.



(NOTE: Beat '11' is a rest, which emphasises the close of the phrase on count '10')

Soniquete: All these sneaky variations and feel changes form part of what flamencos call the 'soniquete'. Flamenco music is all about passion and emotion, and you can hear it in the guitar and see it on the dancers' faces – our job as a flamenco percussionist is to play with the right swing, appropriate palo variations, correct tones, and accompany and follow their every move, to help make those magic moments that make us say 'Ole!'

I hope you enjoy the flamenco journey – there is *so much* to be learned from understanding this rhythm, and once you unlock its code, you will be able to compose so many variations of this groove yourself! And remember where the Cajon came from; it's always important to learn the traditional roots of an instrument, so make sure you check out Peruvian rhythms too! Happy practicing!

SUMMARY OF THE CAJON ESSENTIALS SERIES: by Byron Mark

In this 5 part series, we have looked at many different techniques and rhythms of the Cajon and its application in today's music industry. The Cajon is a rapidly evolving drum, with the newest advancement being the electronic Cajons, equipped with electronic triggers inside, making it the ultimate and portable hybrid drum! (Made by Roland and DG Spain).

PART 1: Looked at how to play a solid 4-to-the-floor groove, focusing on producing a phat bass tone and a cracking back beat 'snare' tone on beats 2 and 4.

PART 2: Introduced you to the world of accessorising your Cajon. I began with the shaker, because it is one of the simplest, yet most effective way to electrify your groove, but there are so many more products available on the market today designed specifically for the Cajon, including a side-stick tambourine, foot clap-stick, finger-shakers, the list goes on!

PART 3: I shared with you my secrets on how to mic up your Cajon, both in the studio and on stage at a gig. It's essential that you can represent the true acoustic sound of the Cajon when amplified.

PART 4: Takes you back to basics, applying the famous world of paradiddles to your Cajon. If you use paradiddles amongst your Cajon grooves and fills, it opens up a new world of possibilities and accent structures!

PART 5: To close, I had to take you to Spain and discuss one of the most famous flamenco rhythms, the Bulerias. Its complex yet simple structure is what makes this rhythm so much fun to work with.

These 5 series offered you a great introductory insight as to how you can be extremely versatile with the Cajon and use it in almost any musical setting. And there are so many more topics on the Cajon that you can immerse yourself into and study if you'd like to be a Cajon master! I am still learning every day too, which is what I love about music – you can never say you know it all, because there is just so much out there to learn and listen to, and the opportunities are endless!



Chris Duff



Peña Flamenca Sydney Dancers

YOUTUBE Performance Links: "Buleria Groove – BYRON MARK – Cajon Solo"; Ramon Porrina; José Montaña

Have any comments or suggestions? Please share them with me at byron@learncajon.com. Want to learn more about modern Pop & Rock Cajon playing?

You can download a free video and PDF notation on '4-to-the-floor Grooves' at www.learncajon.com/learn

Byron Mark has been performing, recording and teaching percussion for 10 years. With a Bachelor of Music, Masters of Teaching, and undergoing intensive study regimes in Spain and Africa, he has an energetic performance style that has paved the way for many tours using his unique percussion station.



Byron is a professional percussionist, drummer, pianist and composer based in Sydney, Australia. He has a strong interest in Flamenco and African drumming and has studied both at home and abroad (Spain, Africa) with artists including Juan Flores, Ramon Porrina and Sibo Bangoura. Byron is a sought after musician performing regularly with numerous groups including flamenco ensemble Pena Flamenca, artists from The Voice including Lionel Cole and Rosie Henshaw, and acoustic duo Kinetic Method. Byron is a passionate educator with a Bachelor of Music and a Masters of Teaching from University of Sydney and he loves to share his knowledge and skills with people in an inspiring and fun way.