

Cajon Essentials

PART 2 BY BYRON MARK

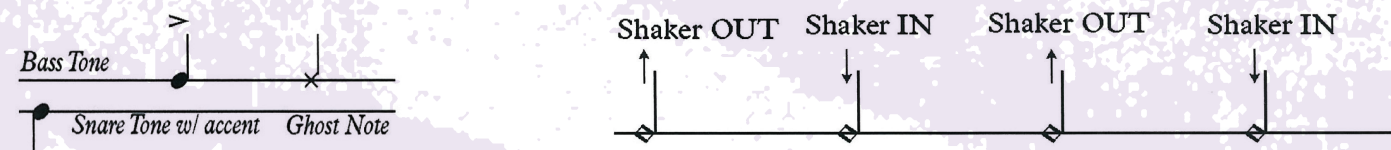


Accessorising your Cajon can bring so much more colour and excitement to your playing. However, the key here is to accessorise tastefully - to enhance & support your groove and the music around it: not to over power the surrounding musical elements. Percussionists like to sport their own unique percussion station setup; however I'd like to share with you one of my favourite and simplest methods to accessorise your Cajon - adding the Shaker!

The Shaker has been used for centuries, originating from North-West Africa and South America, and will be used for generations to come due to its simple, yet powerful effectiveness in music. These days, the Shaker is often used in Pop & Rock music to mimic the groove of hi-hats or ride cymbals, or to compliment other percussion, such as the tambourine.

To play the shaker simultaneously with the Cajon - the vital key to success is a **strong independence between both hands**; playing the main parts of the Cajon groove in one hand, and the shaker pattern in the other. I like to play the shaker in my **leading hand** (right) and Cajon groove with my left, however, this decision is totally up to you as a performer, and its always best to choose the combination that is comfortable for you.

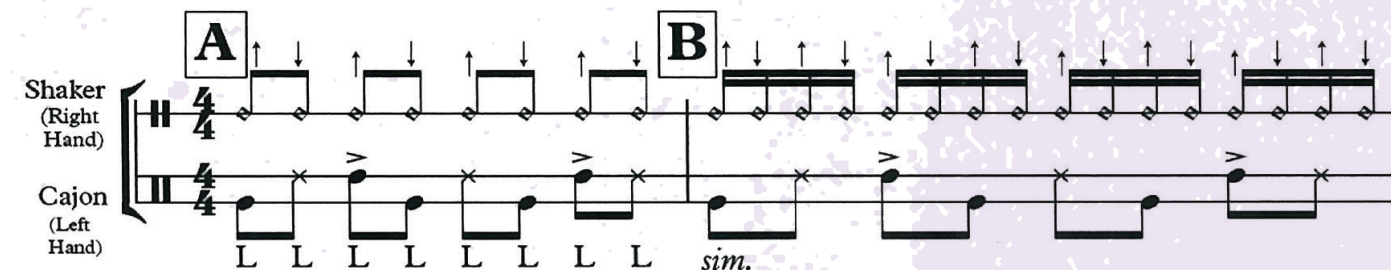
KEY



Note: OUT means the shaker is moving AWAY from your body; and IN means you are bringing the shaker back towards you.

GETTING STARTED

Practice exercises A (8th notes) and B (16th notes) below to develop your Cajon/shaker combo. Of course, **practice each hand individually**, and then both parts together. You will notice that your Cajon hand has a lot of work to do, playing bass, snare and ghost tones all at once. But it sounds great once you get it! (You can also try these shaker patterns with other grooves you're working on).

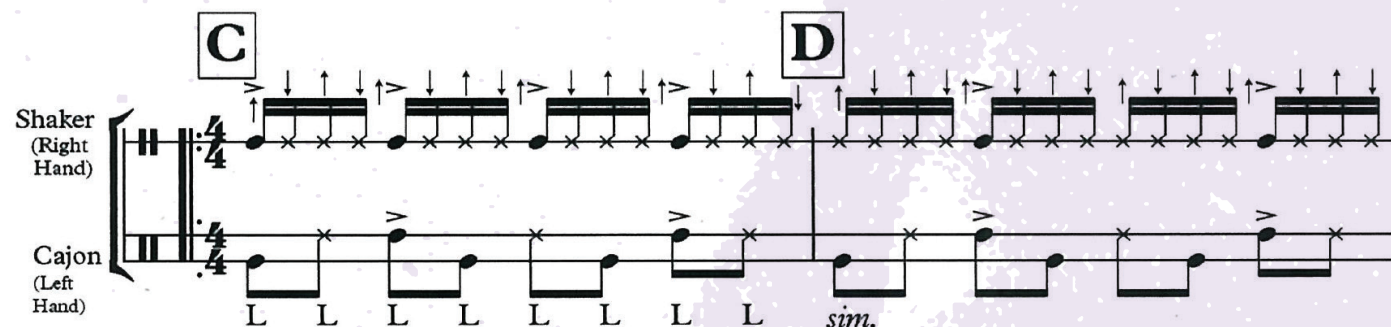


ADDING DYNAMICS

Once you develop this coordination and are comfortable with your grooves, you can add **dynamics and musicality** to your shaker. Firstly, it is essential to add **accents** to your shaker groove. The most common accent patterns are:

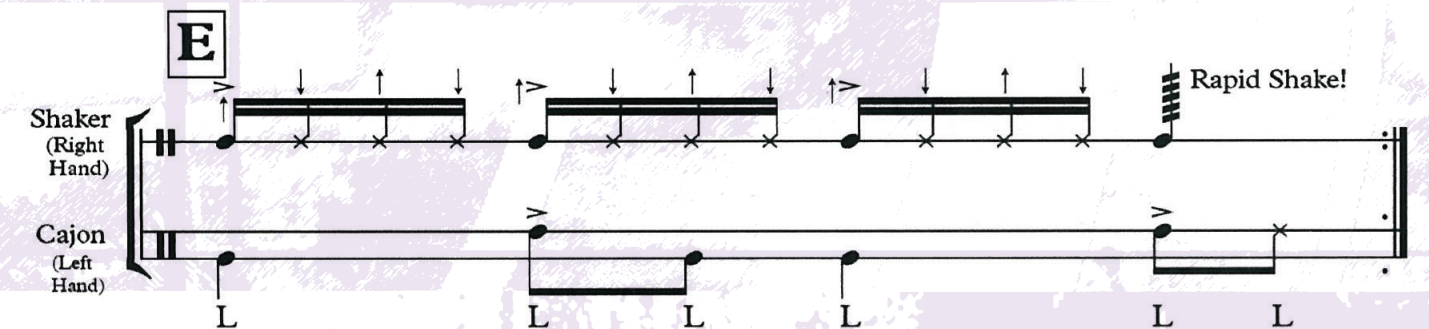
- Accenting all beats of the bar: 1, 2, 3 & 4 (Exercise C)
- Accenting only the **backbeat**: being beats 2 and 4 (Exercise D)

Each accent structure requires a strong level of coordination and dynamic control – so make sure you practice the shaker on its own first before combining it with your Cajon groove.



ADVANCED PRACTICE

The final effect I'd like to share with you is the **'tremolo shake'** effect. Quite simply, this is a rapid shake of the shaker over one or more beats of the bar. The most common and effective placement of this is on beat 4 (Exercise E).



There are many other accessory products on the market today specifically tailored to compliment the Cajon, such as kick pedals, Cajon castanets, woodblocks, tambourines, brushes, snare adjustors, the list goes on. However, like the shaker, you can also use traditional percussion instruments alongside your Cajon playing to amplify the energy and dynamics within your performance. Enjoy practicing!

YOUTUBE Performance LINKS: 'Man In The Mirror Cover' (*Kinetic Method*); 'How to Play Cajon and Shakers Drum Clinic'.

YOUTUBE Accessory LINKS: 'Meinl Mini Cajon Shaker'; 'Schlagwerk Shake Hands'.

Stay tuned for the next edition of PERCUSscene where we'll be looking at more creative ways to play Cajon!

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 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.

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