

Conga Drumming Technique

Notice the lines or spaces on the staff that the conga notation uses. Usually parts are written for two drums, so conga music is often written on a two-line staff. The higher of the two lines on the staff is for the high drum and the lower of the two lines is for the low drum.

If the note has a "L" under it, strike the drum with your left hand.

If the note has an "R" under it, strike the drum with your right hand.

Strokes

There are five basic strokes:

- "O" Open tone (*tono abierto*): played with the four fingers near the rim of the head, producing a clear resonant tone with a distinct pitch.
- "M" Muffled or mute tone (*tono ahogado*): like the open tone, is made by striking the drum with the four fingers, but holding the fingers against the head to muffle the tone.
- "B" Bass tone (*tono bajo*): strike the center of the conga with the heel of your hand. It produces a low muted sound.
- "S" Slap tone (*tono seco*): slap the edge of the conga with the fingers of your hand. The most difficult technique producing a loud clear "popping" sound (when played at fast and short intervals is called [floreo](#), played to instill emotion in the dancer).
- "T" (or "H/T" for heel/toe) Touch tone (*toque de punta*): as implied by the name, this tone is produced by just touching the fingers or heel of the palm to the drum head. It is possible to alternate a touch of the palm with a touch of the fingers in a maneuver called *heel-toe* (*manoteo*), which can be used to produce the conga equivalent of drumrolls.

The *moose call* or [glissando](#) is done by rubbing the third finger, supported by the thumb, across the head of the drum (like a "thumb roll" on a tambourine). The finger is sometimes moistened with saliva or sweat, and sometimes a little coat of beeswax is put on the surface of the conga head to help make the sound. The moose call is also done on the [bongos](#).

To [bend the pitch](#) of the congas, a *conguero* sometimes uses his elbow to shift around on and apply pressure to different parts of the head; this causes the note to change. This is not a traditional stroke, but it is common in modern salsa and rumba.