

## **Doubles – Developing Speed**

This section will deal exclusively with all the aspects relating to doubles and how to develop a well balanced roll. We've been asked many times: "How can I develop the doubles on the conga? My answer is simply: Practice and Patience. "

Here is a very basic method to develop doubles. When you hit the conga typically the middle part of your hand hits the border of the conga (not the rim) and your finger hits close to the center of the drum. Normally the hand will bounce naturally on the drum. We think of it more like a snare drum. If you have never played snare drums then we would like to recommend for you to start listening, watching and learn about snare drums; pay close attention to marching drummers especially.

We try to visualize ourselves playing a snare drum and then listen to the conga drum for articulation. We'll explain it like this: *"Learning to do doubles is like learning a new language. It's hard in the beginning, you don't understand a word but with practice and determination you can dominate it."* The following exercises will help you develop doubles.

# Doubles Exercises

R R LL RR LL RRL LRRL RRL RRL L

RRLL RRLLRRLL RRLLRRLLRRLLRRLL RRLLRRLL

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

R R L L RRL RRL

9  
RRL RRL R L R L

These are the main exercise to develop doubles. Practice this daily. Start at a slow tempo and eventually increase the tempo gradually. Let's do some rudiments that involve doubling: *Half Drag, Full Drag, 5 stroke roll, 9 stroke roll and paradiddles*. Enjoy...

## “The Half Drag”

This rudiment should be practiced slowly. You can gradually build up the speed. We highly recommend practicing this rudiment using a towel on the conga drum. Now, let’s take a look at the exercise.

### Half Drag

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

Start practicing slow and gradually build up the speed

## “The Full Drag”

A *Full drag* consists of a *half drag*, followed by a *single accented stroke*. The latter is made with the same hand that completes the *half drag*. This rudiment should be practiced slowly and increase the speed gradually.

### The Full Drag

LLR    R    RRL    L    LLR    R    RRL    L  
 1    2   3   4   5   6    1    2   3   4   5   6  
 RRL    L   LLR    R    RRL    L   LLR    R

## “The Five stroke roll”

Two staves of music in common time. The first staff shows a five-note roll with accents (>) over the final note of each half. The notes are quarter notes on the lines G4, A4, B4, C5, and D5. The second staff shows a five-note roll with accents (>) over the first note of each half. The notes are quarter notes on the lines G4, A4, B4, C5, and D5. The first staff has the following stroke order below it: R R L L R. The second staff has the following stroke order below it: L R R L L R R R L.

## “The Nine stroke roll”

Two staves of music in 6/8 time. The first staff shows a nine-note roll with a quarter rest at the end of each half. The notes are quarter notes on the lines G4, A4, B4, C5, and D5. The second staff shows a nine-note roll with a quarter rest at the end of each half. The notes are quarter notes on the lines G4, A4, B4, C5, and D5. The first staff has the following stroke order below it: R R L L R R L L R. The second staff has the following stroke order below it: R R L L R R L L R.

Slowly increase the speed while practicing this exercise.

## “The Single Paradiddle”

This rudiment combines two single strokes with one double stroke.

Two staves of music in common time. The first staff shows a single paradiddle with accents (>) over the first note of each half. The notes are quarter notes on the lines G4, A4, B4, C5, and D5. The second staff shows a single paradiddle with accents (>) over the first note of each half. The notes are quarter notes on the lines G4, A4, B4, C5, and D5. The first staff has the following stroke order below it: R L R R L R L L. The second staff has the following stroke order below it: R L R R L R L L.

These are just a few rudiments for you to use. Create your own combination and exercises with this.

## Soloing –What’s involved?

Soloing is an art. When you solo you want to draw a picture in which the audience can see and hear your masterpiece. A clear understanding along with inspiration is what makes a soloist construct a meaningful solo. A sequence which ends in a climax is an excellent solo or a sequence which creates a climax and it ends with a *decaying or entrega* (Spanish word for to give in) is another outstanding way of soloing.

In Latin music, the way you perform a solo is different from any other style. In this genre you want to use meaningful phrases based in *clave*, either  $2/3$  or  $3/2$ , *Son, Rumba, and 6/8*. That is why is necessary to practice phrasing in all claves to master the patterns in every clave. When we teach soloing we always start with quarter note phrasing, follow by eight note phrasing, then syncopated phrasing, and finally sixteenth phrasing. Don't forget the clave concept with every phrase.

One of the books we use is “*Syncopation*” by Ted Reed. After going through all the pages before the *syncopation* starts, we set up the metronome and go from page one (using the *clave* pattern on a *jam block* with my left foot). Once that is mastered then we continue with the *syncopation* part, playing one measure phrase, then two measures phrases, and finally through the whole page. Always at the end of a practice session we create our own combinations. We do the same thing with the triplet section in the book and we apply the  $6/8$  groove to it.

Especially the accents have unlimited combinations because we can apply different sounds to them.

Transcribing solos is another good device to increment your solo vocabulary. This is something we are constantly doing, either mentally or written. We also ask our students to do the same.

This way we are always getting new ideas and also getting involved in the development of how solos change from time to time. Transcriptions may include *solos "típicos"* (Spanish word for simple), melodic phrases from performers such as Carlos "Patato" Valdes, Mongo Santamaria, Ray Barretto, etc. or contemporary style, which is a combination of melodic phrases with speed. You can hear contemporary soloing from "Master Congueros" such as Giovanni Hidalgo, Miguel Anga, Paoli Mejias and Richie Flores.

In summary, solos involve everything you have at your disposition, from the basics to the most complicated rhythm. Solos can be performed in various styles depending on the effect the performer wants to achieve.

## How to apply rudiments in to my solo?

The first conga Masters used very little rudiments. If you listen to their music you may hear a *flam*, a *ruff*, a *five stroke ruff*, and probably a *paraddiddle* but that was it. Often times they did not even knew that they were using them; it was the nature of transferring some rhythms that included those *rudiments*. Everything changed with one person, Giovanni Hidalgo; He took conga drumming to levels never seen before by *applying all the snare drum rudiments* in to the conga drumming. He inspired the new generation of percussionists to study the entire snare drum rudiments and applying them to the congas. As a matter of fact, in our private lessons we teach all of our students to go through, “**The Buddy Rich’s Snare Drum rudiments**”, “**150 Rudimental Solos by Charley Wilcoxon**”, and “**Portraits in Rhythm by Anthony Cirone**”, all of these books are to be played on congas, using all dynamic levels.

Of course, learning how to execute all of these books is part of the process. Next we would play each book with the clave using the wood block on the left foot and finally create your own solos based on the studied solos. Let’s take a look at the following solo involving rudiments.

# Solo applying rudiments

R R L L R      L L R R L

6

R L R L R L

11

R L R L R L R L R L

17

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

This solo is just an example of what you can do with some of the *rudiments* applied on a soloing situation.

Now let's take a look at the 3 congas independence exercise.

## Exercises for Independence on Three Congas

LLRLLL RR LLRLLRLL RRLRRRLL RRLRRLRR  
  
 PTSTPTOO PTSTPPOO PTSTPTOO PTSTPPOO

S B O O S B O O O S O O O O O O  
  
 R L R R L R L L R L R R L R L L

LLRLL LR L LRLL RRLRRRLL RRLRRLRR  
  
 PTSTPTOO PTSOOTOO PTSTPTOO PTSOOTOO

PTSPTPOO PSSOOSO PSSOOSO  
  
 LLRLLLOO LLRRRLRL RRLRRRLL LRLLLRLR

O O O S P T O O O S P T  
  
 R L R L R R L R L R L L