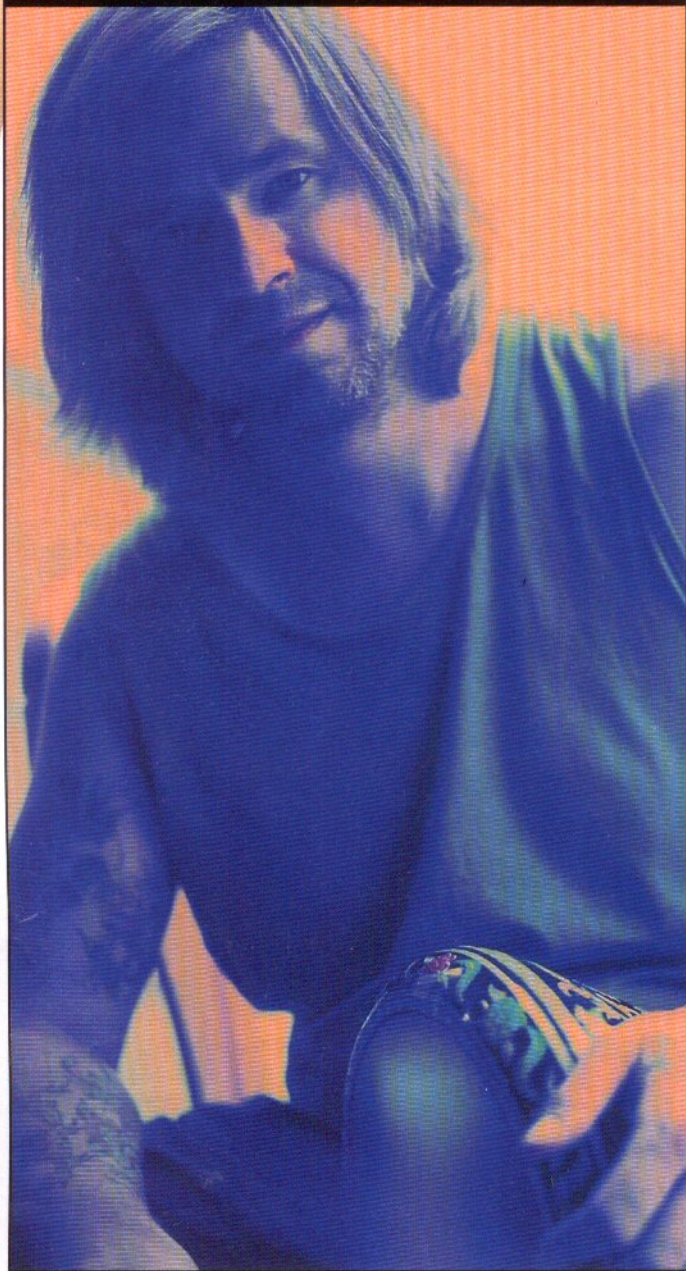


# PICK UP THE PIECES

In the first instalment of a great new series, Pete Lockett commences to make a mean percussive racket



**T**here are two distinctly different sides to being a percussionist. On the one hand you are led to the technical side of your instruments – the traditional and folkloric styles, the intricacies of particular techniques and fingerings, solo technique, flashy licks, you name it. On the other hand, you arrive at a standard pop session or gig and find that in actual fact there's very little opportunity to employ even 25 per cent of what you've learned. Instead, you find yourself in an area which is often neglected. Those simple shaker patterns with 2 and 4 on the tambourine, you know? Those patterns you may well end up playing for a whole song with that niggling thought in the back of your mind, What the hell am I doing here?

It's easy to neglect what looks and feels easy to play, and work away for hours on end at rumba in 17/8 and tumbao in 15 instead. This series is going to focus on these 'simple' aspects of percussion playing, and look at how they may be developed and how the various colours of a complete percussion rig may add greatly to the groove of a song. *Pick Up The Pieces* is for beginners or for kit players wanting to get into a bit of percussion. For the more developed percussionist, the series will provide a bit of a workout on simplicity.

I'm going to begin by analysing an appropriate and practical percussion set-up for this series.

If you don't own all the equipment in this set-up, don't worry, just look at the concepts being represented and try to employ them on what you have, even if it's just a sofa and a coke can full of mung beans. Percussion set-ups are very personal things, and differ greatly from performer to performer and from gig to gig. The set-up I've constructed for the series is not too cumbersome or unusual, and has a lot of practical reasoning behind its constituents. I'm going to run through what's where and why, with an overhead plan to use as a reference. Broadly speaking, the set-up can be split into three main categories. These are: things that are hit with sticks (timbales, floor tom, Rack 1 – mounted metal, wood, small drums, Rack 2 – agogo, wood, cymbals, bongos);



A floor tom would be a possibility here. I use a shallow 14" Premier tom which I tune very low and mic very close to the head from inside. It is amazingly bass end orientated, much the same as Trilok Gurtu's bass drum.





As you can see from the bell set-up on the timbales, the wood block is in the middle, with metal agogo style bells on the left and right. This means that you can easily play right hand metal/left hand wood patterns or vice versa. The low pitched tom to the left gives you that additional



bass end strike option, depending on how the drummer is playing. For example, if he's locked into a tribal tom groove, you might prefer to cut through with some toppy stuff, whereas if he's on a general cymbal and hi-hat vibe, then the low tom might be a good course of action.



Here we see the table in between the congas and timbales, positioned so that it gives a convenient drop-off point for sticks as you move from timbales to congas. You could try a table specifically designed for stick use. I prefer models like this Dixon one with raised rims so stuff doesn't fall off. I actually make little 'hills' of gaffa tape along the front edge, which make troughs for the sticks to fit into, preventing them from rolling off when the inevitable vibrations get going.



This picture illustrates the position I find most practical when positioning congas and bongos for playing together while standing up. I've chosen two rather than three congas for a compact set-up, with the idea in the back of my mind that if three conga-style patterns are required then I'll use a small, strapped-on djembe with a drum mic positioned on the rim. As with all set-up requirements, you need to find what's right for you.

that these three areas have been put side by side (from left to right). I have not, for example, put the floor tom to the right of the congas. Obviously, it would then be restricting for stick work. Also, both racks, with cowbells and wood blocks, are in easy reach of the right hand if you are set in position playing the timbales. For the same reason, most of the cymbals will be within

reach of the timbales. The floor tom is to the left of the timbales because then the three drums go up in pitch – low, medium and high (the timbales are traditionally set up with the smaller drum to the right).

To the right of the timbales there is a small table (Dixon-style, stand-mounted, approximately 12"x12") set between the timbales and congas. This is the ideal place to dump your sticks when you move on to playing with hands on the congas. Fun as it may be to toss them into a backing singer's cleavage, it's more practical to have a table. Indeed, tables are vital in a percussion set-up. Notice there are two in this one, with a larger 24" table to the right of the congas. The point about the small table being in between the timbales and congas is that dumping the sticks then becomes incorporated ergonomically in the change from sticks to hands.

The congas are stand-mounted, with the bongos behind them, just proud by a couple of inches or so. This allows easy access to the heads

for combined conga/bongo patterns. I've also kept to just two congas, instead of three, for ease of manoeuvrability around the kit. To the right of the congas is the larger table, with all the hand held stuff – shakers, tambourines and so on. Behind this table would be an ideal place for a second multi-rack for things like cowbells, although I've limited it to a mounted 'D' tambourine. There are also a few more cymbals around this area, with some mallets and extra sticks on the table to use on them. The front of the table would be an ideal place for your main stickbag, as would the front of the timbales. To the right of the congas and underneath the table we have a foot-operated cowbell and foot-operated 'D' tambourine. These

are ideally positioned for use when playing on the congas or when doing, for example, some shaker work. All that remains of the set-up now is the chimes and effects rack to the right of the table. Get these nice and high so they look dramatic – the appearance of the rig is also very important, so don't neglect it.

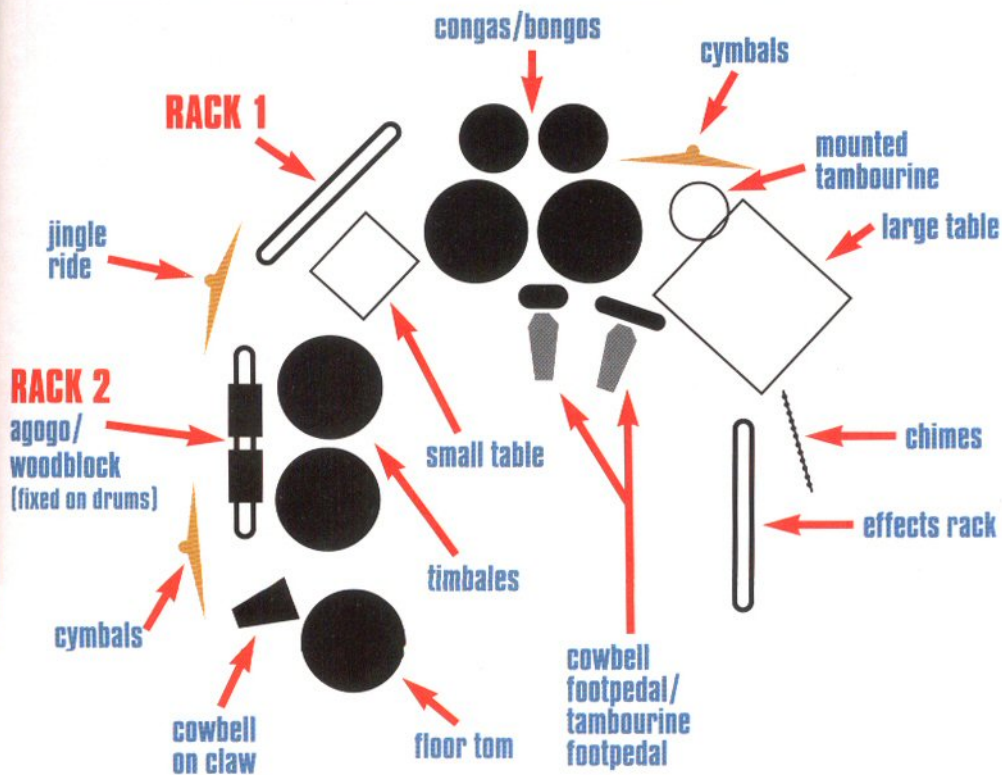
In this series, I'm assuming that the rhythms and ideas will be employed in a situation which involves a kit player. This explains the absence of any really deep, low-end drums. The truth of the matter is that a lot of the most effective stuff a percussionist can do in these situations is the toppy stuff that will cut through the mix.

Having touched on the logic of the set-up, in the next installment we will begin to use it in simple, yet effective, ways. ♦

that which is hit with hands (congas, bongos, chimes, effects rack) and that which is picked up to be played (shakers, guiros, tambourines, triangles etc). You can see from the plan of the set-up



# Basic set-up



## HAND-HELD INSTRUMENTS:

Tambourine  
Shaker  
Multi-guiro  
Cabassa  
Clave  
Caxixi  
Cricket  
Egyptian tabla  
Tamborim

### PLUS...

General shaky effects, including:  
Vibratone,  
Rainstick,  
Seed pods,  
Ocean drum,  
Spring drums,  
Birds,  
Goats' toenails and other toys...