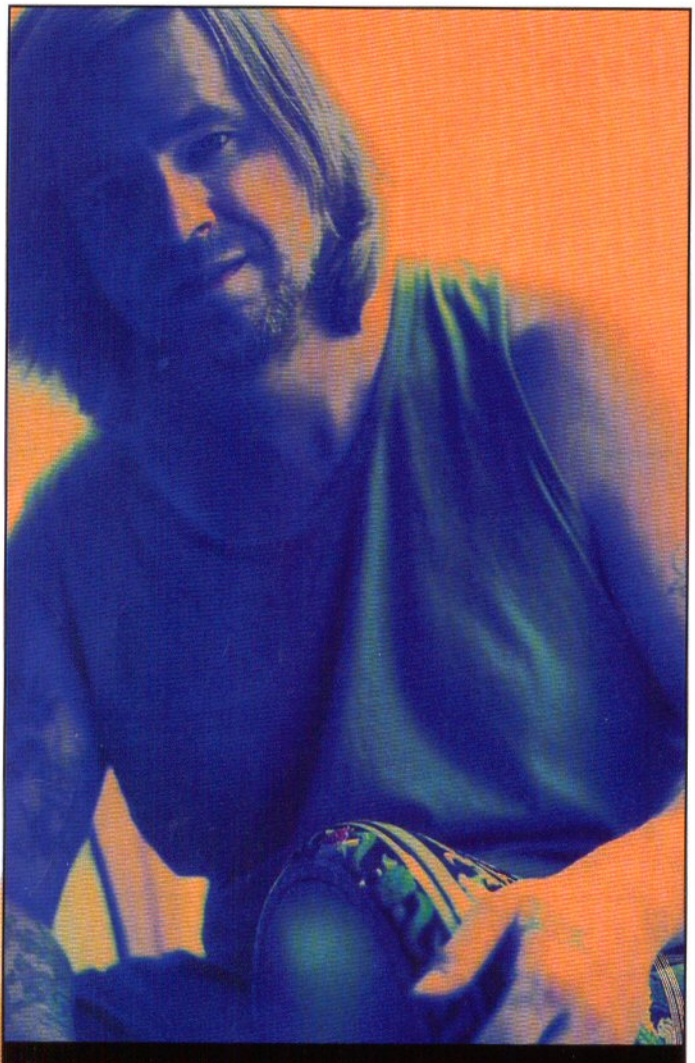
PICK UP THE PIECES



Part 7: In his quest to open up percussion concepts to new players, Peter Lockett finds himself doing unmentionable things with a guiro.

This instalment will begin by looking at the basics of the guiro. The guiro is basically a small cylindrical sound chamber which has ridges cut into its outer surface that are then scraped with anything from a chopstick to a metal-pronged, comb-like stick. The guiro is often made from wood or metal and also traditional-style from a dried Gourd.

Loosely speaking, the washboard is an instrument of similarity to the guiro in as much as it is performed on by scraping the serrations. It is held in the left hand and scraped with the stick in the right hand as in **Fig. 1**. The guiro in this photo is actually a multi-guiro which has a number of different grade separations to choose from and is also filled with beads to allow a possible shaker option.

Example 1 demonstrates the basic guiro pattern found in Cuban music. It consists of long and short scrapes, as indicated in the notation. Note that in the second half of the bar, the direction of the scrapes has reversed itself because of the odd number of scraping motions in the first half of the bar. The longer scrapes are articulated by moving the scraper at a slower speed, and also more gently. **Examples 2-3** create some non-traditional versions using the same concept. **Example 4** is articulated by very short staccato strokes, vaguely similar to single turns of a cabasa. **Example 5** employs the shaker potential of the multi-guiro, while the beater strikes lightly on the ride cymbal (see **Fig. 2**).

Try playing four bars of Example 5 followed by four bars of Example 4 in a cycle. To do this you will need to hold the guiro in the right hand, and scrape with the left for Example 4. Also, you will need to devise a way to neatly get in and out of the shaker pattern without sounding messy. It's not as tricky as might first appear, because there are no sticks to pick up or put down. Also, it's always a good idea to learn small percussion instruments like these left and right-handed as it will certainly make

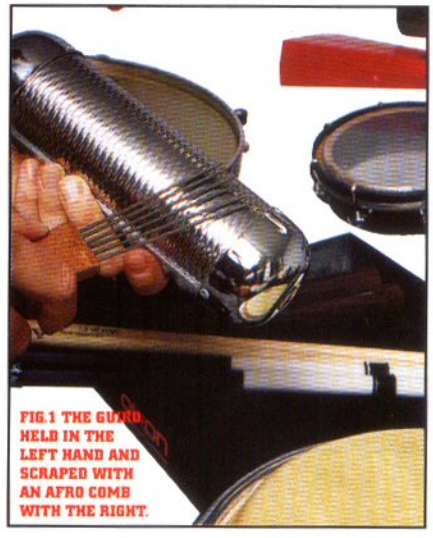


FIG.1 THE GUIRO HELD IN THE LEFT HAND AND SCRAPED WITH AN AFRO COMB WITH THE RIGHT.

FIG.2 THE GUIRO IS USED AS A SHAKER, WHILE THE COMB STRIKES THE RIDE CYMBAL.

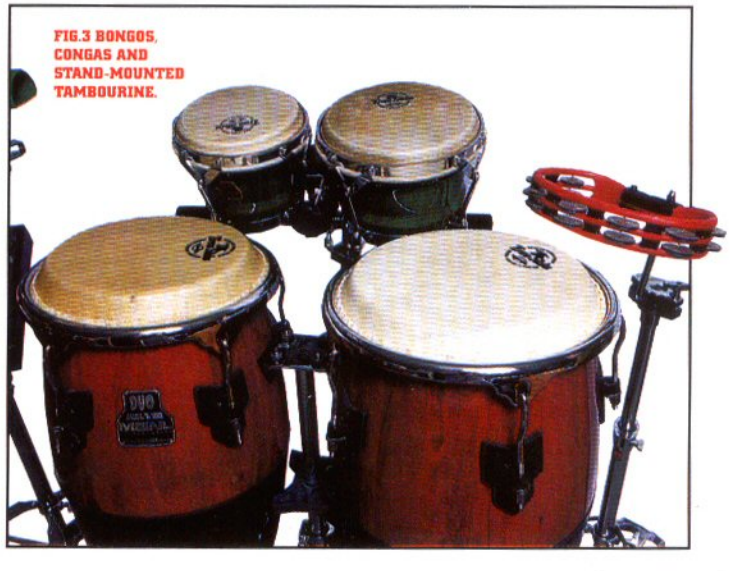
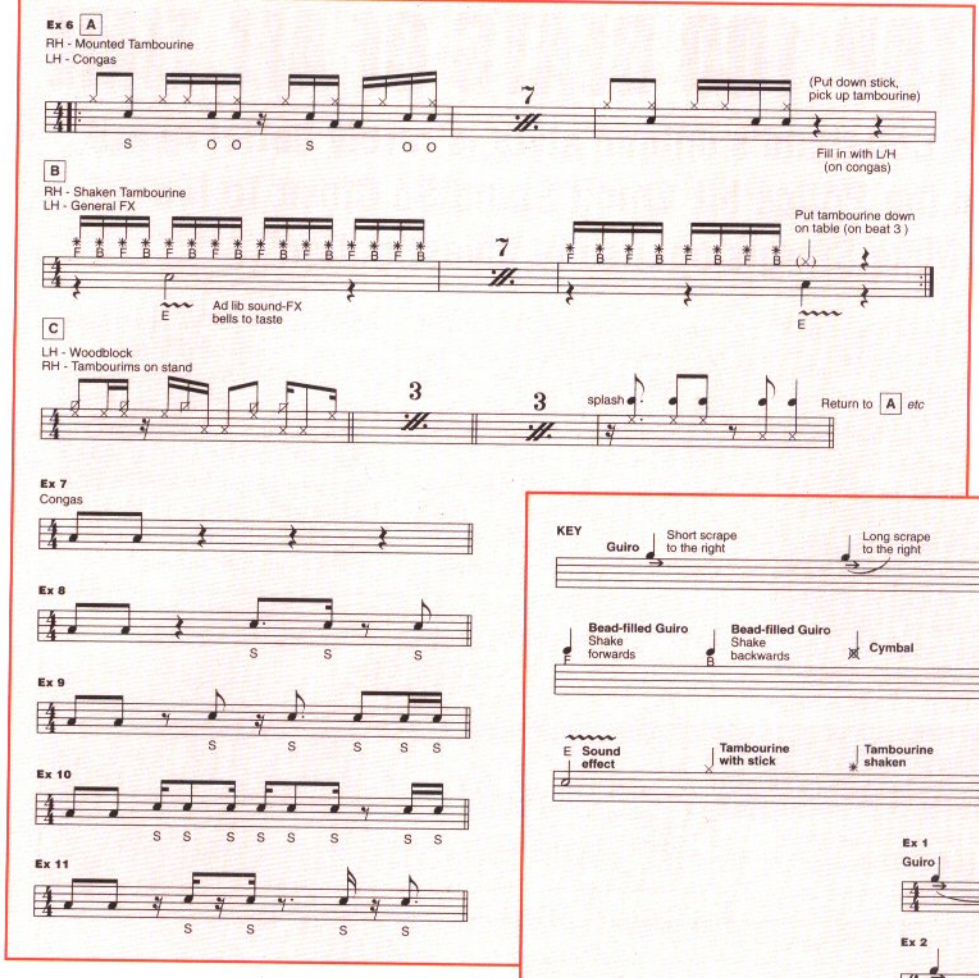
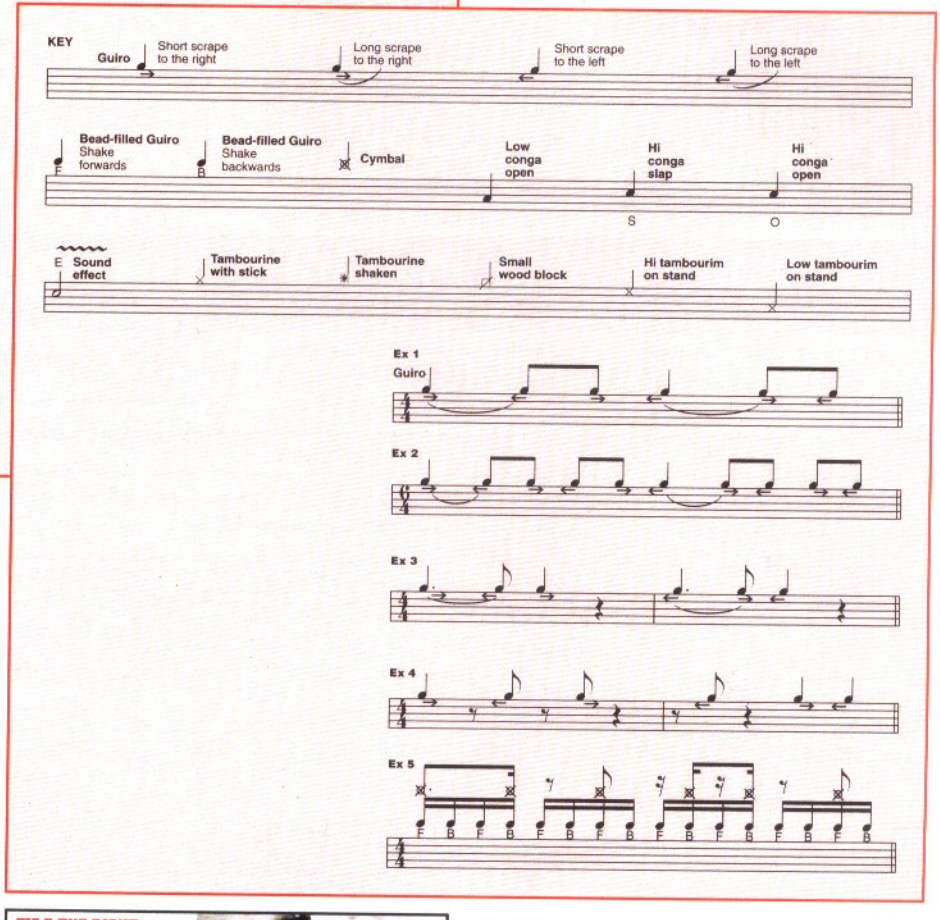


FIG.3 BONGOS, CONGAS AND STAND-MOUNTED TAMBOURINE.





sound effect, then quickly pick up a stick and you're back in to the A section. Alternatively you might be *en-route* to the **C** section, in which case the sound effect will need to be put down on beat four of the last bar of B to give you time to get a stick in each hand for the C section. To return to A from C is fairly straightforward as you will already have the required stick in your right hand. As you can see, the C section ends with a syncopated series of hits.

Creating seamless joins between sections is a well-developed skill in percussionists of all genres, especially those from the classical world, who are often dealing with moments of pin-drop silence during which they need to change instruments and sticks *and* move ten feet to the left. It's all about planning, knowing what you need, when you need it and exactly where everything needs to be at any given point through the duration of a performance.

I'm going to finish this article with a concept that I have found very useful when wanting to come up with percussion parts which feel like they're from the same root, but which are in fact different.

At its simplest level, we take a short phrase with which we want to begin every version of the rhythm we will create (**Example 7**). It may well be part of what the bass is playing, or a horn riff, or whatever. Then, see how many different ways you can conclude the bar. I've explored just four variants in **Examples 8-11** but, as I'm sure you realise, the possibilities are endless. (Incidentally, these conga parts have been written in their skeletal form, and are intended to be continuous sixteenths, with all the unwritten notes to be played as light touches – 'R,L,R,L'). Get stuck in!

Until next time, then... ◆

some of the instrument changes a whole lot easier.

Next we move onto our three part percussion chart. Everything is notated in the score, but there are a few tricky changes to make. **Part A** is a bastardised, Cuban-sounding combined pattern, with the left hand playing congas and the right hand with a stick on the mounted tambourine (see **Figs. 3** and **4**). To move to the **B** section, the right hand needs to put down the stick quite early to pick up the tambourine (**Fig. 5**). The left hand can ad-lib, making it sound a bit like a fill into the B section.

To come out of the B section, the tambourine needs to be put down early. When you put the tambourine down it will make a noise, so make this part of the plan. The sound on beat 3 of the bar of B is the sound of the tambourine hitting the table. Cover this point with a left-handed hand-held

FIG.4 THE LEFT HAND PLAYS CONGAS WHILE THE RIGHT STRIKES THE TAMBOURINE WITH A STICK.

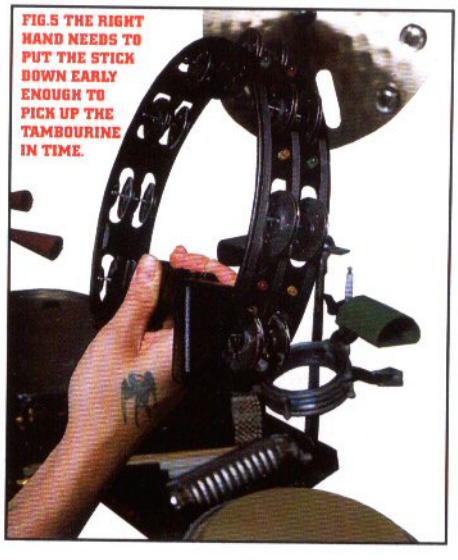


FIG.5 THE RIGHT HAND NEEDS TO PUT THE STICK DOWN EARLY ENOUGH TO PICK UP THE TAMBOURINE IN TIME.