

Jaka Strajnar

# CAJON

rhythms  
with music  
suggestions

basics

## CAJON METHOD

playing  
techniques

use of  
shaker,  
brushes,  
rods

videos  
of all  
exercises  
and rhythms

Jaka Strajnar: Cajon  
Cajon Method

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# CAJON

A Cajon (Spanish: box or crate) is a box-shaped percussion instrument which is played with hands while sitting on it. In the 18th century it was used by slaves in Cuba and Peru area – drums were forbidden at the time, therefore various crates, boxes and drawers were used for playing music. In the 1970s the use of cajon spread across Europe, especially to Spain in flamenco music. Today it is present in all music styles by effectively replacing a classic drumset, especially in acoustic groups. Its simple playing techniques enable fast learning even for people without percussion background. This book presents basic cajon playing techniques, use of rods, brushes and shaker in combination with a cajon, lessons on fills and numerous traditional and contemporary rhythms which are recorded and available for watching online. In order to get a better idea and to increase learning effectiveness, each groove comes with a song suggestion which can be used for playing the groove.

I wish you a pleasant and highly successful learning and playing this wonderful percussion instrument!



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Jaka Strajnar is a professional percussionist. He studied percussion at the Academy of Music in Ljubljana (Slovenia) and jazz drums at the Carinthian State Conservatorium in Klagenfurt (Austria).

He has his own percussion school in Škofja Loka (Slovenia). Jaka Strajnar designs and leads cajon, boomwhackers and body-percussion workshops for all ages and levels. He also offers workshops that focus on teambuilding. Jaka leads and performs in bands where he successfully presents cajon and other percussion instruments.



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## CAJON STRUCTURE

A cajon comprises of a striking surface or head, a body and a rattling or snaring device.

The surface or head has a function similar to a drum membrane, as various sounds are produced by striking on it. Striking at the top part of the head produces high and bright tones, whereas playing towards the middle delivers lower and darker tones. By combining the two, various grooves of all music styles can be formed. The striking surface is built of thin, high-quality layers of various types of wood (beech, ebony, Honduras rosewood, etc.).

Playing on the striking surface is possible with hands or various plastic and wooden rods resulting in completely different tone colour. The striking surface cannot be destroyed by playing on it with hands, but drumsticks should NEVER be used!!! I also recommend removing any rings and bracelets prior to playing, because jewellery (and of course drumsticks) may damage the striking surface.

The body is composed of various hardwoods (birch, different types of exotic wood, etc.). It has a resonance-opening at the back enabling the flow of sound waves from the interior to the surroundings. The basic height of the cajon is 50 cm (for adults), but there are also lower cajons (45 cm – for primary schoolchildren) and even smaller ones for kids.



The sharp metallic sound of the cajon is produced by a rattling device attached to the back of the striking surface. The types of cajons are distinguished by two variants of the rattling device.

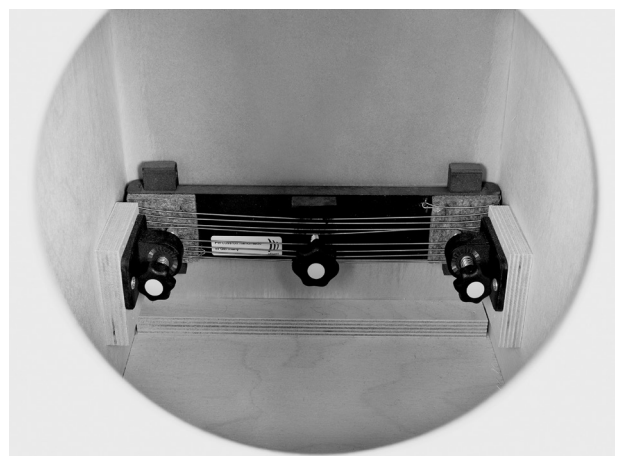
**String cajon** has a device in the form of a wire or string. As early as in the 18th century percussionists in Peru experimented by attaching guitar strings to the back of the striking surface to produce clear and sharp sound and obtain significant difference in tone colour between bass tones and tones produced by the edge of the cajon. Based on this idea, German cajon factory Schlagwerk has developed a tunable string system which is attached in V-shape. Such system ensures very responsive and rich sound. This is because by stretching and relaxing the strings, various proportions of metal (snare) and wood sound can be achieved.



**Snare cajon** contains a snare-like device attached to the bottom head of the snare drum. In most cases it is attached to the back of the striking surface in two parts. As opposed to the string cajon, the device of the snare cajon can be removed easily to obtain a completely different sound, which is dry and warm, without any metallic sound (i.e. Cuban sound). Its only drawback might be the fact that it is not possible to control the proportion of snare and wooden sound due to the fixed snares.

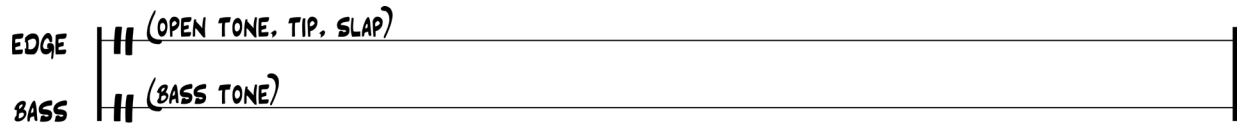


There is a novelty in the development of cajons in the form of **Agile String** technology, which combines the characteristics of both previously mentioned types of cajons. Basically this is a string cajon where strings are wound around a transverse beam. The device is located at the back of the striking surface and can be removed easily. The sound of the cajon can be influenced by stretching the strings.

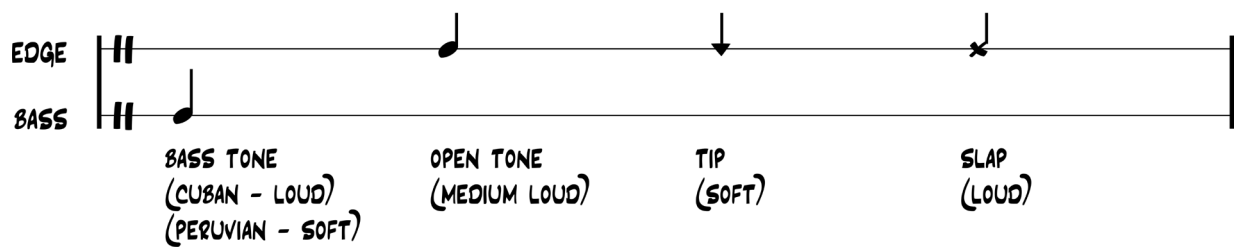


# NOTATION

Strokes on the cajon are written on two lines. The upper line is used for notating strokes played on the edge (open tone, tip, slap). The bottom line is used for notating bass tones played towards the middle.



Each stroke is written with its own symbol.



R = right hand, L = left hand

## HAND DOMINANCE

All hand arrangements in this book are made for persons with a dominant right hand. If you have a dominant left hand I suggest performing all grooves in reverse arrangement.

## SITTING POSITION


Sit on the cajon and spread your legs so that the front edge of the cajon is free to play on. Place your legs to the left and right side of the cajon. You may lean backwards slightly together with the cajon in order to straighten your lower back. Keep an upright posture, relax your shoulders and play by striking with the entire arms and not only from the wrists.



## ONLINE VIDEOS

Next to each notation there is a track number (e.g. TR 1) which you can watch at [www.cajon.si/tracks](http://www.cajon.si/tracks). This will enable you to get a better idea of a particular groove and playing technique which will improve your learning effectiveness. To access the videos enter the password: **KeepOnDrumming**

## SONG SUGGESTIONS FOR THE GROOVES

Each groove comes with a song suggestion, e.g.  Michael Jackson: Billie Jean containing a particular groove. By listening to the suggested song you will get an idea of how the groove works in practice. Start by learning the groove, and then you may play along with the suggested song.



# PLAYING TECHNIQUES

## BASS TONE

Place the entire palm on the striking surface. Stretch the fingers. Perform the stroke by swinging the entire arm (not only the wrist), and hit the striking surface with the palm. After the stroke do not press the palm against the striking surface. Let the hand bounce back freely. Do not play too low to the floor. This stroke is called Cuban bass tone – it is loud and most frequently used.

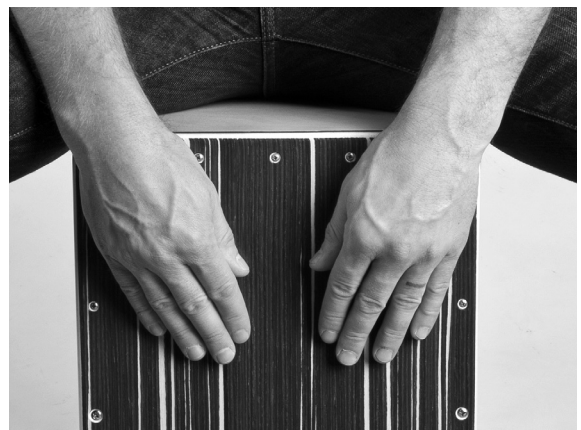


**TR. 1**

Musical notation for Exercise 1. The notation consists of two staves: 'EDGE' and 'BASS'. The 'EDGE' staff shows a sequence of notes: two vertical lines (representing a double bar line), followed by four quarter notes, a bar line, and then four eighth notes. The 'BASS' staff shows a sequence of notes: two vertical lines, followed by four quarter notes, a bar line, and then eight eighth notes. Below the notes are the letters 'R' and 'L' indicating right and left hand strokes.

There is also a Peruvian bass tone which is considerably softer, therefore it is used in very acoustic spaces or in places where the Cuban bass tone would have been too loud. Form your hands in the shape of goblets (as if you would like to drink water from them) and place the entire hands on the striking surface. During the strikes press the hands against the striking surface to control the loudness of individual stroke.

Play the above exercise with Peruvian bass tones too!





## OPEN TONE

Stretch your fingers and place them to the edge of the striking surface by forming the fingers in a V-shape. Keep the thumb above the edge (do not strike with the thumb). Perform the stroke by swinging the entire arm and hit the edge of the striking surface with the fingers stretched. After the stroke do not press the fingers against the striking surface. Let the hand bounce back freely. You can change the colour of the open tone by moving your hand towards the edge or the centre. Playing only with the fingers by keeping the knuckles above the edge produces brighter and higher tone, whereas moving down and striking with the knuckles too produces darker and lower tone. Open tone is a medium loud stroke.



**TR. 2**

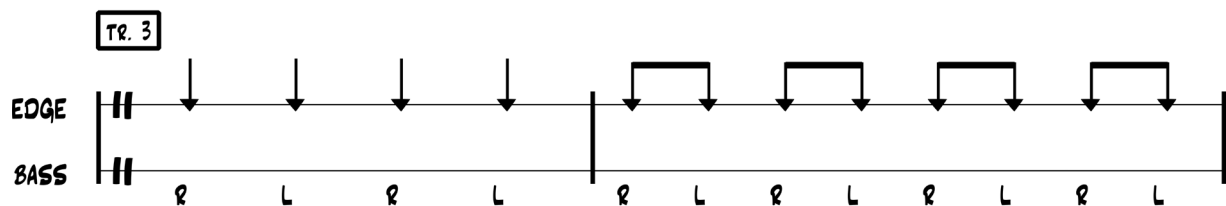
EDGE ||

BASS ||

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

## TIP

Stretch your fingers and place only the fingertips to the edge of the striking surface. The thumb and knuckles are above the edge (do not strike with them). Perform the stroke by swinging the entire arm and hit the edge of the striking surface with fingertips only. During the strikes press the fingertips against the striking surface to control loudness of individual strokes. Tip is a soft stroke often used in combination with other, louder strokes.



It is used in very acoustic spaces together with the Peruvian bass tone. Such playing is very quiet and never too loud. This Peruvian style can also be used for playing all drumset grooves on pages 15–17.





# CAJON GROOVES

Grooves performed on the cajon are divided in three groups:

- Drumset grooves
- Hand to hand grooves
- Ostinato drumset grooves

## DRUMSET GROOVES

Drumset grooves are an imitation of grooves usually performed on a drumset. The position of hands on the cajon is always the same: the right hand is used to play bass tones and the left hand to play slap strokes. A combination of the two strokes can be used for performing various grooves. For better understanding of individual grooves, each of them comes with an example of a song containing the particular groove. Start by playing all grooves slowly. Memorize the grooves and then play them along all the suggested songs.



R = bass tone, L = slap

### POP/ROCK 1

Pop/rock grooves are typical for pop and rock music we hear on the radio every day, which is undoubtedly the most listened to genre of music.

🔊 Michael Jackson: Billie Jean

**TR. 6**

EDGE

BASS

R L R L

POP/ROCK 2

Caro Emerald: A Night Like This

**TR. 7**

The diagram shows two staves: EDGE and BASS. The EDGE staff has a double bar line at the start, followed by a vertical line with an 'x' at the second beat, a horizontal line with an 'x' at the fourth beat, and a vertical line with an 'x' at the sixth beat. The BASS staff has a double bar line at the start, followed by a quarter note at the first beat, a quarter note at the third beat, a quarter note at the fourth beat, and a quarter note at the sixth beat. Below the staves, rhythmic markings 'R' and 'L' are placed: 'R' under the first bass note, 'L' under the second edge 'x', 'R' under the third bass note, 'R' under the fourth bass note, and 'L' under the sixth edge 'x'.

POP/ROCK 3

Creedence Clearwater Revival: Have You Ever Seen the Rain

**TR. 8**

The diagram shows two staves: EDGE and BASS. The EDGE staff has a double bar line at the start, followed by a vertical line with an 'x' at the second beat, a horizontal line with an 'x' at the third beat, a vertical line with an 'x' at the fifth beat, and a vertical line with an 'x' at the seventh beat. The BASS staff has a double bar line at the start, followed by a quarter note at the first beat, a quarter note at the third beat, a quarter note at the fourth beat, and a quarter note at the sixth beat. Below the staves, rhythmic markings 'R' and 'L' are placed: 'R' under the first bass note, 'L' under the second edge 'x', 'R' under the third bass note, 'R' under the fourth bass note, and 'L' under the seventh edge 'x'.

TWIST

Twist is mostly known as a dynamic dance, however it is accompanied by a groove of the same name which has developed in the rock'n'roll times.

The Beatles: Twist and Shout

**TR. 9**

The diagram shows two staves: EDGE and BASS. The EDGE staff has a double bar line at the start, followed by a vertical line with an 'x' at the second beat, a horizontal line with an 'x' at the third beat, a vertical line with an 'x' at the fifth beat, and a vertical line with an 'x' at the seventh beat. The BASS staff has a double bar line at the start, followed by a quarter note at the first beat, a quarter note at the fourth beat, and a quarter note at the sixth beat. Below the staves, rhythmic markings 'R' and 'L' are placed: 'R' under the first bass note, 'L' under the second edge 'x', 'L' under the third edge 'x', 'R' under the fourth bass note, and 'L' under the seventh edge 'x'.

DISCO

Disco has developed in the 1970s and is the music played in dance clubs and discotheques. It is characterised by the so called four-on-the-floor pattern – a bass tone is played at each beat.

Maroon 5 ft. Christina Aguilera: Moves Like Jagger

**TR. 10**

The diagram shows two staves: EDGE and BASS. The EDGE staff has a double bar line at the start, followed by a vertical line with an 'x' at the second beat, a vertical line with an 'x' at the sixth beat, and a vertical line with an 'x' at the tenth beat. The BASS staff has a double bar line at the start, followed by a quarter note at the first beat, a quarter note at the second beat, a quarter note at the fourth beat, and a quarter note at the sixth beat. Below the staves, rhythmic markings 'R' and 'L' are placed: 'R' under the first bass note, 'L' under the second edge 'x', 'R' under the second bass note, 'R' under the fourth bass note, 'L' under the sixth edge 'x', and 'R' under the sixth bass note.



## POLKA

Polka is present both in popular as well as classical music and is undoubtedly one of the best known European dance rhythms.

🔊 Ansambel bratov Avsenik: Na Golici

**TR. 11**

EDGE

BASS

R L R L R L R L

## SOCA

Soca (The Soul of Calypso) is a genre of Caribbean music which has developed in the late 1960s and incorporates the influence of calypso, funk and soul.

🔊 Shakira: Waka Waka (This Time For Africa)

**TR. 12**

EDGE

BASS

R L R L R L L R L

## BOSSA NOVA

Bossa nova is a very popular genre of Brazilian music from the 1950s – it is a combination of samba and jazz.

🔊 Astrud Gilberto: Agua de Beber

**TR. 13**

EDGE

BASS

R L L R R L L R

## WALTZ

Waltz is one of the most well-known global dance rhythms present in almost all genres of music.

🔊 Dmitri Shostakovich: Waltz No. 2

**TR. 14**

EDGE

BASS

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

## HAND TO HAND GROOVES

Hand to hand is a playing technique where the hands are always playing in alternating manner (R, L, R, L ...)

The difference in loudness of individual strokes is very important here in order to produce the best sounding grooves. Make sure to play tip strokes really softly (piano), like ghost notes on a drumset – and bass tones and slap strokes very loudly (forte). Start by playing slowly and pay attention to the correct loudness of individual strokes.

### Sixteenth note grooves

POP/ROCK 1

🔊 Bee Gees: Stayin' Alive

**TR. 15**

EDGE

BASS

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

POP/ROCK 2

🔊 Guns N' Roses: Knockin' on Heaven's Door

**TR. 16**

EDGE

BASS

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

POP/ROCK 3

🔊 Caro Emerald: Tangled Up

**TR. 17**

EDGE

BASS

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

FUNKY

Funky is a genre of Afro-American music from the 1970s encompassing characteristics of soul, jazz and R&B.

🔊 James Brown: Funky President (People It's Bad)

**TR. 18**

The notation for TR. 18 consists of two staves: EDGE and BASS. The EDGE staff has a double bar line at the start and end. The BASS staff has a double bar line at the start and end. The rhythm is indicated by a sequence of letters: R L R L R L R L R L R L R L. The EDGE part features a series of eighth notes with downward arrows, and some notes are marked with an 'x'.

TANGO FLAMENCO

Tango flamenco is one of the flamenco rhythms and should not be confused with the Argentinian tango.

🔊 Paco de Lucia: Me regale

**TR. 19**

The notation for TR. 19 consists of two staves: EDGE and BASS. The EDGE staff has a double bar line at the start and end. The BASS staff has a double bar line at the start and end. The rhythm is indicated by a sequence of letters: R L R L R L R L R L R L R L. The EDGE part features a series of eighth notes with downward arrows, and some notes are marked with an 'x'.

DJOLE

Djole is a carnival African rhythm from Sierra Leone area which is performed on djembe and various African percussion instruments.

🔊 Africa Djole: Kaloum, Cocokoda

**TR. 20**

The notation for TR. 20 consists of two staves: EDGE and BASS. The EDGE staff has a double bar line at the start and end. The BASS staff has a double bar line at the start and end. The rhythm is indicated by a sequence of letters: R L R L R L R L R L R L R L. The EDGE part features a series of eighth notes with downward arrows, and some notes are marked with an 'x'.

SAMBA

Samba is one of the most popular Brazilian genres best known to the world as a carnival rhythm which is performed with numerous Brazilian percussion instruments.

🔊 Jovanotti: Punto

**TR. 21**

The notation for TR. 21 consists of two staves: EDGE and BASS. The EDGE staff has a double bar line at the start and end. The BASS staff has a double bar line at the start and end. The rhythm is indicated by a sequence of letters: R L R L R L R L R L R L R L. The EDGE part features a series of eighth notes with downward arrows, and some notes are marked with an 'x'.

## COUNTRY

Country today is a general name for North American popular music encompassing characteristics of American folk and Western music.

🔊 Johnny Cash: Cat's in the Cradle

**TR. 22**

EDGE

BASS

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

## PARTIDO ALTO (SAMBA)

Partido alto is a type of samba with a distinguishable rhythmic pattern traditionally played on pandeiro (tambourine) and cavaquinho (four string guitar).

🔊 Martinho da Villa: Casa de Bamba

**TR. 23**

EDGE

BASS

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

## BAIAO

Baiao or baion has developed around 1840 and is a typical rhythm of northern Brazil. It has a different hand pattern, therefore pay attention on hand sequence!

🔊 Pink Martini: Anna (El Negro Zumbon)

**TR. 24**

EDGE

BASS

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

## TUMBAO

Tumbao is a typical Afro-Cuban rhythm played on congas. It can be used in different genres of music (salsa, cha-cha-cha, mambo, pop, rock, etc.).

🔊 Mongo Santamaria: Watermelon Man

**TR. 25**

EDGE

BASS

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

## Triplet grooves

### BLUES 1

Blues is the basis of Afro-American music and the starting point of development of all further forms of popular music.

🔊 The Platters: Only You

**TR. 26**

EDGE

BASS

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

### BLUES 2

🔊 Toto: Hold the Line

**TR. 27**

EDGE

BASS

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

### BLUES 3

🔊 Aerosmith: Cryin'

**TR. 28**

EDGE

BASS

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

### BEMBE

Bembe is an Afro-Cuban rhythm traditionally performed with many percussion instruments. It has a different hand pattern, therefore pay attention on hand sequence!

🔊 David Sanborn & Phil Woods: Senior Blues

**TR. 29**

EDGE

BASS

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

The following are triplet grooves too, but the second triplet of all beats is left out (only the first and the third triplet are played). This is how the so called jazz-phrasing is achieved, which is typical for jazz and various popular genres of music.

### SHUFFLE

Shuffle or boogie is a popular swing dance style. Initially played only on the piano, it has gained presence as a rhythm in various genres of music.

🔊 The Kooks: Shine On

**TR. 30**

### TUMBAO (jazz-phrasing)

This is a typical Afro-Cuban rhythm performed on congas, which in this case is played in jazz-phrasing. It can be used in different genres of jazz and popular music.

🔊 Gene Ammonds: The Happy Blues

**TR. 31**

### HALF TIME SHUFFLE1

Half time shuffle is a shuffle whereby the chords and harmony sequence is one time slower than in the usual shuffle rhythm.

🔊 Steely Dan: Babylon Sisters

**TR. 32**



## HALF TIME SHUFFLE 2

🔊 Toto: Rosanna

**TR. 33**

EDGE

BASS

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

## NEW JACK SWING

New jack swing combines electronic hip-hop and dance-pop grooves with modern R&B and became popular in late 1980s.

🔊 Madonna: Bye Bye Baby

**TR. 34**

EDGE

BASS

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

## NEW ORLEANS

New Orleans is a predecessor of jazz. It was performed by marching bands in New Orleans on different occasions (such as births, weddings, funerals, etc.). The marching band was positioned in the second line, therefore this type of playing is also called Second Line Drumming.

🔊 The Meters: Hey Pocky A-Way

**TR. 35**

EDGE

BASS

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

You can play all hand to hand grooves with open tones too. In this case replace all slap strokes with open tones, while keeping the remaining bass tones and tip strokes unchanged. Such playing technique is appropriate in situations where a slap stroke would cause the entire groove to sound too loud.

## OSTINATO DRUMSET GROOVES

This playing technique is similar to the drumset playing technique whereby the right hand strikes on one of the cymbals (hi-hat, ride). The right hand is used for playing tip strokes on the right edge of the cajon, while the left hand is used for playing a combination of bass tones and slap strokes. This playing technique frequently produces concurrent strokes, where a tip stroke is played with the right hand and a bass tone or a slap stroke with the left hand simultaneously. Make sure to play joint strokes completely simultaneously (without any flams)! Ostinato grooves are notated on three lines, of which the upper line is used for notating tip strokes performed with the right hand (ostinato), and the bottom two lines are used for notating bass tones and slap strokes performed with the left hand. Make sure that the right hand strokes are even while keeping the exact combination of strokes of the left hand.



R = tip (ostinato), L = bass tone



R = tip (ostinato), L = slap

## Eight note ostinato grooves

POP/ROCK 1

Michael Jackson: Billie Jean

**TR. 36**

EDGE R

EDGE L

BASS L

POP/ROCK 2

Caro Emerald: A Night Like This

**TR. 37**

EDGE R

EDGE L

BASS L

POP/ROCK 3

Creedence Clearwater Revival: Have You Ever Seen the Rain

**TR. 38**

EDGE R

EDGE L

BASS L

POP/ROCK 4

Lenny Kravitz: Everything

**TR. 39**

EDGE R

EDGE L

BASS L

### OFF-BEAT 1

This is a pop/rock groove where the right hand is used for playing off-beat strokes. Off-beat grooves are frequently used in disco and ska music too.

🔊 The Trammps: Disco Inferno

**TR. 40**

Musical notation for TR. 40. It consists of three staves: EDGE R, EDGE L, and BASS L. Each staff begins with a double bar line. The BASS L staff has a single eighth note on the first beat and another on the third. The EDGE L staff has two eighth notes marked with an 'x' on the second and fourth beats. The EDGE R staff has a series of eighth notes on the first, second, third, and fourth beats, with each note marked with a downward-pointing arrowhead.

### OFF-BEAT 2

🔊 Patrick Hernandez: Born To Be Alive

**TR. 41**

Musical notation for TR. 41. It consists of three staves: EDGE R, EDGE L, and BASS L. Each staff begins with a double bar line. The BASS L staff has a single eighth note on the first beat and another on the third. The EDGE L staff has two eighth notes marked with an 'x' on the second and fourth beats. The EDGE R staff has a series of eighth notes on the first, second, third, and fourth beats, with each note marked with a downward-pointing arrowhead. Above each eighth note on the EDGE R staff is a horizontal line with two downward-pointing arrowheads, indicating a specific stroke or technique.

### POP/ROCK (combination 1)

🔊 Donna Summer: Hot Stuff

**TR. 42**

Musical notation for TR. 42. It consists of three staves: EDGE R, EDGE L, and BASS L. Each staff begins with a double bar line. The BASS L staff has a single eighth note on the first beat and another on the third. The EDGE L staff has two eighth notes marked with an 'x' on the second and fourth beats. The EDGE R staff has a series of eighth notes on the first, second, third, and fourth beats, with each note marked with a downward-pointing arrowhead. Above each eighth note on the EDGE R staff is a horizontal line with two downward-pointing arrowheads, indicating a specific stroke or technique.

### POP/ROCK (combination 2)

🔊 Gloria Gaynor: I Will Survive

**TR. 43**

Musical notation for TR. 43. It consists of three staves: EDGE R, EDGE L, and BASS L. Each staff begins with a double bar line. The BASS L staff has a single eighth note on the first beat and another on the third. The EDGE L staff has two eighth notes marked with an 'x' on the second and fourth beats. The EDGE R staff has a series of eighth notes on the first, second, third, and fourth beats, with each note marked with a downward-pointing arrowhead. Above each eighth note on the EDGE R staff is a horizontal line with two downward-pointing arrowheads, indicating a specific stroke or technique.

## Triplet ostinato grooves

### BLUES 1

🔊 The Platters: Only You

**TR. 44**

EDGE R

EDGE L

BASS L

### BLUES 2

🔊 U2: Trip Through Your Wires

**TR. 45**

EDGE R

EDGE L

BASS L

### BLUES 3

🔊 Aerosmith: Cryin'

**TR. 46**

EDGE R

EDGE L

BASS L

Some song suggestions (e.g. Aerosmith: Cryin') do not contain the corresponding groove right at the beginning, but it comes up later in the song. Songs often consist of various parts (intro, verse, chorus, bridge, etc.) and there could be a different groove in each part.

In the following triplet ostinato grooves the second triplet of all beats is left out (only the first and the third triplet are played). This is how the so called jazz-phrasing is achieved, which is typical for jazz and various popular genres of music.

SHUFFLE

🔊 The Kooks: Shine On

**TR. 47**

EDGE R

EDGE L

BASS L

HALF TIME SHUFFLE

🔊 Steely Dan: Babylon Sisters

**TR. 48**

EDGE R

EDGE L

BASS L

RAGGAE

Raggae has developed in the 1960s in Jamaica. Thanks to Bob Marley it became a world known genre of music.

🔊 Bob Marley: Buffalo Soldier

**TR. 49**

EDGE R

EDGE L

BASS L



## Sixteenth note ostinato grooves

POP/ROCK 1

🔊 Earth, Wind and Fire: Can't Hide Love

**TR. 50**

The notation for TR. 50 consists of three staves. The top staff, labeled 'EDGE R', features a continuous sixteenth-note ostinato pattern across four measures. The middle staff, labeled 'EDGE L', has a whole rest in the first measure, followed by a sixteenth note with an 'x' in the second measure, a whole rest in the third, and another sixteenth note with an 'x' in the fourth. The bottom staff, labeled 'BASS L', has a whole rest in the first measure, followed by a quarter note in the second, a whole rest in the third, and another quarter note in the fourth.

POP/ROCK 2

🔊 Red Hot Chili Peppers: Blood Sugar Sex Magik

**TR. 51**

The notation for TR. 51 consists of three staves. The top staff, labeled 'EDGE R', features a continuous sixteenth-note ostinato pattern across four measures. The middle staff, labeled 'EDGE L', has a whole rest in the first measure, followed by a sixteenth note with an 'x' in the second measure, a whole rest in the third, and another sixteenth note with an 'x' in the fourth. The bottom staff, labeled 'BASS L', has a whole rest in the first measure, followed by a quarter note in the second, a half note in the third, and another quarter note in the fourth.

POP/ROCK 3

🔊 Lenny Kravitz: Fly Away

**TR. 52**

The notation for TR. 52 consists of three staves. The top staff, labeled 'EDGE R', features a continuous sixteenth-note ostinato pattern across four measures. The middle staff, labeled 'EDGE L', has a whole rest in the first measure, followed by a dotted quarter note with an 'x' in the second measure, a quarter note with an 'x' in the third, and another dotted quarter note with an 'x' in the fourth. The bottom staff, labeled 'BASS L', has a whole rest in the first measure, followed by a quarter note in the second, a half note in the third, and another quarter note in the fourth.

PARTIDO ALTO (SAMBA)

🔊 Martinho da Villa: Casa de Bamba

**TR. 53**

The notation for TR. 53 consists of three staves. The top staff, labeled 'EDGE R', features a continuous sixteenth-note ostinato pattern across four measures. The middle staff, labeled 'EDGE L', has a quarter note in the first measure, a dotted quarter note with an 'x' in the second, a quarter note with an 'x' in the third, and another quarter note in the fourth. The bottom staff, labeled 'BASS L', has a whole rest in the first measure, followed by a quarter note with an accent in the second, a quarter note with an accent in the third, and another quarter note in the fourth.

## PLAYING WITH BRUSHES AND RODS

All ostinato drumset grooves (pages 25–29) can be played with brushes and rods held in the right hand. This produces a new sound on the cajon. Hold the brush or rod with the right hand (like a pencil) and play on the edge of the cajon while playing a combination of bass tones and slap strokes with your left hand.

Various cymbals (ride, hi-hat, etc.) can also be used; in this case play the cymbals with the right hand and a combination of bass tones and slap strokes with the left hand.



Nylon brushes

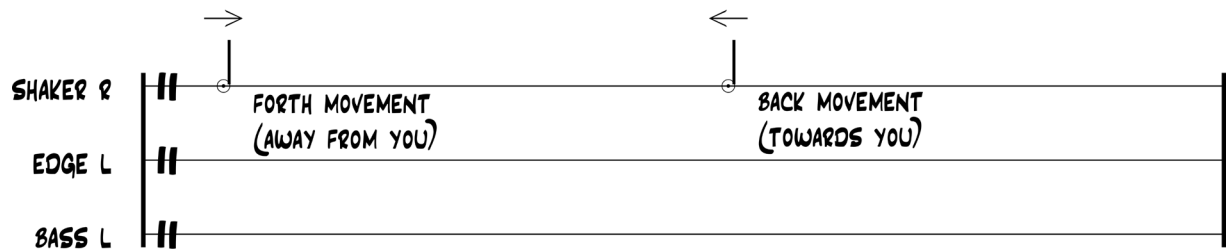


Rods

Play all ostinato drumset grooves with nylon brushes and rods too.

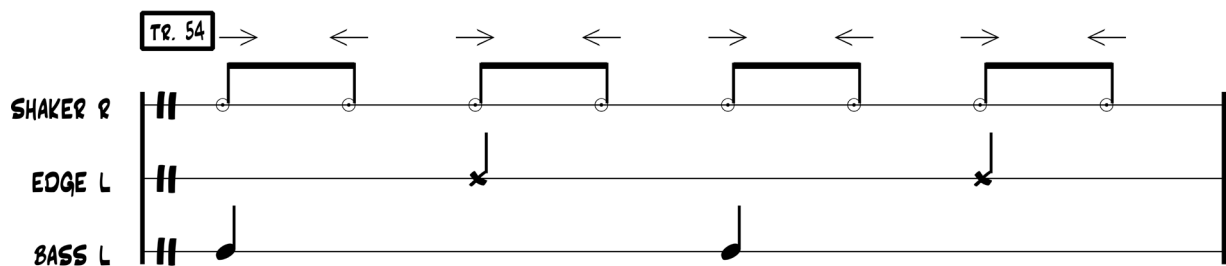
# PLAYING WITH A SHAKER

Shaker can also be used while playing grooves on the cajon. Hold the shaker with fingertips of your right hand and move it forth (away from you) and back (towards you) while looking at your thumb constantly. Move the arm at the elbow only, keeping the shaker as horizontally as possible. The right hand is used for playing the ostinato groove, while the left hand is used for playing a combination of bass tones and slap strokes. Pay attention to the steady rhythm of shaker in the right hand and the correct combination of bass tones and slap strokes played with the left hand! Use a shaker to play grooves on pages 25, 27 and 29 too.



POP/ROCK (eighth notes)

🔊 Tom Petty: Learning to Fly



POP/ROCK (sixteenth notes)

▶ Earth, Wind and Fire: Can't Hide Love

**TR. 55** → ← → ← → ← → ← → ← → ← → ←

SHAKER R  
EDGE L  
BASS L

Detailed description: This musical notation block is for 'TR. 55'. It consists of three staves: SHAKER R, EDGE L, and BASS L. Above the SHAKER R staff, there are 12 arrows alternating direction: → ← → ← → ← → ← → ← → ← → ←. The SHAKER R staff contains four groups of four sixteenth notes, each group beamed together. The EDGE L staff has two 'x' marks, one under the second and one under the fourth group of sixteenth notes. The BASS L staff has two quarter notes, one under the first group and one under the third group of sixteenth notes.

POP/ROCK (triplets)

▶ The Platters: The Great Pretender

**TR. 56** → 3 ← → 3 ← → 3 ← → 3 ←

SHAKER R  
EDGE L  
BASS L

Detailed description: This musical notation block is for 'TR. 56'. It consists of three staves: SHAKER R, EDGE L, and BASS L. Above the SHAKER R staff, there are 12 arrows with a '3' below each pair of arrows, indicating triplets: → 3 ← → 3 ← → 3 ← → 3 ←. The SHAKER R staff contains four groups of three sixteenth notes, each group beamed together. The EDGE L staff has two 'x' marks, one under the second and one under the fourth group of sixteenth notes. The BASS L staff has two quarter notes, one under the first group and one under the third group of sixteenth notes.

POP/ROCK (combination 1)

▶ Donna Summer: Hot Stuff

**TR. 57** → ← → ← → ← → ← → ← → ←

SHAKER R  
EDGE L  
BASS L

Detailed description: This musical notation block is for 'TR. 57'. It consists of three staves: SHAKER R, EDGE L, and BASS L. Above the SHAKER R staff, there are 12 arrows alternating direction: → ← → ← → ← → ← → ← → ← → ←. The SHAKER R staff contains four groups of four sixteenth notes, each group beamed together. The EDGE L staff has two 'x' marks, one under the second and one under the fourth group of sixteenth notes. The BASS L staff has two quarter notes, one under the first group and one under the third group of sixteenth notes.

POP/ROCK (combination 2)

▶ Gloria Gaynor: I Will Survive

**TR. 58** → ← → ← → ← → ← → ← → ←

SHAKER R  
EDGE L  
BASS L

Detailed description: This musical notation block is for 'TR. 58'. It consists of three staves: SHAKER R, EDGE L, and BASS L. Above the SHAKER R staff, there are 12 arrows alternating direction: → ← → ← → ← → ← → ← → ← → ←. The SHAKER R staff contains four groups of four sixteenth notes, each group beamed together. The EDGE L staff has two 'x' marks, one under the second and one under the fourth group of sixteenth notes. The BASS L staff has two quarter notes, one under the first group and one under the third group of sixteenth notes.

# FILLS

By using fills the rhythmic accompaniment gains variety and musicality, as mere repetition of a particular groove might become too monotonous. Fills provide an enhancement and a logical transition between individual parts of a song. Perform the grooves below by playing

the groove three times, then play a fill and repeat the entire sequence. Make sure not to rush or drag during the fill. The fill must be performed in the same tempo as the preceding groove. In the recording the groove is played three times, followed by a fill.

## POP/ROCK GROOVE

EDGE

BASS

R L R R L

TR. 59 FILL 1

EDGE

BASS

R L R L R L R L R L

TR. 60 FILL 2

EDGE

BASS

R L R L R L R L R L

TR. 61 FILL 3

EDGE

BASS

R L R L R L R L R L

Play the groove and all three fills with play-along Track 72.

BLUES GROOVE

TR. 62 FILL 1

TR. 63 FILL 2

TR. 64 FILL 3

Play the groove and all three fills with play-along Track 73.

In real situations grooves are played more than three times depending on the structure of a song. The most frequently used structures are: a groove is played seven times followed by a fill (the fill is in the 8th bar) or a groove is played 11 times followed by a fill (the fill is in the 12th bar).

You can also play all fills with other drumset, hand to hand and ostinato drumset grooves.

# SHORT FILLS

A rhythmic accompaniment can also be played by using short fills. That means that instead of playing a fill throughout the last bar, the first half of the bar is used for playing a groove and the second half for playing a suitably shorter fill. Play the groove three times and

perform a fill in the second half of the last bar only. Pay attention to the tempo! In the recording (Track 72) the groove is played three times followed by a half of the groove and a short fill.

## POP/ROCK GROOVE

EDGE

BASS

R L R R L R L

TR. 65 FILL 1

EDGE

BASS

R L R L R L

TR. 66 FILL 2

EDGE

BASS

R L R L R L

Play the groove and both fills with play-along Track 72.



BLUES GROOVE

Musical notation for a blues groove. The top staff is labeled 'EDGE' and the bottom staff is labeled 'BASS'. The EDGE staff contains a sequence of eighth notes with triplet markings (3) and a final 'FILL' section. The BASS staff contains a corresponding eighth-note pattern. Handwriting below the staves indicates the drumming pattern: R L R L R L R L R L R L.

Musical notation for 'TR. 67 FILL 1'. The top staff is labeled 'EDGE' and the bottom staff is labeled 'BASS'. The EDGE staff contains a sequence of eighth notes with triplet markings (3) and a final 'FILL' section. The BASS staff is empty. Handwriting below the staves indicates the drumming pattern: R L R L R L.

Musical notation for 'TR. 68 FILL 2'. The top staff is labeled 'EDGE' and the bottom staff is labeled 'BASS'. The EDGE staff contains a sequence of eighth notes with triplet markings (3) and a final 'FILL' section. The BASS staff is empty. Handwriting below the staves indicates the drumming pattern: R L R L L L.

Play the groove and both fills with play-along Track 73.

You can also play all short fills with other drumset, hand to hand and ostinato drumset grooves.

You can combine all fills (pages 33 and 34) and short fills (pages 35 and 36) and invent new ones to create your own 'repertoire' of fills. You can perform them along all song suggestions.

# ODD METER GROOVES

Odd meter grooves in Europe are typical in the Balkans. They are also called complex time signatures, as they can be divided in various groups of two or three beats. They are much easier to perform by counting the mentioned beats. Therefore it is better to start playing slowly and pay attention to beat groups. To get a better idea, each groove is notated twice (in the same manner in

both times). Once you master an individual groove try performing short fills (three times groove followed by a fill). Hint: start playing a short fill by performing the last group of strokes in the form of slap strokes. That means: in 7/8 play the last two eighth notes with slap strokes, in 9/8 the last three eighth notes with slap strokes and in 10/8 the last two eighth notes with slap strokes.

7/8 (3 + 2 + 2)

🔊 Bijelo Dugme: Lipe cvatu

**TR. 69**

EDGE

BASS

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

9/8 (2 + 2 + 2 + 3)

🔊 Dave Brubeck: Blue Rondo a la Turk

**TR. 70**

EDGE

BASS

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

10/8 (3 + 3 + 2 + 2)

🔊 Lalo Schifrin: Mission Impossible

**TR. 71**

EDGE

BASS

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

## CONCLUSION

The cajon is a box full of rhythms. Be creative and make new rhythms! You can also discover various effects and playing techniques and incorporate them in your playing. To make exploration of sounds easier let me unveil a few previously invented playing techniques:

### **Playing on the right or the left surface of the cajon**

You can play various strokes on both sides of the cajon.

### **Playing with knuckles**

Make fists and play on the striking surface with the first knuckles.

### **Playing with fists**

Make fists and position them on the striking surface in the way that the little fingers touch the striking surface and the thumbs face away from the striking surface.

### **Playing with the heel on the right side of the cajon**

Turn the right foot towards the cajon so that the heel strikes against the right surface. You can for instance play a beat or pulse or off-beat with the right heel while performing all grooves.

### **Playing with the heel – glissando effect**

Touch the striking surface with the right heel. Start lifting the heel while playing open tones or slap strokes fast with both hands. The sound changes by lifting and pressing the heel against the striking surface.



### Playing with two brushes or rods

Use two brushes or rods for playing all drumset or hand to hand grooves. This playing technique produces a completely different tone colour of the cajon as compared to playing with hands.

### Tapping with the fingers

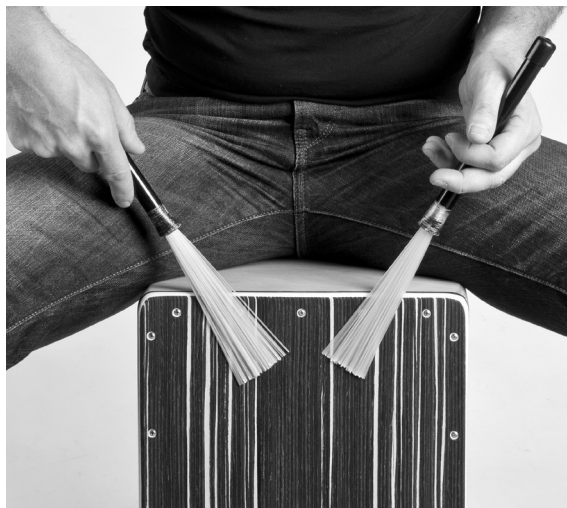
Play alternating with all fingers to get the tremolo or roll effect. By moving downwards the tone gets lower and darker.

### Playing with the fingernails

Only if your fingernails are short! Tips and tones can be replaced by playing with the fingernails. In flamenco there is an effect called rasgueado, which is used on a guitar but it can be applied on the cajon too. Bend your index finger, middle finger, ring finger and little finger and place the thumb across the fingernails of these fingers. Your hand forms a fist-like shape. Turn the hand in the way that the fingers face the striking surface. Now quickly extend the fingers one by one: start by the little finger followed by the ring finger, middle finger and index finger. Each finger strikes against the striking surface with the fingernail. By performing this quickly, you achieve a typical rasgueado effect.

### Heck Stick and Side Kick

The German cajon factory Schlagwerk has developed an exceptionally innovative cajon accessories called a Heck Stick and a Side Kick. The Side Kick can be attached to one of the side surfaces of the cajon (to the right side if you are right-handed) and played with the heel (it produces a claves-like sound). The Heck Stick can be attached to the Side Kick and played with the hand (it produces a tambourine-like sound). You can perform all ostinato drumset grooves (pages 25–29) by playing the Heck Stick with your right hand. At the same time you can play a beat or a pulse or various other patterns with the heel on the Side Kick. Possibilities are endless.



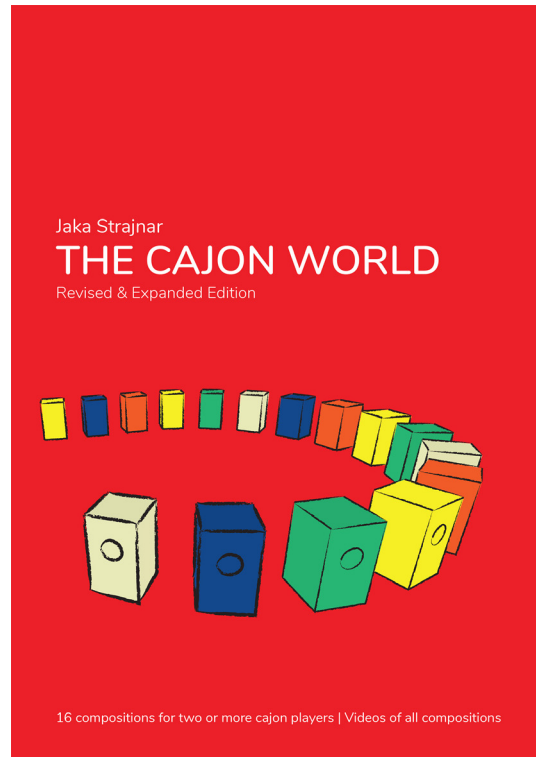
Enjoy learning and playing  
the cajon!  
Keep on drumming!  
Never give up!

Also available:

**The Cajon World** by Jaka Strajnar

The Cajon World is a collection of sixteen compositions designed for two or more cajon players. The compositions are written in different music styles: pop, rock, blues, soca, samba...

In addition to making wonderful concert pieces, these compositions will also make most useful teaching tool.



For more information please visit:

**[www.cajon.si/en/books/](http://www.cajon.si/en/books/)**