Big Tasty Tom-tom

by Mark Shelton

The floor tom is in! The deep sounding three-legged membranophone has been a standard part of the drum set for decades, but these days the low tones of the floor tom can also be heard emanating from elsewhere in a worship band.

Gear

A double-headed floor tom is commonly used, but a large single-headed concert tom-tom or a Brazilian surdo will also work in a worship band setting. Choose a drum that can be tuned to a low pitch--nothing smaller that a 14”x14” instrument. A thick head will help to achieve a dark tone with low sustain.

Most floor toms are equipped with adjustable legs designed to accommodate a seated player. Generally these legs will not raise the drum up to a proper height for a standing percussionist and many snare drum stands will not allow for a 16” drum. Avoid stooping over to play your tom licks and invest in a Hamilton KB275 Drum Stand with a basket that will expand to hold an 18” drum. The Street Can from LP is another solution. Available in three sizes, these single-headed, metal-shell drums feature extra long legs. Retrofitting your tom with the Pearl 27” Extra Long Floor Tom Legs is another height-increasing option.

Keep your stick bag stocked with a wide assortment of sticks, mallets, bundled rods, and brushes to expand the floor tom’s timbres.

• A standard drum stick will be the go-to for a great deal of your tom work. I prefer a concert model (such as a Vic Firth SD 1) or a heavy marching stick for a dark sound.

• Brushes and bundled rods should be in your arsenal of implements. A cajon brush will provide both a brush attack and some low end boom. Phat Broomz from Innovative Percussion live in my mallet case.

• The Vic Firth SD12 Swizzle G (or a similar combo stick) provides a standard bead and a hard felt head on the other end.

• A concert bass drum mallet on the floor tom can deliver a bunch of boom. Listen to the tone of the drum on this version of “Oceans” by Hillsong United:

https://youtu.be/4g-iYws5868

Orchestration Examples

Dive into exploring various ways to weave the floor tom into the sound of your worship band. Here are a few examples to get you started and inspire your creativity.

Thicken up the texture by playing in unison rhythm with a tom groove from the drum set. Check out the floor tom foursome playing the main groove on “Be Lifted Higher” from Gateway Worship:

https://youtu.be/LAsK4rqHKE4

Cadence grooves are used frequently in modern worship music. While the drum set lays down a street beat rhythm, try out an old-school tenor drum part on the floor tom.



Analyze loops and enhancement tracks to spark some ideas. Reorchestrate those rhythms onto your percussion set up including floor tom. Watch a demonstration on the Worship Training video “Floor Tom Loop.”

Add an intensity building stream of sixteenths or thirty-seconds to a “build section” in a song.



Drum set players use the rims. Try some counterhoop creativity on the floor tom. There is an example at 2:21 of this video for “You Don’t Miss A Thing” from Bethel Music:

https://youtu.be/Rzn2inZ3URE

Don’t expect the engineer or producer to feature your floor tom. No worries--the low frequency drumming can sit back in the mix and still contribute a helpful amount of punch and pulsation.

(c) 2017 Mark Shelton Productions / Percussion For Worship

Previously published in *Worship Musician!* www.worshipmusician.com