Cookin' With The Cabasa
by Mark Shelton

Percussion instruments produce sounds by striking, scraping, and/or shaking.
The small, but versatile cabasa can function in all three areas of tone creation.

The sound producing elements of the cabasa include a ridged metal sheet wrapped around a cylinder that is encircled by strands of metal beads. A handle is attached to one of the flat surfaces of the cylinder and caps at the ends of the cylinder prevent the strands of beads from sliding off the cylinder. The tonal possibilities of the cabasa include sounds reminiscent of guiro, maracas, and shekere.



Adjustment Tips
If your beads of your cabasa do not slide easily over the ridged surface, try these conditioning pointers:

• Place the end of a thin rod (such as a triangle beater) under a strand wire and apply pressure to expand the strand slightly. Repeat for all the strands.

• Insert the sharpened end of a pencil under the beads and scrape the pencil along the ridged surface to lay down a coating of graphite that will act as a lubricant.

Grip and Playing Position
The handle of the cabasa can be held with either hand. I prefer to grip the handle with my dominant hand. The rotation technique feels more comfortable with my stronger and more agile hand.

The main playing position situates the instrument slightly in front of the player's chest near the bottom of the sternum with the handle parallel to the floor. The non-holding hand remains near the cabasa for the striking and scraping techniques.

Tone production

• Striking

Use the four fingers of the free hand to strike the beads. You can tap on the beads closest to the floor or strike the upper area. This is a delicate timbre, but certainly useful.

• Shaking

Experiment with controlling the beads as you shake the cabasa with a side-to-side motion. With practice, you can control the beads as they slap against the cylinder. This sound is similar to a shaker, but with a tighter articulation.

• Scraping

Place your free hand (palm down) on a portion of the beads. You can position your hand under the cylinder or at the upper area (see photos).





Exert slight pressure against the beads with your free hand and rotate the cabasa cylinder slightly using the handle. You will hear the beads scrape against the ridged metal surface. Rotate the cylinder in the opposite direction to produce another scrape.

Practice the back-and-forth motion to produce steady streams of eighth and sixteenth notes.

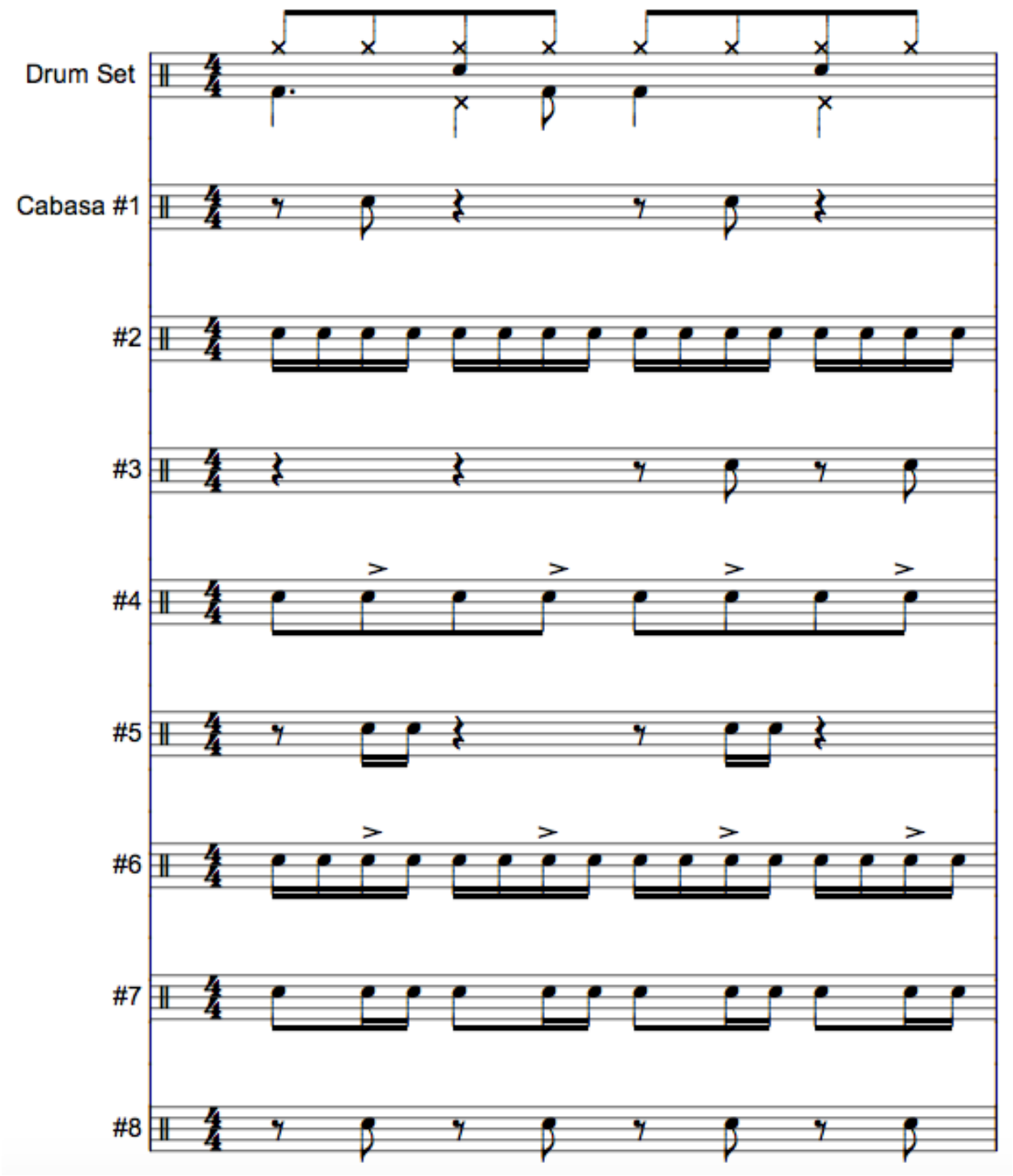
Check out my short video tutorial (on the Worship Training website) to view a demonstration of striking, scraping, and shaking methods for the cabasa.

With experimentation and practice, you will be able to produce scrapes of various lengths. Controlling the note durations is one of the major means of musical phrasing with the cabasa.

Example Rhythms

The following lines present cabasa rhythms that will complement the drum set pattern found in the top staff. Learn all eight examples and play along with a willing drummer (or program the drum set part on a device). Notice how each cabasa rhythm influences the overall groove between the cabasa and drum set.

(Notation is on the following page)



As you develop your technique on the cabasa, experiment with creating rhythm patterns in different time signatures and musical styles. Try improvising along with recordings. Build up your repertoire of cabasa licks and be ready to drop some striking, scraping, and shaking into a groove.

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