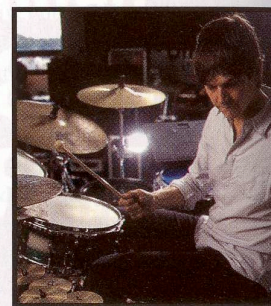


Do-It-Yourself Percussion, Part 3

Drum Rattlers

by Glenn Kotche



This column is dedicated to providing drummers and percussionists with simple and inexpensive do-it-yourself projects for building and modifying instruments and accessories. This month's project is drum rattlers.

The "drum rattler" is my term for a removable rattler that can be fitted around a drum, resting on the edge of the drumhead. When it's played you get a sympathetic rattle sound in addition to the drum sound. This accessory may not be useful to all drummers, but it can provide an interesting color for a certain song or part of a song. Given the ease with which it can be made from items around your house, it can't hurt to give it try.

Be Creative

The next step is the fun one. Find any items that will rattle against a drumhead and are small enough to mount on a safety pin. I've had good luck with small bells, small wire loops, old keys, and beads. The possibilities are virtually limitless. My personal favorites are some small antique jingle bells and some metal hoops from a djembe rattler.

Open each safety pin and mount your rattler items on it. The amount is at your discretion, as is the number and spacing of the pins.

Getting Started

The first item that you need to scrounge up is an old T-shirt. Cut off the bottom 6" of the shirt. This gives you a 6" cloth band. (The rest of the shirt can be discarded, or worn at your next football practice.) Next, you'll need several safety pins. I prefer large ones, but any size will do. Fasten the pins through the top edge of the cloth band so that most of each safety pin is hanging over it.

Fit It On

After you've attached your rattlers, slide the band over the top of the drum so the band sits just below the rim. Then lift the pins onto the drum so that they rest near its edge. The rest of the cloth band should fit snugly around the shell, keeping it in place.

See how you like the sound with only a few

A variety of items can be used to create a rattling sound on a drum



The drum rattler is created by attaching rattling items to a cloth band.

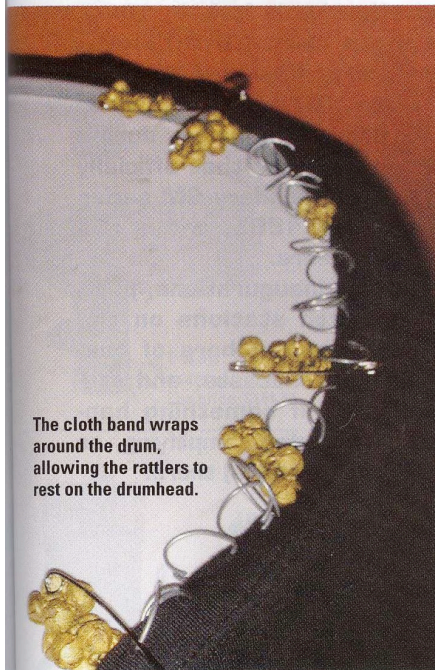


pins on the head or with several. The sound of the drum and the reaction of the pins will change depending on how much of the cloth band is on the head and therefore how close the pins are to the playing area of the drum. You may want the pins or rattlers to be only on one specific part of the head, or you may prefer them around the entire circumference. I find that having around six rattlers resting on the head very near the rim is more than enough to get that special sound without sacrificing the sound of the drum. The best part is that with a quick reach or flick of the stick you can swing the pins off the head so they're resting on the cloth band and the rattler effect is gone.

The T-shirts that I've been using (men's large) are ideal for 14" and 16" drums. You may have to modify the size of the cloth band for larger and smaller drums. You can simply tie a knot in the band to make it smaller, or use a different part of the shirt to cut, such as the neck hole.

The next time you have ten minutes and are feeling a little creative, give the drum rattler a try. You may really like what you hear.

Glenn Kotche is the drummer/percussionist for eclectic rock band Wilco. He was most recently featured in the January '05 issue of MD.



The cloth band wraps around the drum, allowing the rattlers to rest on the drumhead.

