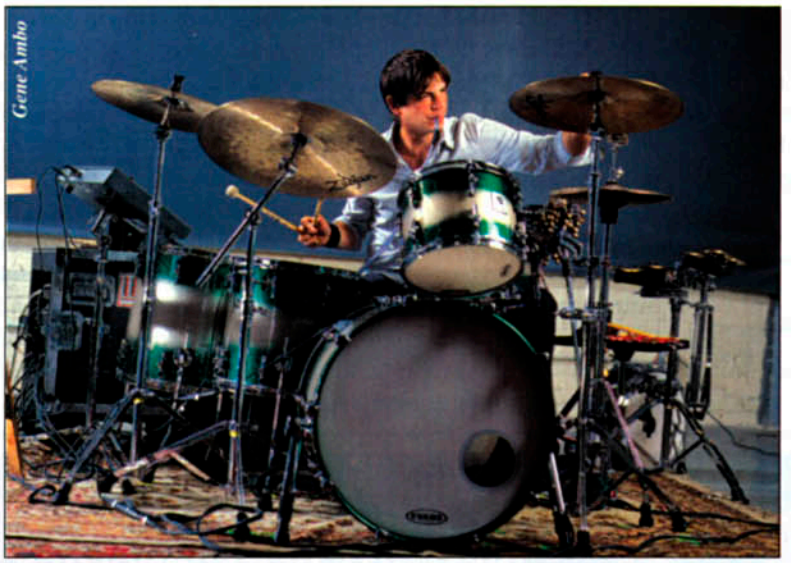
Do-It-Yourself Percussion

The Mani-Tom

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 the Mani-Tom.



The Mani-Tom is created by passing a length of clear vinyl tubing through the vent hole of a floor or mounted tom.

Probably the most frequently asked question I get about my kit is about a set of tubes that are attached to the toms. People see me blowing in them while playing, and they can't figure out what it is that I'm doing. I'm quick to point out that this idea is not my own. I was lucky enough to read about it in an old interview with Mani Neumeier, the renowned drummer for the Germa band Guru Guru. He describes his invention as an air hose attached to a mounted tom, allowing him to change the pitch of the tom at will, simply by blowing air into it while playing.

The hose or tubing can be attached to any drum that has a vent hole. When you blow into the tube and force air into the drum, the added air pressure increases the tension of the heads and raises the pitch of the drum. When you stop blowing, the pressure returns to normal, lowering the raised pitch and giving the impression that the drum pitch itself has been lowered. In actuality, you can only *raise* the pitch with the Mani-Tom method. But you get a timpani-like pitch-bending sound nonetheless.

The only thing you need to make your own Mani-Tom is a length of flexible plastic or rubber tubing, which is available at any hardware store. I prefer the clear type in about a 4' length. Most drums have a vent hole that a $^{3}/_{8}$" outside x $^{1}/_{4}$" inside diameter hose will fit into perfectly. These lengths of tubing are extremely inexpensive and will last a long time with proper care and rinsing.

When you get the tubing home, simply insert one end into the vent hole, and you're set. I've never found a need to secure the hose to the drum; it should fit snugly enough in the vent hole to stay put. Also, it's important to note that I've never noticed a negative effect on the sustain or tone of a drum by having a hose inserted in its vent.

When you blow into the hose, the pitch of the drum will raise. When you stop blowing, the drum will return to normal. (This is assuming that there are no other holes in the drum that allow the air to escape.) I usually attach a hose to each mounted tom and floor tom, and I keep the blowing ends of them taped together so I can use them all simultaneously. It is possible to hold a certain pitch or pressure longer if you stop up the end of the hose with your tongue or by biting down on the end so as to keep the air from escaping.

Although this is a special effect that not everyone will be interested in, it does enable us to get a rolling, swooping color that's similar to a timpani glissando.

If you'd like to hear an audio example, check out the song "Reservations" from Wilco's *Yankee Hotel Foxtrot* record. You can hear the bending rolls on floor toms thanks to the Mani-Tom.

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