

Do-It-Yourself Percussion, Part 2

The Hi-Hat Shaker

by Glenn Kotche

This column is dedicated to providing drummers and percussionists with simple and inexpensive projects for creating instruments and accessories. This month's project is a hi-hat shaker.

As the name implies, a hi-hat shaker is a shaker that attaches to a hi-hat stand using a traditional hi-hat clutch. This device seemed to me to be the logical next step from the various commercially available tambourines/jingles that attach to the hi-hat. When no such product appeared on the market, I began to explore ways to make my own.



My exploration resulted in two approaches that both successfully fill this niche. One uses egg shakers; the other incorporates two small LP One Shot Shakers. Either design can be used in addition to the hi-hat, or exclusively (without the hi-hat sound) by loosening the top cymbal clutch so only the shaker is played.

Because a hi-hat shaker produces a quiet sound, it's ideal for use in the studio. It can sometimes eliminate the need for a shaker overdub, or (when used with the hi-hat) it can provide an enhanced hi-hat sound. However, for more than ten years I've also had great results using it in live situations, with a hi-hat microphone. Considering the success of commercially available brackets that enable cowbells and tambourines to be played with the feet, a shaker that's playable with the feet makes perfect sense.

Take Your Shots

I opted for LP's One Shot shakers as one version of my hi-hat shaker because they offer a crisp, precise sound, with great response. For this design you'll need two small One Shot shakers, a regular hi-hat clutch, and either two rubber bands or some gaffer's tape.

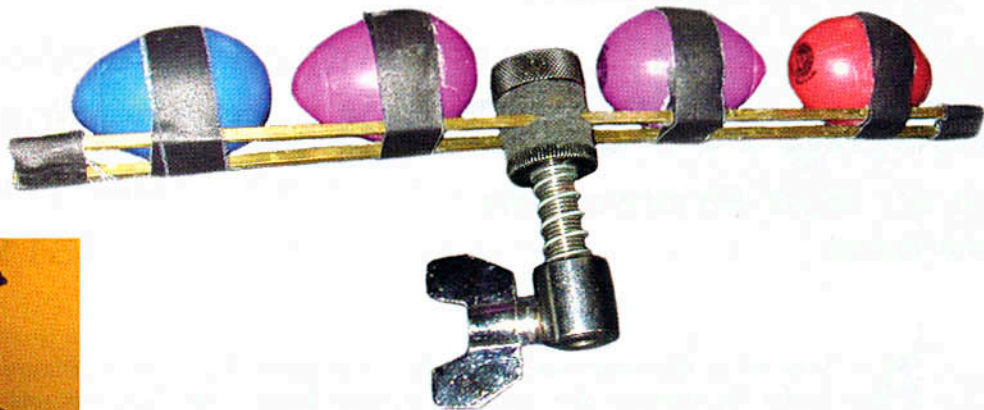
All you need to do is loosen the clutch, remove the felt washers and insert both shakers—parallel to each other—between the two nuts of the clutch. Then tighten the nuts so that the shakers are firmly held in the clutch. Fasten the two rubber bands (or tape) around the ends of each shaker so they are joined. This final step helps keep the shakers from slipping and moving around in the clutch.

Since the One Shots are designed to only sound when played in a forward motion, make sure that both of the shakers are placed the same way, in the position that allows them to sound with a downward motion. (This design can also be mounted upside down; resulting in easily executed up-beat only shaking.)

The Good Eggs

The second design incorporates four egg shakers (of any brand), two metal dowels, a hi-hat clutch, and a fastener (rubber bands, tape, or hook-and-loop strips). The first step is to loosen the nuts of the clutch just enough to fit the two metal dowels (parallel to each other and horizontal to the floor) between the two felt washers. Then tighten the nuts and secure the dowels to each other with two rubber bands or with strips of tape. The dowels should form a "track" in which the egg shakers can easily rest.

I put two eggs on each side of the clutch, spacing them as evenly as possible. The eggs then need to be secured to the dowel track. I've had success with all of the aforementioned methods, but I prefer using four thick rubber bands, which are wrapped around each egg and dowel track. Using hook-and-loop fastener strips allows the eggs to move around a bit more than tape or rubber bands do. You should use the fastener that gives you the sound and action that you like.

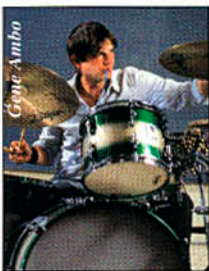


This shaker design gives a rounder sound that's a bit less crisp and pointed than the One Shot design. But it's ideal for 8th-note patterns, which end up sounding like 16th notes due to residual vibrations.

Cover Your Bases

Whichever hi-hat shaker design you select, I recommend that you add a pad for the hi-hat stand when using the shaker independent of the hi-hat cymbals. You can use a folded cloth, a towel, a piece of foam, or any soft material that can be placed between the floor and the hi-hat stand footboard. By doing this you'll cushion the impact of the footboard against the base of the hi-hat stand, thus preventing unwanted sound without affecting the normal function of the hi-hat.

As always, it's important to note that other designs for hi-hat shakers are possible. These two just proved to be the easiest and most effective in my own experiments. For an audio example of the hi-hat shaker, listen to "Jesus Etc." from Wilco's *Yankee Hotel Foxtrot*, or "Muzzle Of Bees" from *A Ghost Is Born*.



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

