

Latin for drummers – How to play Candombe on drums?

Candombe is the heritage of enslaved Africans in the Rio de la Plata area. Originally it was played with four drums made of barrels and leather as the drumhead. Nowadays, it comes with three handmade drums, but... how do you play Candombe on your drum set?

Remember that the drum set is not an instrument developed in this part of the continent. Therefore, in order to play Candombe, we are going to need to identify which elements of traditional playing cannot escape interpretation.

First of all, let us remember the drums, what they play, and the relation with the “Madera” pattern and pulse.

The image shows five staves of musical notation. From top to bottom: REPIQUE, PIANO, CHICO, MADERA, and PULSE. The REPIQUE, PIANO, and CHICO staves use a treble clef and a 2/4 time signature. The MADERA staff uses a bass clef and a 2/4 time signature. The PULSE staff uses a bass clef and a 2/4 time signature. The notation includes various note values, rests, and accents. The PULSE staff has four measures, each with a single note, numbered 1 to 4.

How to read:

Symbol	Written in the third space is what the hand plays. It means:
×	REPIQUE & CHICO DRUM - With this symbol we're gonna represent the playing of a slapped-high pitched-tone stroke, without choking the head!
●	PIANO DRUM - It represents the palm of the hand on the head (standing ON the head), like the bass-tone stroke on tumbadoras.

Symbol	Written in the first space is what the stick plays. It means:
∅	REPIQUE, PIANO & CHICO DRUM - It represents the open tone notes played by the stick. Remember...Do not leave the stick ON the head. Let it fly back!
×	PIANO DRUM - With this symbol we're gonna represent the stick staying ON the head, without bouncing!

Now we are going to identify one or two elements of each drum.

With the Chico drum, the accented note is played with the hand on every second sixteenth note.

With the Piano drum, there are two different elements. First, the open tone notes played with the stick that happens together with the second “Madera” note and between the fourth and fifth notes. Furthermore, the bass note is played with the hand, and the stick stays on the head in the first and third pulse.

Finally, with the Repique drum, there are two different elements. First, the “Madera” pattern with all its variations and the last hand-played note in the fourth pulse.

Let us use one variation of the “Madera” pattern as a hi-hat ostinato:



Now, with the Chico drum, a note is placed in the second sixteenth note of the second pulse. Again, because it is a high-pitched note, we are going to play it on a snare drum.



In order to add the bass drum, look at the bass and the opened tone notes from the Piano drum:



Finally, with the Repique drum, let us use that high-pitched note placed in the fourth beat:



Here we have our first Candombe pattern, so let us groove it! Note: Candombe drum patterns are usually played between 80 to 120 bpm.

Now we have developed our first groove pattern... How about some variations to our ostinato?

Ostinato variations

Here you have one for each pulse:

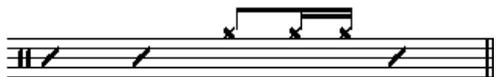
1st pulse:



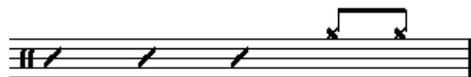
2nd pulse:



3rd pulse:



4th pulse:



You can combine these variations in order to embellish the original ostinato. Here you have one using the first and fourth pulse variation:



How about hihat w/foot figures?

Our hi-hat's foot is free when we play the ostinato on the ride cymbal. So, we can play different figures with it. Let us check some possibilities:

1.- Pulse

Besides being the popular concept of a pulse, this is a very important element of Candombe. When you play Candombe in its traditional context, you stand on your feet with the drum in front of you, hanging from your shoulder. You then start walking, taking one step in front of the other (of course!), but this step ends besides the previous one, not going forward! Furthermore, rhythmically, the steps to the front are in the first and third pulse, and the other steps accompany every second and fourth pulse. Therefore, the hi-hat playing a pulse directly relates to the rhythmic pattern made with your feet when you walk playing Candombe.



So, to apply this to our groove:



2.- "and"

In order to make a "jazzier" groove, you can add a hi-hat figure at every "and" of each pulse:



3.- Madera

We can also play the original "Madera" pattern (similar to 3-2 Son Clave):



Up to this... there is one Candombe drum groove, four ostinato variations, and three hi-hat w/foot possibilities... Therefore, a lot!

Try to practice each one separately. Then, when you feel comfortable, try to mix them, making your own Candombe groove. Have fun!