

Lesson 5: Handing and Timing for Basic 4/4 Djembe Parts

Following a simple progression we can learn the two most commonly played accompaniment djembe parts, with proper handing and timing.

	1	.	*	.	2	.	*	.	3	.	*	.	4	.	*	.
	G		g	d	G		g	d	G		g	d	G		g	d
	G		g	d	G		P		G		g	d	G		P	
	G		g	d	-		P		G		g	d	-		P	
alt. handing	D		g	d	-		P		D		g	d	-		P	

These patterns start with a straightforward downbeat and upbeat feel, and move us to a clave feel (grayed squares). The rhythm we have arrived at is best known as Kuku.

	1	.	*	.	2	.	*	.	3	.	*	.	4	.	*	.
	G		P	T	G		P	T	G		P	T	G		P	T
	G		P	T	G		g	d	G		P	T	G		g	d
	P		P	T	P		g	d	P		P	T	P		g	d
	P			T	P		g	d	P			T	P		g	d

These patterns start as the previous group did, with the bass pulse on the downbeats, but substitute slaps for tones on the upbeats. With a series of further substitutions (practice each line by itself until the handing is effortless!), we arrive at the final line, which is practically a universal accompaniment djembe part in 4/4 rhythms from West Africa. Trying to master this rhythm by itself is deceptively challenging for beginners; so I recommend using this progression to get there in gradual steps, reinforcing the right/left handing along the way.