

## **BODY PERCUSSION**

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### **History**

While many folk dancing traditions from around the world include some body rhythms of clapping and patting, the material in this lesson was based on body percussion that is a direct descendent of African-American rhythms. Any teaching of Body Percussion should include an acknowledgement and teaching of its history as a Black American art form. Enslaved peoples, taken from West Africa to the Americas to work on plantations, brought with them their rich heritage of music and dance. Plantation owners quickly recognized the power of this music to strengthen community and build resistance, so drums and musical gatherings were outlawed. These rhythms could not be suppressed and were transferred from instruments onto the body.

*Exploring body percussion reinforces the understanding that everything we humans create has roots in something that went before. -Brenda Dixon-Gotschild*

<https://dancemagazine.com/origins-of-body-percussion/#gsc.tab=0>

### **Warm Ups**

1. Clap your hands (clap 3x). Stomp your feet (stomp R, L, R) Move your body (hit chest R, L, slap legs R, L) to the beat (snap R, L, hit R hand to left arm)  
From Rhythm-One <https://youtu.be/hT05rRyjFag?feature=shared>
2. Circle
  - A. turn hands outwards and hit against both neighbours, cross arms and hit upper arms, slap both legs, clap) 3x Break – stomp R, L, slap legs R, L, stomp feet R, L, hit centre chest.
  - B. ¼ turn jump (to face R) clap, hit shoulders of person in front of you R, L, R (turn back to C) step clap) 2x butterfly] reverse to other side.  
Extend to 2 circles – 1 AB, 2 BA  
From Rhythm-One

**Combination** (adapted from Lane Alexander – *Chicago Human Rhythm Project*)

Phrase 1 – R step (clap 2x), L step clap ] repeat 3x (2 bars)

Phrase 2 – R step hit legs up clap, [L step, hit legs down up clap] repeat, reverse, repeat (2 bars)

Phrase 3 – R step clap, AST kick L, clap under L leg, clap above L leg, L step, slap both legs, R step. Jump both feet fwd (arms hi) jump back (arms Lo) hit chest R, L, R. (2 bars)

Phrase 4 – stand in 2<sup>nd</sup> position knees bent: [hit R hand to R leg, hit R hand to L hand, hit r hand to R leg] reverse, [hit R hand to R leg, hit R hand to L hand, hit L hand to chest, hit R hand to R leg, hit R hand to L hand] reverse slap legs R, L, R, slap R hand to L foot, step L, pull feet together (4 bars)

### **Variations and Adaptations**

Use a variety of Choreographic devices - retrograde, repetition, rondo, canon, call & response, tempo, level, fragment, accumulation, symmetry/asymmetry, to turn this combination into a group choreographic activity for students or into a performance piece.

Suggestions:

After teaching the combination

1. Choose concept/concepts you wish to teach. Model working collaboratively with students to adapt the combination, according to the concept/concepts chosen, to create a more visually or rhythmically interesting piece of choreography.
2. Divide class into groups and provide each group with 1 or more concepts to adapt the combination. Share and provide feedback.
3. Concepts can be chosen by students, assigned with intent, or randomized (dice).

### **More**

Keith Terry is a leader in Body Percussion performance and education. (He sometimes comes up to Vancouver for workshops!) Learn more about him here:

<https://crosspulse.com>

Body Percussion performance on film to share with students: <https://youtu.be/sb-2VsE2y-U?si=eibS-Fsx2W4wktcq>

Rhythm-One: Richard Filz has a YouTube channel and Instagram page with lots of video resources – especially good for elementary – middle school.