Tihai Rudiments

By Jerry Leake

This article explores the traditional language and context of North Indian Tabla Tihai (tee-hi), with an equal goal of adapting the unique tihai formulae to playing snare drum rudiments.

All drummers know that rudiments are the building blocks for developing strong technique, creatively assimilated to drumset. Buddy Rich, for example, was a grand master of incorporating rudiments into playing jazz. Rudiments are typically one- or two-beat phrases that alternate strong and weak hand positions; the Wilcoxin and Whaley books arrange them into concise and challenging marches. However, not much new innovation has occurred to alleviate (some of) the tedium when playing rudiments as isolated drills.

Before exploring tihai inspiration, we first need some context on Indian music.

PART I: NORTH INDIAN CONTEXT

North Indian Tabla

The pair of drums called tabla evolved from the more ancient "pakhawaj" drum used for accompanying Dhrupad vocal music. All pakhawaj compositions are easily adapted to the more "modern" tabla, and the tihai we will explore are derived from this ancient lineage. At this time there is no specific need to understand how spoken syllables are applied to playing pakhawaj or tabla. Our purpose is to use the vocal language to build tihai phrases and interpretations.

North Indian Tihai

"Tihai" literally means "one-third" (1/3). It is a type of rhythm cadence that typically concludes compositions or improvisations on melodic and percussion instruments. In basic terms, a tihai is a phrase that is played three times, with the final stroke landing on a strong beat, usually beat 1 of a given rhythm cycle. However, tihai can be calculated to begin and end on any beat, depending upon their application. Tihai can be very short (mukhra tihai) or extremely long, spanning many rhythm cycles of a minute or more (chakradhar tihai).

The theory and application of tihai is too vast to comprehensively discuss in this article; there are numerous sources you can use to dig deeper. For now, we will focus on a specific collection of tihai built using the same set of tabla syllables (called *bols).*

Tabla Bols

The tihai we will interpret are derived from nine tabla *bols*.

• The first pair of *bols* is spoken with the tip of the tongue at the top of the mouth: "te te." The first "te" sounds like "tent" and the second "te" sounds like "tay." Repeat "te te" ("tent tay") many times.

• The second pair is spoken more in the jaw: "ka ta." Repeat, then combine with "te te," four times each pair: "te te" (4X) "ka ta" (4X).

• The third pair is spoken in the throat using the hard "g" sound: "ga di." Repeat and combine four times each: "te te, ka ta, ga di."

• The fourth spoken pair is felt in the gut: "gi na." Repeat "ga di gi na" and combine all, four times each: "te te, ka ta, ga di, gi na."

• The final syllable to end the series is "dha." Emphasize the "h" in your recitation; avoid saying "da."

The complete *bol* series, rendered in different parts of the body (as if digesting the phrase) is "te te ka ta ga di gi na dha."

Tintal Cycle

These nine tabla *bols* will be used to build tihai in the 16-beat rhythm cycle called "tintal" (think four bars of 4/4). Each tihai will begin from beat 1, called *sum* (+). Each will also end on *sum* of the next cycle. Tintal (the groove) should always be spoken between each tihai, connecting them as one composition.

In the tintal notation below, the "+" (clap of the hand) marks the first four-beat group, the "2" marks the second clap/group, the "o" (outward wave) marks the third, and "3" (clap) marks the fourth. Tintal literally means "three claps."

Tintal bols

+	dha	dhin	dhin	dha
2	dha	dhin	dhin	dha
o	dha	tin	tin	ta
3	ta	dhin	dhin	dha

Tabla Tihai

The following eight tihai (composed by Shanta Prasad, George Ruckert, Jerry Leake and John Bergamo; arranged by Ruckert and Leake) are built using "tete kata gadi gina dha." Tihai 1 occupies one cycle, whereas all others occupy multiple cycles. Always end strong on beat 1 with "dha" to link to the next tintal cycle. The sequence for our arrangement is: tintal, tihai 1, tintal, tihai 2, tintal, tihai 3, etc. When you are comfortable with each tihai, refer to video 2 to speak the entire arrangement.



See videos of examples performed by Jerry Leake in the digital edition of this issue at www.pas.org/publications/percussivenotes/notesonline_copy1.aspx

Tihai 1 (1 cycle)

+	dha	dhin	dhin	dha
2	dha	dhin	dhin	dha
o	dha	tin	tin	ta
3	ta	dhin	dhin	dha
+	**te te**	**ka ta**	**ga di**	**gi na**
2	**dha**	**—**	**te te**	**ka ta**
o	**ga di**	**gi na**	**dha**	**—**
3	**te te**	**ka ta**	**ga di**	**gi na**
+	dha	dhin	dhin	dha
2	dha	dhin	dhin	dha
o	dha	tin	tin	ta
3	ta	dhin	dhin	dha

To save space and isolate each tihai, I have eliminated tintal before and after each tihai: always begin and end with tintal. The underlined "te te" marks the beginning of each tihai (1/3) segment.

Tihai 2 (3 cycles)

+	**te te**	**ka ta**	**ga di**	**gi na**
2	**dha -**	**te te**	**ka ta**	**ga di**
o	**gi na**	**dha -**	**te te**	**ka ta**
3	**ga di**	**gi na**	**dha -**	**—**
+	**—**	**te te**	**ka ta**	**gi di**
2	**gi na**	**dha -**	**te te**	**ka ta**
o	**ga di**	**gi na**	**dha -**	**te te**
3	**ka ta**	**ga di**	**gi na**	**dha -**
+	**—**	**—**	**te te**	**ka ta**
2	**ga di**	**gi na**	**dha -**	**te te**
o	**ka ta**	**ga di**	**gi na**	**dha -**
3	**te te**	**ka ta**	**ga di**	**gi na**
+	dha… (tintal)			

Tihai 3 (4 cycles)

+	**te te**	**ka ta**	**ga di**	**gi na**
2	**dha -**	**dha -**	**dha -**	**te te**
o	**ka ta**	**ga di**	**gi na**	**dha -**
3	**dha -**	**dha -**	**te te**	**ka ta**
+	**ga di**	**gi na**	**dha -**	**dha -**
2	**dha -**	**—**	**te te**	**ka ta**
o	**ga di**	**gi na**	**dha -**	**dha -**
3	**dha -**	**te te**	**ka ta**	**ga di**
+	**gi na**	**dha -**	**dha -**	**dha -**
2	**te te**	**ka ta**	**ga di**	**gi na**
o	**dha -**	**dha -**	**dha -**	**—**
3	**te te**	**ka ta**	**ga di**	**gi na**
+	**dha -**	**dha -**	**dha -**	**te te**
2	**ka ta**	**ga di**	**gi na**	**dha -**
o	**dha -**	**dha -**	**te te**	**ka ta**
3	**ga di**	**gi na**	**dha -**	**dha -**
+	dha… (tintal)			

Tihai 4 (2 cycles)

+	**te**	**—**	**te**	**ka**
2	**—**	**ta**	**te te**	**ka ta**
o	**gi di**	**gi na**	**dha**	**te**
3	**—**	**te**	**ka**	**—**
+	**ta**	**te te**	**ka ta**	**gi di**
2	**gi na**	**dha**	**te**	**—**
o	**te**	**ka**	**—**	**ta**
3	**te te**	**ka ta**	**ga di**	**gi na**
+	dha…			

Tihai 5 (4 cycles)

+	**te**	**—**	**te**	**ka**
2	**—**	**ta**	**te te**	**ka ta**
o	**gi di**	**gi na**	**dha -**	**te te**
3	**ka ta**	**gi di**	**gi na**	**dha -**
+	**te te**	**ka ta**	**gi di**	**gi na**
2	**dha -**	**—**	**te**	**—**
o	**te**	**ka**	**—**	**ta**
3	**te te**	**ka ta**	**ga di**	**gi na**
+	**dha -**	**te te**	**ka ta**	**gi di**
2	**gi na**	**dha -**	**te te**	**ka ta**
o	**gi di**	**gi na**	**dha -**	**—**
3	**te**	**—**	**te**	**ka**
+	**—**	**ta**	**te te**	**ka ta**
2	**gi di**	**gi na**	**dha -**	**te te**
o	**ka ta**	**gi di**	**gi na**	**dha -**
3	**te te**	**ka ta**	**gi di**	**gi na**
+	dha…			

Tihai 6 (4 cycles)

+	**te te**	**ka ta**	**gi di**	**gi na**	
2	**dha**	**—**	**—**	**te te**	
o	**ka -**	**ta -**	**—**	**ga di**	
3	**gi -**	**na -**	**—**	**te te**	(triplet)
+	**ka**	**ta**	**ga**	**di gi na**	(triplet)
2	**dha**	**—**	**te te**	**ka ta**	
o	**ga di**	**gi na**	**dha**	**—**	
3	**—**	**te te**	**ka -**	**ta -**	
+	**—**	**ga di**	**gi -**	**na -**	
2	**—**	**te**	**te**	**ka ta ga**	(triplet)
o	**di**	**gi**	**na**	**dha —**	(triplet)
3	**te te**	**ka ta**	**gi di**	**gi na**	
+	**dha**	**—**	**—**	**te te**	
2	**ka -**	**ta -**	**—**	**ga di**	
o	**gi -**	**na -**	**—**	**te te**	(triplet)
3	**ka**	**ta**	**ga**	**di gi na**	(triplet)
+	dha…				

Tihai 7 (5 cycles)

+	te	—	te	ka
2	—	ta	ga	—
o	di	gi	—	na
3	dha	te	te	ka
+	ta	ga	di	gi
2	na	dha	te te	ka ta
o	ga di	gi na	dha	te
3	—	te	ka	—
+	ta	ga	—	di
2	gi	—	na	dha
o	te	te	ka	ta
3	ga	di	gi	na
+	dha	te te	ka ta	gi di
2	gi na	dha	te	—
o	te	ka	—	ta
3	ga	—	di	gi
+	—	na	dha	te
2	te	ka	ta	ga
o	di	gi	na	dha
3	te te	ka ta	ga di	gi na
+	dha…			

Tihai 8 (7 cycles)

+	te	—	te	ka
2	—	ta	ga	—
o	di	gi	—	na
3	dha	te	te	ka
+	ta	ga	di	gi
2	na	dha	te te	ka ta
o	ga di	gi na	dha -	te te
3	ka ta	gi di	gi na	dha -
+	te te	ka ta	ga di	gi na
2	dha -	—	te	—
o	te	ka	—	ta
3	ga	—	di	gi
+	—	na	dha	te
2	te	ka	ta	gi
o	di	gi	na	dha
3	te te	ka ta	ga di	gi na
+	dha -	te te	ka ta	ga di
2	gi na	dha -	te te	ka ta
o	ga di	gi na	dha -	—
3	te	—	te	ka
+	—	ta	ga	—
2	di	gi	—	na
o	dha	te	te	ka
3	ta	ga	di	gi
+	na	dha	te te	ka ta
2	ga di	gi na	dha -	te te
o	ka ta	gi di	gi na	dha -
3	te te	ka ta	ga di	gi na
+	dha…			

PART II: TIHAI RUDIMENTS

Part I explored a pure language-based application of tabla syllables; it takes time and effort to become proficient with speaking drum vocables. However, with language as our source and guide, a much higher level of ownership can be achieved, revealing new horizons of inspiration. The challenge will be to apply language while playing snare rudiments. Our process will follow the stages outlined below.

Stages of Development

1. Thoroughly review Part I, speaking the tihai with kriya gestures.
2. Focus on just tihai 1. Play as alternating paradiddles, *without* voice or foot

Example 1. Tihai 1 as single paradiddle



3. Add the foot playing half notes on bass drum or ankle bells (w/practice pad)

Example 2. Tihai 1 w/foot



4. Now speak the tabla *bols* to complete rudiment, voice and foot layers.

Example 3. Tihai 1 w/tabla bols



Simplifying the Bols

Because this is a contemporary invention, we can take liberties to simplify learning and execution. We can modify the nine bols—"tete kata gadi gina dha"—to just four by borrowing from the South Indian drum language: "ta ka di mi." (Continue using "tete kata gadi gina" bols to achieve the highest level.)

Notice in Example 4 that each paradiddle corresponds with each "ta ka di mi" phrase, establishing unity with the voice and sticking mechanics. Also view Video 4.

Example 4. Tihai 1 w/"ta ka di mi"



Exploring Other Rudiments

Below is a list of the standard rudiments (alternating strong to weak hand) that work well for playing each tihai. Experiment with your own approaches and orchestrations to drumset.

1. single paraddidle (shown in Example 4)
2. flam paradiddle
3. ruff paradiddle (non-standard)
4. 9-stroke roll
5. flam tap/accent (modify sixteenths to triplets)
6. double ratamacue

For this article, it is not possible to notate each tihai using all rudiment options.

Refer to Video 5.

Tintal Adaptation

Our goal is to combine the tihai as an extended arrangement, with tintal spoken and played between each. If you are using a practice pad and ankle bells (encouraged), you can play tintal with all "dha" and "ta" syllables with the weak hand on the pad ("snare"). All "dhin" and "tin" syllables are played on the side of the pad for contrast ("cymbal"). Video Link 6 (discussed below) incorporates tintal on snare drum and bass drum.

Tihai 2–6 as Paradiddle

Following are tihai 2–6 notated using single paradiddles with "ta ka di mi" syllables, the foot playing half notes. Refer to Video 6.

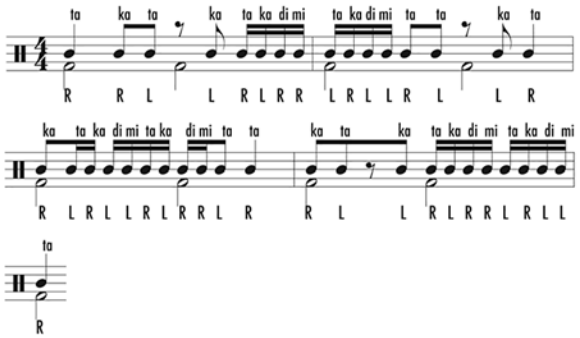
Example 5. Tihai 2



Example 6. Tihai 3



Example 7. Tihai 4



Example 8. Tihai 5



Example 9. Tihai 6



Refer to Part I of this article to adapt Tihai 7 and 8.

CONCLUSION

As drummers, we love solving unusual rhythm puzzles from any inspiration. By breaking down the traditional context and language of North Indian tihai, taking small steps to get inside a deep concept, our understanding and application will become easier, the puzzle gradually solved. In this article, I have only scratched the surface of possibilities; it is for you to dig deeper and pioneer new and exciting approaches.

Jerry Leake is an Associate Professor of Percussion at Berklee College of Music and the New England Conservatory. He leads the world-rock-fusion octet Cubist (cubistband.com), which performs compositions from his 2010 acclaimed Cubist CD. Jerry has just released his third Cubist CD, *Prominence*, where African songs and melodies are woven into tight world-rock-fusion designs. Jerry is cofounder of the world-music ensemble Natraj and performs with Club d'Elf and the Agbekor Society. Jerry has written eight widely used texts on North and South Indian, West African, Latin American percussion, and advanced rhythm theory (Rhombuspublishing.com). Jerry is also former president of the Massachusetts PAS Chapter, and was a presenter of his "Harmonic Time" concept at a 2011 TEDx Seminar in Cambridge, Mass. **PN**


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