

Introducing the *tablā*

The *tablā* is a percussion instrument originating from the Indian subcontinent, consisting of a pair of drums – bass and treble drum – used in traditional, classical, popular and folk music. It has been a particularly important instrument in *Hindustāni sangīt* (North Indian classical music) since the 18th century.

The treble drum, *dāhinā* or *tablā*, is tuned to the *sā* or the tonic note of the piece of music that is to be played, while the bass drum, *bāyāñ* or *ḍaggā*, is tuned in consonance with the *dāhinā*.

As can be heard in this video clip, there are seven basic sounds that can be produced from the pair of drums. Of these, five sounds may be produced on the *dāhinā*: *te*, *ṭe* (closed sounds) *tā*, *nā* and *tin* (open sounds). Only two sounds can be produced on the *bāyāñ*: *ghe* and *ke*. All seven sounds may be pronounced differently by changing the vowel sounds that follow the consonant sounds. For example, *ghe* can be pronounced *gha* or *ghi* and *ke* can be pronounced *ka* or *ki*. In short, it's the preceding consonant sound that is important and not the succeeding vowel sound – the vowel sounds can be amended to help you when speaking, particularly if you are speaking quickly.

When learning a language, once you have learned a few letters, you then go on to learn words and, in the beginning, you learn small words like: it, the, bat, cat, sat, it, and so forth; similarly, on the *tablā*, you learn phrases, such as: *te ṭe*, *tira kiṭa*, *ghi ghi te ṭe*, *ki ki te ṭe*.

Again, when learning a language, as you advance you learn to combine different sounds or phonics; similarly the seven basic sounds may be combined to produce many more sounds. For example, *ghe* and *nā* played simultaneously produces the sound *dhā*, *ghe*; *tin* produces the sound *dhin*, *ghe*; and *te* produces the sound *dheṭ*.

What you hear in this video clip is a composition called *kāidā* (not covered in Indian Takeaway – *Rāg and Tāl Baics*). This sequence is important, as it is used when learning how to set your hands on the *tablā*. This *kāidā* is set to *tīn tāl* and goes like this: *dhā dhā te ṭe*, *dhā dhā tin nā*, *tā tā te ṭe*, *dhā dhā dhin nā*.

This video clip concludes with a couple of other compositions that you may be familiar with but are not required for Indian Takeaway – *Rāg and Tāl Baics*.