

Bongo Rhythms

BONGO KEY



Diagram illustrating the Bongo Key notation:

- Hembra Open with thumb:** Represented by a vertical bar on the first line of the staff.
- Macho Open with thumb:** Represented by a vertical bar on the second line of the staff.
- Fingers Closed:** Represented by an 'x' on the third line of the staff.
- Slap with fingers:** Represented by a vertical bar with a dot on the fourth line of the staff.

Below the staff, the labels are: Hembra Open, Macho Open, Thumb Closed, and Slap with fingers.

This is the notation key for the following bongo rhythms. Unlike the congas, the bongos are played mainly with the fingers. As with the conga studies it is very important to master each sound and make them as distinctive as possible. The HEMBRA is the larger drum and is on the right. The MACHO is the smaller and is on the left. Below is a very common bongo pattern called the MARTILLO. It is similar to the conga mambo pattern in that it contains the building block sounds and strokes for many bongo rhythms. Master it before moving on to the other patterns.

The Martillo



Diagram illustrating the Martillo Bongo Pattern:

The pattern consists of four measures. Each measure starts with a vertical bar (Hembra Open) followed by a vertical bar with a dot (Macho Open). The pattern then repeats: vertical bar with a dot (Macho Open), vertical bar (Hembra Open), vertical bar with a dot (Macho Open), vertical bar (Hembra Open). The pattern is marked with a circled 'x' (Fingers Closed) and a vertical bar with a dot (Slap with fingers).

Below the staff, the labels are: R, L, R, L, R, L, R, L, R, L, R, L.

Sometimes the bongo player will also play cowbell, shekere or other percussion instruments as they are needed in the ensemble. Below is a typical cowbell pattern which the bongo player might play.

The dash (-) is the mouth of the Bell (louder) while the dot (.) is the top of the bell (softer).

Bongo Cowbell Pattern



Diagram illustrating the Bongo Cowbell Pattern:

The pattern consists of eight measures. Each measure starts with a vertical bar with a dash (-) followed by a vertical bar with a dot (.) and a vertical bar with a dash (-). The pattern repeats: vertical bar with a dash (-), vertical bar with a dot (.), vertical bar with a dash (-), vertical bar with a dot (.), vertical bar with a dash (-), vertical bar with a dot (.), vertical bar with a dash (-), vertical bar with a dot (.).

The following patterns are examples of traditional bongo rhythms. After you learn them try creating your own. Then get a conga playing friend and try playing the conga and bongo worksheet rhythms together. Use the tempo markings from the Conga Groove Section.