

Latin for drummies – How to play Candombe on drums?

Candombe is the heritage of African slave’s in Rio de la Plata’s area. Originally it was played with four drums made with barrels and leather as a drumhead. Nowadays with three handmade drums, but... How can I play Candombe on my drum set?.

Remember that the drum set isn’t an instrument developed in this part of the continent so, in order to play Candombe we’re gonna need to identify which elements of the traditional playing cannot escape from my interpretation.

First of all, let’s remember the drums, what they play and the relation with the “Madera” pattern and pulse.

The image shows musical notation for five different drum parts in Candombe. The parts are labeled on the left: REPIQUE, PIANO, CHICO, MADERA, and PULSE. Each part is written on a five-line staff. The REPIQUE, PIANO, and CHICO parts use various note values and rests to represent rhythmic patterns. The MADERA part uses a simpler rhythmic pattern. The PULSE part is represented by four diagonal slashes, numbered 1 through 4, indicating a steady pulse.

How to read:

Symbol	Written in the third space is what the hand plays. It means:
✕	REPIQUE & CHICO DRUM - With this symbol we’re gonna represent the playing of a slapped-high pitched-tone stroke, without choking the head!
●	PIANO DRUM - It represents the palm of the hand on the head (standing ON the head), like the bass-tone stroke on tumbadoras.

Symbol	Written in the first space is what the stick plays. It means:
∅	REPIQUE, PIANO & CHICO DRUM - It represents the open tone notes played by the stick. Remember...Do not leave the stick ON the head. Let it fly back!
✕	PIANO DRUM - With this symbol we’re gonna represent the stick staying ON the head, without bouncing!

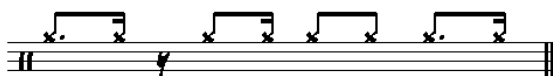
Now we're gonna identify one or two elements of each drum.

From the Chico drum, the accented note played with the hand in every second sixteenth note.

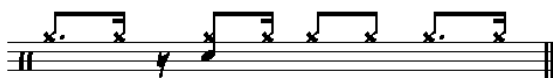
From the Piano drum, two different elements. First, the open-tone notes played with the stick that happens together with the second "Madera" note and between the fourth and fifth note. And the bass note played with the hand and the stick staying on the head together in the first and third pulse.

Finally from the Repique drum, two different elements. First, the "Madera" pattern with all of its variations and the last hand-played note in the fourth pulse.

Let's use one variation of the "Madera" pattern as a hi-hat ostinato:



Now, from the Chico drum, a note placed in the second sixteenth note of the second pulse. Cause is a high-pitched note, we're gonna play it on the snare drum.



In order to add the bass drum, take a look to the bass and the opened-tone notes from the Piano drum:



Finally, from the Repique drum, let's use that high-pitched note placed in the fourth beat:



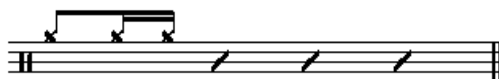
Here we have our first Candombe pattern. Let's groove it! Note: Candombe drum patterns are usually played between 80 to 120 bpm.

Now we have developed our first groove pattern... How about some variations to our ostinato?

Ostinato variations

Here you have one for each pulse:

1st pulse:



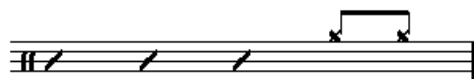
2nd pulse:



3rd pulse:



4th pulse:



You can combine these variations in order to embellish the original ostinato. Here you have one using the first and fourth pulse variation:



How about hihat w/foot figures?

When we play the ostinato on the ride cymbal, our hihat's foot is free. So we can play different figures with it. Let's check some possibilities:

1.- Pulse

Besides the popular concept of pulse. This is a very important element of Candombe. When you play Candombe in its traditional context. You stand on your feet with your drum in front of you, hanging from your shoulder. You start walking, making one step to the front first, and then, another step with your other foot (of course!) but this step ends besides the previous one, not going forward! And rhythmically, the steps to the front are in first and third pulse and the steps accompanying in every second and fourth pulse. The hihat playing pulse, has a direct relation with the rhythmic pattern made with your feet when you walk playing Candombe.



Applying this to our groove:



2.- "and"

In order to make a more "jazzy" groove. You can add a hihat figure in every "and" of each pulse:



3.- Madera

We can play also the original "Madera" pattern (similar to 3-2 Son Clave):



Up to this...one Candombe drum groove, four ostinato variations and three hihat w/foot possibilities...a lot!

Try to practice each one separately. When you feel comfortable try to mix them making your own Candombe groove. Have fun!