



Handpan Inspiration Cards E-book

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1. Introduction

You may already have been playing the handpan for a while - or perhaps you have just bought one and are looking for a different way to learn. There are hundreds of instructional videos online in which you, as a player, see a sequence of numbers pass by, often accompanied by a handpan player demonstrating it at high speed. This can be quite frustrating when you are just starting out.

Perhaps you have been playing for some time and have discovered that you would like to learn in a different, more creative way: more by ear and by feel, rather than by watching videos with numbers. It is from this perspective that the Handpan Inspiration Cards were developed. Learn to play handpan according to your own needs, and see the cards as a challenge through which you gradually learn to apply more musical elements to your handpan playing.

This card set was also developed through my own teaching practice, where I was often asked: "How can I learn to play by feel?" Drawing on my musical background, I created several backing tracks that make it easier to learn to play intuitively.

I wish you lots of enjoyment with the cards. In this e-book, I will give you tips on how to use the different themed cards to find your handpan flow.

2. Different handpans

Whatever handpan you have, you can use the cards with any instrument. All cards were developed for handpans with nine notes. If your handpan has more notes, you can easily extend the patterns using higher notes. Replace certain numbers with higher numbers to create even more variation. This does require some preparation.

You can also use handpans with additional bass notes. Try replacing the ding with another bass note from time to time. Use your ears to check whether it sounds good.

The Improve cards contain links to music tracks that you can play along with. You can choose between D Kurd and B Kurd. Other tunings may be added in the future.

Examples on the other themed cards are played on a D Kurd handpan, but they can also be played on a B Kurd handpan.

3. How to use the cards

There are different ways to use the cards. The simplest way is to ask yourself: “Which element would I like to practise?” Is it rhythm, a handpan pattern, or both?

For example, start with a Harmony card. Once you have practised it, add a Rhythm card and play the harmony pattern in that rhythm. If you would like to add some extra technique, a Skills card is a good match. Still not done playing? Add a Challenge card to push yourself further.

Many cards contain a QR code that provides further explanation or lets you see or hear examples. Use these for inspiration. Of course, you may copy the examples too if you still find it difficult to come up with something yourself.

The Improve cards stand on their own and are not combined with other cards. They were specifically developed for playing along with a music track. This is how you learn to play by ear and by feel.

If you are playing with someone else, the Two Players cards offer a fun challenge. You give each other assignments and often play one after the other, in a question-and-answer format. This teaches you to listen closely to the handpan and to learn from each other's playing. You can also combine these cards with other cards. There are many possible combinations! The final chapter contains several example card layouts to get you started.

4. Playing posture

What is the right posture when playing the handpan? Sitting on the floor in a lotus position with the handpan on your lap may look beautiful, but it is not really recommended when you are just starting out. Since everyone has different proportions, the length of your legs and upper body will determine what is best for you to try at first.

Tall people will usually have little difficulty playing with the handpan on their lap. Sitting on a chair or stool often works best. If you also have a stand, that can be especially comfortable in the beginning.

Smaller handpan players often benefit most from using a stand. An adjustable-height stand works best for this. Nowadays, there are also stands that allow you to play while standing. They work well, but they can be quite expensive.

There are also floor stands, which you place on the ground so that you can play while kneeling or sitting on the floor.

Most importantly, a good playing posture allows you to move your upper body easily, keep your shoulders low, and move your arms around the pan in a relaxed way. Especially when you are starting out, experiment with different positions to discover what works best for you. Personally, I like sitting on a low stool, with the handpan comfortably supported between my knees so that I can play in a relaxed way.



5. Harmony card

a. Playing handpan patterns

In the beginning, playing handpan is mainly about learning patterns and practising them until they become automatic. Playing tempo is essential here. If you try to play too fast at first, you will notice that it affects your coordination.

A pattern is a sequence of notes played one after another or at the same time.

There are many online videos that teach patterns through number combinations. Visit www.masterthehandpan.com, where you can find many enjoyable online courses and great handpan patterns.

b. Tips for playing harmony patterns and rhythm

On the Harmony card, the patterns are divided between the two hands. Start by playing in a slow rhythm. It becomes easier when you remember a pattern as a shape: from left to right, for example, or as a triangle.

At first, you can also read the numbers aloud while playing. This can help you remember the pattern and distinguish the different notes more quickly. The left side of the handpan has the even numbers and the right side has the odd numbers.

The rhythm ultimately determines how the pattern sounds. You can start by playing all notes separately, one after another. Play them at the same length first. Then apply different note lengths to create rhythmic variation. There are many possibilities here. It is enjoyable to experiment by feel and develop your own rhythms.

Later, you can draw a Rhythm card to help you turn the harmony pattern into a rhythmic pattern.

c. Tips for time signatures

Besides rhythm, the time signature determines how the different beats are divided.

Music is organised in a fixed sequence of beats. The most important is 4/4: you count to four in every bar. There are also triple time signatures, such as 6/8 and 3/4. On the Harmony cards, you can see this division illustrated on the card.



6. Skills card - which playing technique do you use?

When learning handpan, the early stage is mainly about becoming aware of your playing technique. How can you create sound from the handpan? Which effects can you use to create differences in tone? With the Skills card, you can apply these techniques in your handpan playing.

Examples of playing techniques:

a. Ghost notes

These are very light strikes with the fingertips. The name says it all: “ghost” notes. The strikes are so soft that you can barely hear them, yet they do have an effect on your playing.

Try lightly tapping your fingertips on the rim around the ding, not on the playing surface. This area of the handpan is often used to add percussive elements to your playing. You can also apply ghost notes to any tone field. They are the only strikes that may remain in contact with the surface, so that no ringing note is created. Ghost notes therefore have a percussive character.

b. Playing dynamically

Differences in volume greatly influence how the handpan sounds. This is partly determined by the type of handpan you have, especially by the metal from which it is made. Ember steel handpans have a wider dynamic range than, for example, nitrided steel handpans. The thinner the metal, the less dynamic range is available.

However, your way of playing is just as important. Can you create clear differences between very soft strikes and stronger playing? You can train this by playing a simple pattern on one tone field: begin very softly, then strike gradually more strongly. It is important to know the dynamic limits of your handpan in order to play musically.

c. Double notes

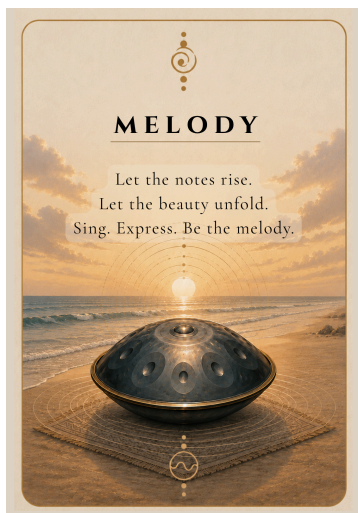
Double notes are a beautiful addition to your handpan playing. Once you know which notes create suitable combinations, you can use them often.

An easy way to start is by playing two adjacent notes. You can do this with both hands next to each other, but it is often done with one hand as well. The technique is to move your hand from the outside inward in a fixed position, striking two notes simultaneously. This is often done with the thumb and middle finger held in a fixed shape. It requires some practice, but it is certainly worth it.

d. Alternating hands

Playing alternately means striking every note with the left and right hand in turn. It is a technique that helps you maintain perfect coordination in your playing.

With this technique, stay close to the handpan and avoid making large arm movements. Large movements make it easier to miss notes and reduce your control over the sound. Alternating strikes are the most commonly used technique when playing. However, you will sometimes need to play double strikes with one hand when there is no other option.



7. Melody cards

a. The function of melody

What exactly is a melody? We often play a fixed, repeating pattern. A melody fits beautifully between these patterns, separating them and giving them space. We create room to fill with melodic notes.

But which notes should you play? The higher notes on the handpan are best suited for melody, as they often stand out above the rest. Lower notes can also form a melodic pattern.

If you do not know what to play as a melody, try singing it first while you play. Use the Melody cards to learn to listen to your handpan. The melody tells a story, while the handpan pattern supports it.

b. Playing dynamically

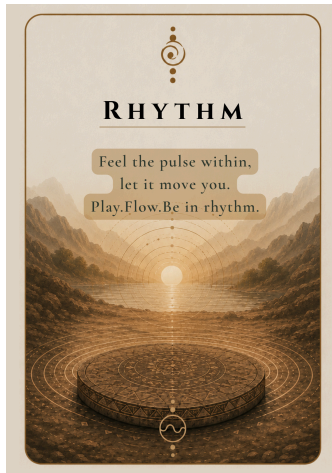
Dynamic playing was also briefly discussed in the Skills section. It is essential for melody. You want the listener to hear what you have to say, so make sure the melody is played with slightly more emphasis. Or use dynamic differences to make certain notes sound stronger than others.

c. Improvisation

Make something up yourself so that a melody naturally emerges. This is a wonderful way to let your inner voice be heard.

What do you hear while you are playing? Sometimes you have “lucky shots”: a beautiful melodic line that appears spontaneously. Feel free to repeat it a few times and add variation, such as a difference in volume or another rhythm.

When you spontaneously play a beautiful melody, use the power of repetition and discover what else you can do with it. This will naturally bring you into a flow.



8. Rhythm cards

Playing handpan mainly consists of striking notes in a particular order. We call this a handpan pattern. These strikes usually happen in a constant movement, which we call a rhythm pattern.

Rhythm is related to both the time signature and the tempo at which you play.

a. Time signatures

Music moves through an organisation of time. We experience time in music as something familiar. It gives us a sense of consistency. There are different ways of perceiving this time: by counting along, dancing, swaying, or walking to a familiar pulse. This is the time signature you experience.

The most common time signature is an even meter, in which we count to two or four. Think of walking in time to marching music. We unconsciously count to four.

An uneven meter is a three-part meter. You can recognise it by its strong swaying quality. We unconsciously count to three.

The difference between time signatures strongly affects your playing technique, because the technique is not the same for every time signature. You will often develop a preference for either an even or uneven meter. This is also connected to your own musical experiences.

b. Playing accents

When practising any rhythm pattern, try adding accents. This means playing one of the notes slightly louder than the others. This automatically changes the rhythm pattern.

This is especially effective when the accents do not fall on the so-called strong beats, but in between them. Let me explain: strong beats are the main counts in each bar. Imagine that we are playing in an even meter with four beats. Then 1, 2, 3, and 4 are the strong beats.

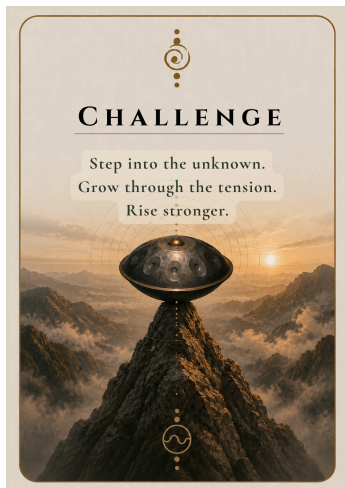
But you can also play between these beats, and this is where accents work particularly well. You could count: “1-and-2-and-3-and-4-and.” An accent on the “and” after the first beat, instead of on beat one itself, creates a completely different rhythmic experience.

It takes some practice before you can play this comfortably, but it adds so much value to your handpan playing that it is well worth the effort.

c. Tempo

The tempo at which you play also shapes the rhythmic aspect of your playing. Playing faster does not automatically produce a better result. Slow playing, on the other hand, improves coordination between the two hands.

Relaxation is essential when playing faster. When you speed up, tension in your hands and arms often increases unconsciously, while the opposite - relaxation - produces better results. Pay close attention to your posture while playing.



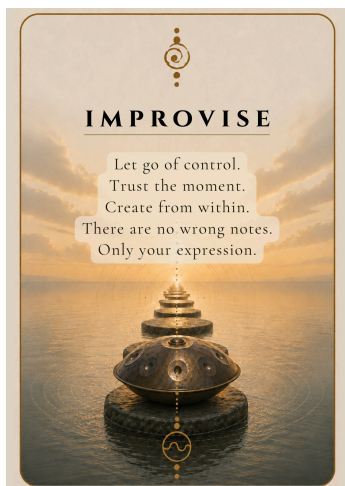
9. Challenge cards

With the Challenge cards, you add an extra challenge to your playing. They complement the Skills cards. You can also start with a Challenge card if you do not yet know what you want to practise.

Harmony and Challenge, or Rhythm and Challenge, are good combinations. Feel free to add a Challenge card when playing with an Improvise card as well.

In fact, Challenge cards work with every themed card.

Challenge yourself and develop not only your playing technique, but above all your musicality.



10. Improvise cards

With the Improvise cards, you enter your own handpan flow. The background music helps you learn to play perfectly by ear and by feel. The music is open and accessible, inviting you to play along intuitively. And the wonderful thing is: everything sounds good! You cannot strike a wrong note. That is one of the advantages of playing the handpan.

These cards include a short example video that you may choose to play along with. Do not let it influence you too much; it is only an example intended to help you find a certain flow.

Play the music through a separate USB speaker placed at ear height for the best playing experience. It may be obvious, but playing with earphones is not recommended, as you will hear the handpan less well while playing.

The music on these cards ranges from a pleasant beat to calm ambient music.

a. Playing by feel

How do you begin? What should you focus on when you want to play by feel? The answer is simple: trust your feeling.

When listening to music, try to discover where the music affects you and which part appeals to you most. Is it the rhythmic part, the harmony, or the melody? Follow the part that draws your attention and try to imitate it.

An easy example is discovering a rhythm pattern in the music. You should already have practised this with the Rhythm cards. Listen to the rhythm in the music and try to imitate it. It is not about playing the right notes, but about the rhythm pattern.

To make this easier, play along on the rim around the ding using ghost notes: light strikes with your fingertips.

b. Listening to the backing track

When you begin playing along with the music tracks, it is advisable to listen to the track once before joining in. Try to divide the music into sections. For example, there may be an open beginning, followed by different harmony patterns.

Make a mental analysis of the music. This will help you know what is coming when you play along. The more you map out beforehand, the more comfortable it will be to play with the track.

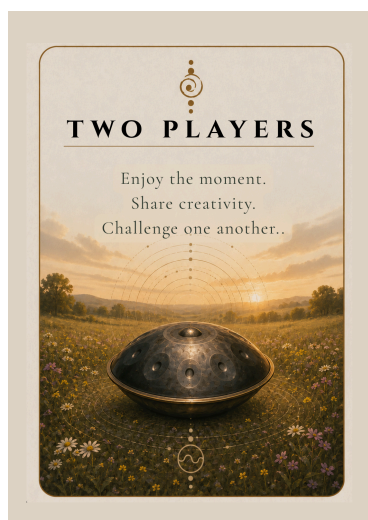
You can then fill in these different sections with your handpan, mainly by trying to imitate elements as described in section a.

In some tracks, you can clearly hear a melody. You can try to play along with it, or answer it musically as though it were a question. This is a wonderful beginning to playing by feel.

c. The art of leaving things out

Improvising means playing what you hear in the moment. Try not to play too much. Sometimes it may seem as though we need to fill every space, but allowing silences creates musical expression too.

When the next musical phrase begins, it will sound even more exciting as a result. Timing is everything.



11. Two Players

Playing together is extra enjoyable and very educational for your musical development. With these cards, you give each other playing assignments and learn from each other's playing.

Playing together also has another benefit: you can try to make the two handpans sound alike in volume, touch, and tone, as though they were one instrument.

Copying each other is an example of an activity on these cards. You can also combine these cards very effectively with other cards, such as the Rhythm card.

You can play together on two handpans, but it also works very well on one handpan. This is particularly enjoyable with children. Place the handpan with the lowest note in front of one person, while the other player sits opposite them.

In this way, player 1, sitting on the lower-note side, can play a basic pattern while player 2 improvises on the higher-note side.

If there are several players, you can easily use these cards and divide the group according to the different assignments.

12. Example card layout

- Start with one card of your choice and practise the assignment.
- You can add another card to option a and combine assignments a and b.
- You can then add a Challenge card for an extra challenge.
- You can select the card yourself or surprise yourself by drawing one blindly from the deck.

Example 1



It naturally depends on your personal learning goal: what you would like to practise or which playing element you would like to improve. You can draw a random card every day to stimulate your creativity, or use the themed cards very deliberately to train each element separately.

Example 2

Draw a Rhythm card and choose three random notes on the handpan to discover a pattern.

You can also reverse this by drawing a Harmony card first and creating your own rhythm for it.

Example 3

Draw an Improvise card and add either a Challenge card or a Skills card.

If you would like to learn to play handpan more by feel, please visit www.zenyamusic.nl.

