Tiptop Audio — TOMS909

- Manual PDF

Manual PDF

Tiptop Audio TOMS909: using it for melodic components

The **TOMS909** is primarily a **triple analog tom drum voice** based on the TR-909 tom circuits, but the manual makes clear that it can go well beyond percussion. Because each of the **Low, Mid, and High toms** has:

- **Tune**
- **Decay**
- **Accent**
- **Level**
- its own **Gate input**
- its own **Accent input**
- its own **audio output**
- and its own **VC Tune input with attenuator**

…it can be used as a **pitched percussive instrument**, a **3-note melodic voice cluster**, or a **modulated metallic texture generator**.

What in the manual suggests melodic use?

The strongest clues are:

1. **Extended TUNE range**
2. The module is not restricted to fixed tom tones.

3. The manual explicitly says the Tune control can create:
    - low soft bass drum sounds
    - toms
    - “many other percussive sounds”
4. **Voltage control over tune/pitch for each drum**
5. Each tom has a dedicated **VC-TUNE input** and attenuator.
6. This means you can animate pitch with sequencers, LFOs, envelopes, or oscillators.
7. **Audio-rate modulation**
8. The manual specifically recommends patching a **VCO sine wave** into the tune CV inputs.
9. This is a classic way to create **pitched metallic spectra**, inharmonic tones, and tuned percussion timbres.
10. **Sequenced modulation**
11. The manual describes sequencing a VCO through a **Z8000 -> Z3000 -> VC-TUNE** chain.
12. That effectively turns the harmonic content of the toms into a **sequenced melodic parameter**.
13. **The note that VC-Tune is not 1V/Oct**
14. Important limitation: it is **not precision pitch tracking**.
15. So you should think of it as **quasi-melodic / tuned percussion / tonal modulation**, not as a keyboard-accurate oscillator voice.

Best ways to use the TOMS909 melodically

1. Three tuned toms as a melodic percussion set

This is the most direct use.

Patch concept

- Send separate trigger patterns to:
- **LOW GATE IN**
- **MID GATE IN**
- **HIGH GATE IN**
- Take either:
- individual outs for separate mixing/panning, or
- **MIX OUT** for a summed signal
- Tune each drum to a stable pitch area using the **TUNE** knobs

Musical result

You get a 3-note tuned percussion instrument. Think: - low / mid / high “notes” - tribal melodic figures - pentatonic-feeling tom melodies - call-and-response between registers

How to make it more melodic

- Set **Decay** shorter for more defined pitch attacks
- Set **Decay** longer for more body and more obvious tone
- Pan low/mid/high across stereo if you have a mixer
- Program different rhythmic densities per tom

Why it works

Even without exact volt/oct tracking, fixed tuning across three drums gives you a **repeatable interval structure**. This is enough for: - ostinatos - melodic fills - pseudo-bassline plus upper accents - tonal percussion riffs

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2. Use gate sequencing to imply melody through register

The manual shows using a **Trigger Riot** to drive all three toms at different divisions. That same idea can be used to create melodic movement.

Patch concept

- Low tom = root pulse
- Mid tom = offbeat answer
- High tom = faster ornament
- Tune them to musically related intervals by ear

Example: - Low = tonic-ish - Mid = fourth or fifth-ish - High = octave-ish or ninth-ish bright accent

Musical result

This creates **melody by orchestration**, rather than by traditional note sequencing. You hear a phrase because the ear connects: - pitch height - rhythm - accent - decay shape

This is especially effective in: - techno - electro - polyrhythmic minimal - tribal / broken beat styles

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3. Sequence the VC-TUNE inputs for moving pitch contours

Although the manual says **VC-TUNE is not 1V/Oct**, it is still highly useful for melodic animation.

Patch concept

- Patch a CV sequencer row into:
- **VC-L-TUNE**
- **VC-M-TUNE**
- **VC-H-TUNE**
- Use the corresponding attenuators to scale the pitch movement
- Trigger each tom with gates from a trigger sequencer

Musical result

This gives: - shifting tuned percussion - rising/falling tom lines - morphing melodic phrases - unstable but musical pitch gestures

Best practice

Because pitch tracking is not calibrated: - use **small modulation amounts** for subtle interval movement - tune by ear rather than expecting exact semitones - use quantized CV only as a rough organizational tool, not for exact intonation

Strong musical applications

- melodic fills
- pitch-bent tom runs
- evolving percussion hooks
- semi-tuned bass motifs from the low tom

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4. Audio-rate FM for metallic melodic percussion

This is one of the most interesting uses described in the manual.

The patch tip specifically recommends: - patching a **Z3000 sine wave** - into all three **VC-TUNE** inputs - and adjusting oscillator frequency

What this does

At audio rates, modulation of tune creates: - metallic overtones - bell-like sidebands - harsher or more harmonically rich attacks - tuned-noise percussion colors

Why this matters musically

This turns the TOMS909 from “drum module” into something closer to: - tuned industrial percussion - metallic marimba-like hits - clangorous FM toms - synthetic mallet voices

Making it melodic

If the modulating oscillator is itself pitch-sequenced: - the harmonic color changes in sync with the composition - each hit can imply changing pitch centers - the toms can move from drum role into tonal role

The manual explicitly suggests: - clocking a sequencer - sending sequenced CV to the VCO’s **1V/Oct** - then using that VCO to modulate the TOMS909 tune CV inputs

That is a very powerful patch, because the **melody is not just in the drum pitch**, but in the **harmonic relationship between drum and modulator**.

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5. Build harmonic relationships between Low, Mid, and High toms

Since each tom has independent Tune control, you can manually set them into interval relationships.

Useful tuning strategies

By ear, try: - **root / fifth / octave** - **root / minor third / fifth** - **root / fourth / minor seventh** - close dissonant intervals for industrial tension

Musical result

You can create: - chord-like percussion voicings - melodic triad fragments - tuned fill systems - pseudo-arpeggios when triggered in sequence

Tip

Use: - **longer decay** for more audible pitch - **shorter decay** for more “plucked” tuned percussion

Short decay often works better for melodic clarity in dense mixes.

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6. Accent as an expressive melodic parameter

The manual spends significant time on **Accent**, and this matters musically.

Accent does more than volume: - it affects loudness - it also changes the way the analog circuit is “hit” - which slightly changes attack and noise content

So Accent acts like a primitive **performance articulation control**.

Melodic use

Patch gates or CV into **ACCENT IN** while sequencing the toms.

This allows: - stronger notes in a phrase - phrase-end emphasis - ghost notes vs accented notes - dynamic melodic contour

Why this is important

A melodic part is not just pitch; it is also: - phrasing - emphasis - articulation

On TOMS909, Accent gives you a way to make repeated tuned hits feel like an intentional line rather than static percussion.

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7. Use the Low tom as a bass voice

The manual notes that Tune can reach into **low-end bass drum / low percussion territory**. That implies the **Low tom** can often function as a quasi-bass instrument.

Patch concept

- Trigger the **Low tom** in a repeating pattern
- Set:
- lower Tune
- medium/long Decay
- carefully balanced Accent
- Optionally add subtle VC-TUNE modulation from a sequencer or envelope

Musical result

You can get: - thumpy bass ostinatos - subby tuned hits - acid-adjacent percussive bass pulses - “bassline by drum synthesis”

This works best in styles where the bassline can be more percussive than sustained.

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8. Use individual outs to build contrapuntal melodic layers

The module has: - **LOW OUT** - **MID OUT** - **HIGH OUT** - **MIX OUT**

For melodic work, the individual outputs are especially useful.

Why

You can process each tom differently: - low tom through saturation or lowpass filtering - mid tom through delay - high tom through reverb or ping-pong delay

Musical advantage

Each tom can occupy a different melodic role: - **Low** = bass motif - **Mid** = main pulse/melodic answer - **High** = ornament / sparkle / syncopation

This creates **multi-register melodic counterpoint** from one drum module.

Practical melodic patch ideas

Patch 1: Tuned tom melody trio

Goal: create a 3-note melodic percussion phrase

- Trigger source with 3 outputs -> Low/Mid/High Gate In
- Tune Low/Mid/High to a pleasing interval set by ear
- Set medium-short Decay
- Use individual outs or Mix Out
- Add slight Accent variation to one or two drums

Result: a playable tuned tom riff.

Patch 2: Bass + answer + lead percussion

Goal: make the TOMS909 act like a mini melodic ensemble

- Low tom tuned low, medium decay, slower rhythm
- Mid tom tuned higher, syncopated rhythm
- High tom tuned bright, sparse accents
- Pan low left-center, mid center, high right
- Add accent pulses to high tom only

Result: a full melodic-percussive pattern with clear phrase structure.

Patch 3: Sequenced pitch drift

Goal: add melodic variation over time

- Trigger each tom normally
- Send separate CV rows to each VC-TUNE input
- Keep attenuators low to moderate
- Use repeating but offset CV patterns

Result: each tom changes pitch over time, generating evolving melodic loops.

Patch 4: Audio-rate harmonic percussion

Goal: create metallic melodic tones

- Sine VCO -> mult/stack -> all three VC-TUNE inputs
- Set VC-TUNE attenuators fairly high
- Sequence the VCO pitch from a CV sequencer
- Trigger toms in complementary rhythms
- Keep decay shorter for sharper metallic definition

Result: tuned industrial bells / metallic tom harmonics / animated melodic percussion.

Patch 5: Tom arpeggiator

Goal: make the three toms behave like a chord arpeggio

- Tune Low/Mid/High as root/third/fifth by ear
- Trigger them sequentially:
- Low on step 1
- Mid on step 2
- High on step 3
- all together occasionally on step 4
- Add accent only to phrase boundaries

Result: a percussive arpeggio line.

Strengths and limitations for melody

Strengths

- Three independently tunable analog voices
- Dedicated CV tune per voice
- Great for tuned percussion and tonal rhythm
- Audio-rate modulation opens up rich melodic timbres
- Accent adds articulation and dynamics
- Individual outs enable layered melodic mixing

Limitations

- **VC-TUNE is not 1V/Oct**
- Not intended as a precise chromatic oscillator
- Pitch may be better treated as **relative** rather than exact
- Best results come from **ear tuning** and **percussive phrasing**, not keyboard-style tonal expectation

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Best musical mindset for the TOMS909

The best way to think about this module is:

not as a conventional melodic synth voice, but as a:

- **tuned percussion instrument**
- **3-voice analog tonal drum bank**
- **metallic FM percussion source**

- **bass/mid/high melodic rhythm generator**

If you approach it that way, it can contribute a lot of melodic content: - riffs - bass pulses - intervallic tom phrases - shimmering metallic harmonics - sequenced tonal percussion textures

In other words, the TOMS909 excels at **melody-through-rhythm, register, timbre, and articulation**.

Most effective pairings with other modules

Based on the manual, the TOMS909 becomes especially melodic when paired with:

- **Trigger/gate sequencers**
- for independent rhythmic phrasing of the 3 toms
- **CV sequencers**
- for moving tune relationships over time
- **VCOs**
- especially sine waves for audio-rate FM/timbre shaping
- **stereo delays/reverbs**
- to enhance tonal and spatial perception
- **mixers/panners**
- to separate the three toms into a melodic stereo image

Bottom line

The **TOMS909** can absolutely create melodic material, especially if you use it as:

1. a **3-note tuned percussion set**
2. a **bass/mid/high interval voice cluster**
3. a **CV-modulated tonal drum instrument**

4. an **audio-rate FM metallic melody source**

Its melody is less about exact keyboard tracking and more about **pitched rhythm**, **interval relationships**, **accent phrasing**, and **harmonic modulation**. In a Eurorack system, that makes it extremely strong for expressive techno, electro, industrial, minimal, and experimental melodic percussion lines.

Generated With Eurorack Processor