

Membranophone

A **membranophone** is any musical instrument which produces sound primarily by way of a vibrating stretched membrane. It is one of the four main divisions of instruments in the original Hornbostel-Sachs scheme of musical instrument classification.

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Hornbostel-Sachs

The Hornbostel-Sachs scheme of musical instrument classification divides membranophones in a numeric taxonomy based on how the sound is produced:

- 21**: by hitting the drumskin with a hand or object (most common form, including the timpani and snare drum)
- 22**: by pulling a knotted string attached to the drumskin (common in Indian drums, and can be considered an example of a chordophone as well)
- 23**: by rubbing the drumskin with a hand or object (common in Irish traditional music, an example is the bodhran)
- 24**: by modifying sounds through a vibrating membrane (unusual form, including the kazoo) ^[1]

Shape and technique

Membranophones can also be divided into large divisions based on shape and manner of sound production:^[2]

- Tubular drums** include a wide range of drum shapes, like *waisted*, *long*, *footed*, *cylindrical*, *conical* and *barrel*
- Mirlitons, Kazoos and Swazzles vibrate in sympathy with sounds travelling across a membrane. These are the only membranophones that are not truly drums.

SIL International maintains a classification system based largely on shape:^[3]

- Cylindrical drums** are straight-sided, and generally two-headed. A buzzing, percussive string is sometimes used. Examples include the bass drum and the Iranian *dohol*.
- Conical drums** are sloped on the sides, and are usually one-headed. Examples include the Indian *tabla* and the Venezuelan *chimbangueles*.
- Barrel drums** are normally one-headed, and may be open at the bottom. They bulge in the middle. Examples include the *Dhak* from eastern parts of India, *bendre*, made by the Mossi of Burkina Faso out of a large calabash, and the *trong chau* of Vietnam.
- Hourglass drums** (or *waisted drums*) are hourglass-shaped and generally two-headed. The drumheads are laced onto the body, and the laces may be squeezed during performance to alter the drum's pitch. Examples include folk drums in India (like the *damaru*) and much of Africa, as well as some talking drums.
- Goblet drums** (or *chalice drums*) are one-headed and goblet shaped, and are usually open at the bottom. Examples include the Arab *darabukka*, and a range of similar instruments from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Africa, Southeastern Europe and the Middle East.
- Footed drums** are single-headed and are held above the ground by feet. The space between the drum and the ground provides extra resonance. Examples include a range of East African and Polynesian drums.
- Long drums** are a diverse category, characterized by extreme length. Examples include the single-headed hollow tree trunk drums of Africa and the ornately carved and dyed *gufalo* of the Nuna in Burkina Faso.
- Kettle drums** (or *pot drums* or *vessel drums*) are frequently played in pairs, and have a vessel or pot body, are one-headed and usually tuned to a specific note. Examples include the timpani and tabla.
- Frame drums** are composed of one or more membranes stretched across a frame. Examples include the tambourine and bodhran.
- Friction drums** produce sound through friction, such as by rubbing a hand or object against the drumskin. Examples include the Brazilian *cuica* and the Spanish *zambomba*.
- Mirlitons, Kazoos and Swazzles produce sound by blowing air across a membrane.



Mirlitons, as the kazoo in the picture, are a special class of membranophone, and is the only class that does not consist of true drums



A timpani is a kind of kettle drum

Traditional classifications

The traditional classification of Indian instruments include two categories of percussion.^[4]

- Ghan*: Percussion without membranes, such as chimes, bells and gongs
- Avanaddh*: Percussion with membranes, such as drums with skin heads

Other categories

The *predrum* category consists of simple drum-like percussion instruments. These include the *ground drum*, which, in its most common form, consists of an animal skin stretched over a hole in the ground, and the *pot drum*, made from a simple pot.^[5]

Water drums are also sometimes treated as a distinct category of membranophone. Common in Native American music and the music of Africa, water drums are characterized by a unique sound caused by filling the drum with some amount of water.^[6]

The *talking drum* is an important category of West African membranophone, characterized by the use of varying tones to "talk". Talking drums are used to communicate across distances.^[7]

Military drums or *war drums* are drums in various forms that have been used in the military.



A *cuica* is a kind of friction drum

See also

- Semispherical drum
- Vibrations of a circular membrane

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