

Triangle (musical instrument)

The **triangle** is an idiophone type of musical instrument in the percussion family. It is a bar of metal, usually steel but sometimes other metals such as beryllium copper, bent into a triangle shape. The instrument is usually held by a loop of some form of thread or wire at the top curve.^[1] "It is theoretically an instrument of indefinite pitch, for its fundamental pitch is obscured by its nonharmonic overtones."^[2]

Contents

History

- Ancient and medieval period
- Renaissance and romantic period
- Contemporary period

Shaping and manufacturing

Use and technique

Musical styles

- Classical music
- Folk and popular music

Notes

History

Ancient and medieval period

The triangle has a prestigious history. The triangle in its ancient form had rings strung to the lower bar.^[3] Yet the first mention of a triangle, in a tenth-century manuscript, is of an instrument without rings. A triangle without rings is depicted in the King Wenceslaus IV Bible (late fourteenth century) and again on a mid-fifteenth-century window in the Beauchamp Chapel, St Mary's, Warwick. This latter triangle with its open corner has a curiously modern appearance, except that at the top angle the steel bar is twisted into a loop through which the thumb of the performer (an angel) passes. Like its ancestor the sistrum, the triangle was clearly used for religious ceremonies, quite widely in mediaeval churches. The triangle occurs more often than any other instrument except the cymbals in paintings of Bacchic processions and similar occasions, and angels will often be seen singing and playing a triangle at the same time.^[3]

Renaissance and romantic period

With the development of the genre—opera, the instrument triangle has been widely used in opera works. In many of the operas by Mozart, Beethoven's 9th symphony and Liszt's bE major piano concerto, triangle has been used.^[4]

Triangle



Classification	Hand percussion, idiophone
-----------------------	-------------------------------

Timbre	bright, complex
---------------	-----------------

Volume	medium
---------------	--------

Attack	fast
---------------	------

Decay	slow
--------------	------

Playing range

Single note, open and closed

high

Contemporary period

Triangle is considered as a tool to polish the melody with powerful but clear sound. Especially in contemporary work, triangle's beauty has been further discovered and, as a percussion instrument, it has been more widely used from chamber music level to orchestral level.

Shaping and manufacturing

On a triangle instrument, one of the angles is left open, with the ends of the bar not quite touching. "One corner of the triangle is left open to keep the instrument from having a specific pitch and to allow it to generate ethereal, scintillating overtones instead".^[5] It is either suspended from one of the other corners by a piece of, most commonly, fishing line, leaving it free to vibrate, or hooked over the hand. It is usually struck with a metal beater, giving a high-pitched, ringing tone.

Although today the shape is generally in the form of an equilateral triangle, early instruments were often formed as non-equilateral isosceles triangles. In the early days the triangles did not have an opening and had jingling rings along the lower side.

Early examples of triangles include ornamental work at the open end, often in a scroll pattern. Historically, the triangle has been manufactured from a solid iron and later steel rod and bent into a triangular shape roughly equilateral. In modern times, the scroll pattern has been abandoned and triangles are made from either steel or brass.^[6]

Use and technique

The triangle is often the subject of jokes and one liners as an archetypal instrument that seemingly has no musical function and requires no skill to play. (The Martin Short character Ed Grimley is an example.) However, triangle parts in classical music can be very demanding, and James Blades in the Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians writes that "the triangle is by no means a simple instrument to play".

A **triangle roll**, similar to a snare roll, is notated with three lines through the stem of the note. It requires the player to quickly move the wand back and forth in the upper corner, bouncing or "rolling" the wand between the two sides.

Musical styles

Classical music

In European classical music, the triangle has been used in the western classical orchestra since around the middle of the 18th century. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Joseph Haydn and Ludwig van Beethoven all used it, though sparingly, usually in imitation of Janissary bands.^[7] The first piece to use the triangle prominently was Franz Liszt's Piano Concerto No. 1, where it is used as a solo instrument in the third movement, giving this concerto the nickname of "triangle concerto". In Romantic era music, the triangle was used in some music by Richard Wagner, such as the "Bridal chorus" from Lohengrin. Johannes Brahms uses the triangle to particular effect in the third movement



Alan Herbst, a young orchestral musician, plays the triangle.

of his Fourth Symphony. The triangle is used extensively in Hans Rott's Symphony in E major, particularly in the BIS recording; in later recordings, the conductor has reduced its role. ^[8]

Most difficulties in playing the triangle come from the complex rhythms which are sometimes written for it, although it can also be quite difficult to control the level of volume. Very quiet notes can be obtained by using a much lighter beater: knitting needles are sometimes used for the quietest notes. Composers sometimes call for a wooden beater to be used instead of a metal one, which gives a rather "duller" and quieter tone. When the instrument is played with one beater, the hand that holds the triangle can also be used to damp or slightly modify the tone. For complex rapid rhythms, the instrument may be suspended from a stand and played with two beaters, although this makes it more difficult to control.

Folk and popular music

In folk music, farró, cajun music and rock music a triangle is often hooked over the hand so that one side can be damped by the fingers to vary the tone. The pitch can also be modulated slightly by varying the area struck and by more subtle damping.

The triangle (known in Cajun French as a 'tit-fer, from *petit fer*, "little iron") is popular in Cajun music where it serves as the strong beat, especially if no drums are present. ^[9]

In the Brazilian music style Farró it used together with the zabumba (a larger drum) and an accordion. It forms together with the zabumba the rhythmic section. It provides usually an ongoing pulse, damping the tone on the first second and fourth while opening the hand on the third beat to let most frequencies sound. It can be used though extensively for breaks and to improvise to vary the rhythm. A notable instrumentalist in this style has been Mestre Zinho.



A Brazilian singer playing the triangle.

Notes

1. "Percussion Instruments" (<http://www.gandharvaloka.co.nz/instruments/percussion.html>).
2. "Triangle | musical instrument" (<https://www.britannica.com/art/triangle-musical-instrument>).
3. James., Blades (1992). *Percussion instruments and their history* (<https://archive.org/details/percussioninstru00jame>) (Rev. ed.). Westport, Conn.: Bold Strummer. ISBN 0933224710. OCLC 28230162 (<https://www.worldcat.org/oclc/28230162>).
4. Beck, John H. (2007). *Encyclopedia of percussion*. New York: Routledge. ISBN 9780415971232.
5. "Triangle, Philharmonia Orchestra" (<http://www.philharmonia.co.uk/explore/instruments/percussion/triangle>).
6. Grover, Neil, Whaley, Garwood. "About the Triangle" (<http://www.pas.org/docs/default-source/pasic-archives/triangle>).
7. Peinkofer, Karl, Tannigel, Fritz (1976). *Handbook of Percussion Instruments*. European Amer Music Dist Corp.
8. "OUP: Richard WAGNER (1813-1883)" (instruments used), Oxford University Press, 2006, webpage: OUPcoUK-Wagner (<http://www.oup.co.uk/hirecat/Wagner/>) Archived (<https://web.archive.org/web/20070915022215/http://www.oup.co.uk/hirecat/Wagner/>) 2007-09-15 at the Wayback Machine.

9. "[Louisiana Voices Glossary](http://www.louisianavoices.org/edu_glossary.html)" (http://www.louisianavoices.org/edu_glossary.html) (Under definition for Tit-fer). Retrieved 2008-03-08.
-

Retrieved from "[https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Triangle_\(musical_instrument\)&oldid=914710917](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Triangle_(musical_instrument)&oldid=914710917)"

This page was last edited on 8 September 2019, at 23:24 (UTC).

Text is available under the [Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike License](#); additional terms may apply. By using this site, you agree to the [Terms of Use](#) and [Privacy Policy](#). Wikipedia® is a registered trademark of the [Wikimedia Foundation, Inc.](#), a non-profit organization.