

The Instruments

- **Djembe**

The Djembe is an hourglass-shaped drum that originates from West Africa and has a drum head traditionally made from goat skin. The Djembe drum is simple to learn and yet it is a versatile instrument, capable of producing a wide range of sounds, and is reasonably priced and readily available.

Excerpt from Andy Gleadhill's African Drumming Book 2, page 6



- **Dunun**

A set of Dunun drums often consists of three drums of differing sizes, usually small, medium and large called Dundunba, Sangban and Kenkeni. They are generally played with wooden sticks and often, as is the case with Ewe drumming from Ghana, also incorporate a metal Bell. They can be played horizontally by individuals (Rural style) or vertically by one performer (Ballet style).

Elements from Andy Gleadhill's African Drumming Book 2, page 6



- **Bell**

There are several variations but these were originally fashioned from the Bells attached to cattle and goats, which would sound as the animal moved, so that the worker tending the animals was able to locate them in the dense bush. They can consist of one high-pitched and one low-pitched Bell, which are forged together. The Latin American Equivalent are the Agogo Bells which are an integral part of Brazilian Samba Music.

Elements from Andy Gleadhill's African Drumming Book 2, page 7



- **Talking Drum**

The Talking Drum, or Dondo, is an hourglass-shaped drum with strips of cord, string, twine or leather connecting the drum heads at opposite ends of the drum. When the player squeezes the cords this tightens the tension of the drum. In order to achieve this, the player holds the drum horizontally under one arm, enabling them to squeeze the drum with that arm whilst striking the drum head with a curved stick held in the other hand.

Excerpt from Andy Gleadhill's African Drumming Book 2, page 6



- **African Bongos**

The African Bongos (sometimes referred to as Ethnic Bongos) are the precursor to Latin American Bongos that are the instrument we are more used to playing today. Although the same in many ways, i.e. a pair of drums, one small and one larger, joined together by a small wooden bridge, the drum heads on the African Bongos are tensioned by stringing rather than by metal tensioning bolts and have animal hide skins rather than plastic and are always played with the hands.

Excerpt from Andy Gleadhill's African Drumming Book 2, page 7



- **Balafon**

The Balafon is also known as an African Xylophone. It is constructed by tying graduated lengths of wood to a frame with hollowed out gourds suspended underneath each piece of wood to act as resonators. The wooden notes are tuned to a Pentatonic (five-note) ascending scale and played with rubber ended sticks.

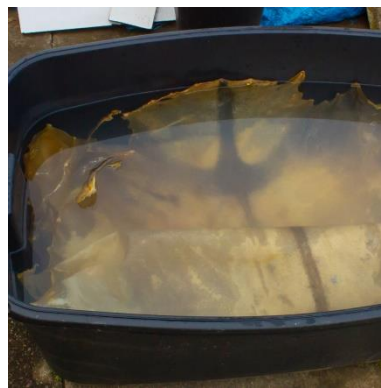
Excerpt from Andy Gleadhill's African Drumming Book 2, page 7



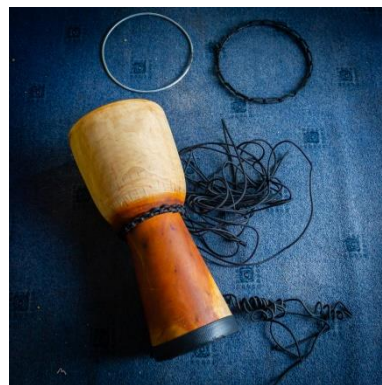
How the Instruments Are Made

Djembe drums are manufactured in a number of ways, including moulded or formed fibre glass and other mass produced ways. Whilst not 'authentic' these drums are consistent and very light weight, often with synthetic skins on them.

Traditionally a Djembe is made of wood, skin, rope and three metal rings and is classified as percussion, specifically a membranophone (an instrument that makes its primary sound by vibrating a stretched membrane).



A traditional drum will have started as a tree. It will have been cut down and allowed to dry out. The outer shape will be carved and trimmed down using a lathe and the inside of the drum will be hollowed out before the goat skin is put on. The skin will have also been cleaned, dried and treated.



The three metal rings are harnessed to the drum to accommodate the vertical ropes and the skin is held in place by the top two of these rings at the head of the shell. The goat skin tightens as the verticals are woven back and forth

through the rope loops between the top metal ring and the bottom one. It is a slow process to increase tension over time so as not to stress the skin too much initially, but over a period of a few days the verticals are tightened and tightened.



It all seems quite straight forward mechanically, but the skill and quality of the build itself, ensuring that the head is perfectly round and even and having the strength, skill and tools to correctly add tension takes some training and practice.

