Hands On Learning
with Reading Museum Service

UGANDA - MUSIC G10

Uganda is in the east of Africa. Like many countries, music is a valued part of their culture. It is played for enjoyment as well as at weddings and important occasions.

Many Ugandans still play their traditional instruments but they also listen to music with western influences.

The instruments in this box are similar to those played in western countries but they have developed slightly differently.



Ennanga harp

This is very different to the European harps that have three wooden sides. This is quite a small harp but some are huge and can fit nine strings on them. It has been decorated with a cowhide over the sound box. The musician sits with the harp between their legs and uses both hands to pluck the strings.



The smoothly curved neck means the strings are different lengths so when plucked they produce different notes. This harp is missing the rings that are normally just below the wooden pegs. These are movable and create a buzzing sound. The picture on the right shows a man playing an ennanga harp with these rings.



To be a harpist was an important position in society because they played for the Kabaka. The Kabaka was the king of Buganda, the most populous tribe in Uganda.





Left: The ennanga harp and a western harp.

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Fiddle



This looks like a guitar that has lost its strings. In fact it is a type of fiddle! Musicians in Uganda call it an endingidi.

It takes time to make such a beautiful object that can also be played. The wooden drum-like section is the sound box. It produces a tinny sound. It was buried in the ground for weeks to soften the wood. This made it easier to hollow out. Can you see the nails? They are also made from wood rather than metal. A piece of hide from a snake, goat or lizard is stretched over the sound box. An owner might personalise their endingidi with decorated tassels.



A traditional story says the endingidi's inventor dreamt about making the instrument. He thought the instrument was similar to a sekitulege that was often played by children. You can see the similarity between the bow-shaped sekitulege and the endingidi. Both have only one string and the sound changes depending on the tension of the string.

Above: A sekitulege

Whistle



This whistle is played by blowing across the large end. You might have done something similar with a bottle. Opening and closing the small hole lets the instrument play two notes.

It comes from an area in north Uganda called Acholi and has been decorated with a layer of snakeskin.

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Kayamba rattle



Just picking up this instrument makes a noise! It is made from two rafts of reeds that are then bound together. Seeds or small beads are put between the two rafts and these create the sound. The kayamba rattle is normally used to accompany other instruments. It is cradled in the fingers of both hands and shaken back and forth. The player's thumbs can beat out a rhythm on the flat of the rattle while they are doing this.



Left: The man on the left of the choir group is playing the kayamba rattle.

Thumb piano



Thumb pianos are known by different names in Africa. They are called an okeme, a sanza and a mbila. They are usually made from a wooden board with thin metal strips attached. The length of the strip affects the pitch. The thumb piano is held in both hands, with both thumbs plucking the strips. Can you hear the different sounds each makes? Smaller strips make a higher pitch.



On the left is a thumb piano at The Museum of Reading. It has been made from a Huntley & Palmer biscuit tin. The company sold biscuits in Africa and tins were then recycled to make thumb pianos. The tin acts as the sound box making the music louder and giving it a distinct sound.

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Side blown horn



This antelope horn has been made into a musical instrument. In Africa it is known as arupape, or apel. The horn naturally curves and twirls.

Its has been delicately hollowed out. The tip of the horn has been cut off so that there is a small finger hole. The musician uses this to produce different notes.

A side blown horn is usually played as part of a group making music to dance to. It is worn around the neck of the performer. Instead of blowing from the bottom of the horn the musician would use a larger hole cut into the side. It has beautiful shades of colour running through it, which give a natural decoration.



