

PLAY IDEAS BANK

Practical Ideas for Creative Play - A comprehensive collection for Playworkers & Playschemes everywhere

No.14



MAKING MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

Children can make musical instruments to accompany singing or dancing, or to create a complete band for a concert or parade. Many junk instruments are quick and easy to make, for instant use, but you can also pursue instrument-making as a craft in itself, creating custom-built instruments that both look and sound beautiful. In this leaflet, written and drawn by Harry Shier, we concentrate on the simpler types, that don't require too much precision or technical expertise. It is a companion to the leaflet "Music" which has lots of ideas about using music and musical instruments creatively in play situations.

Before you Start

These instruments use a wide variety of junk materials. A lot can be collected at home and you will find many more at your local Play Resource Centre. You will find that many pieces of junk that aren't described in this leaflet can be turned into interesting musical instruments. Once you've read the leaflet you should be able to spot the sound potential of all sorts of things and design your own instruments to make the most of it. Inevitably we'll have to use a few items you won't find in the junk box, but we've tried to keep them to a minimum.

TOOLS

You'll need good scissors and also a good sharp Stanley knife, to be used by adults or under the closest of supervision. Many

instruments involve a hammer and nails, a saw or hacksaw and sometimes a drill.

TYPES OF INSTRUMENTS

We've divided them into four sections:

Percussion instruments are things that you hit, scrape or shake. They play rhythms but not tunes.

Tuned percussion are percussion instruments on which you can play a range of different notes so they can (in theory, if not always in practice) be used to play a tune.

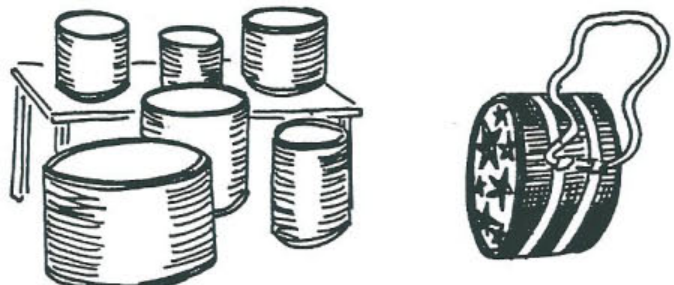
Stringed Instruments are those that you pluck, strum or play with a bow. Again they can in theory play tunes, but you'll find it is very hard to get home-made stringed instruments to play loud enough for a band.

Wind Instruments are obviously those that you blow into.

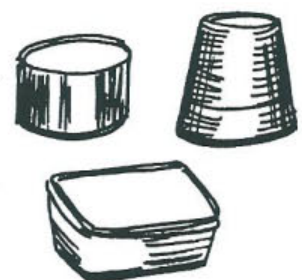
Percussion

DRUMS

Large industrial fibre-board containers make superb ready-made drums, and are stocked by many Resource Centres. The fibre-board bottom makes an OK drum sound, especially when played with a soft beater, so there's no need to stretch a drum-skin. Some come with round metal lids, which give you a different drum sound. The drums are easy to paint and decorate so they look good too and smaller ones can have a strap attached to use them in a marching band.

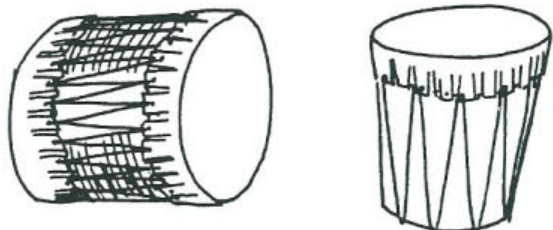


Large tins and plastic containers also make good drums. Assemble a whole drum kit.



DRUMS CONTINUED

If you do need to stretch a drum skin, polythene or PVC off-cuts are best. Cut a circle larger than the top of your drum and make holes round the edge. Fasten with string and pull tight as shown.



BEATERS

Any stick can be used to hit a drum, but soft beaters often sound better - for a boom rather than a bang! Try scraps of carpet, fur-fabric or other stuff wrapped tightly round the end and glued.



SHAKERS

All kinds of unbreakable containers with all kinds of bits inside make different shaker sounds. Simplest is a small plastic bottle, or try yogurt pots or small tins. Add a handle made from a stick or rolled up cardboard selotaped in place. Inside use gravel, dried peas, rice, pasta, beads or buttons.

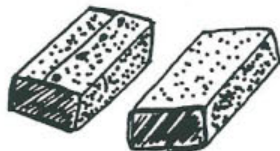


Authentic-looking maraccas can be made with papier mache over small balloons (PVA glue gives a stronger result than wallpaper paste) and a length of dowelling or broomstick for a handle.



SAND BLOCKS

Glue or pin sandpaper to offcuts of wood and rub together.



JINGLE BELLS

Bottle tops (make hole with hammer and nail) on coat-hanger wire. If you can afford to buy proper jingle bells (from craft shops) they can be used on all kinds of instruments or sewn to clothes, ribbons, wristbands etc.



JINGLE STICKS

More pierced bottle-tops nailed to a dowel or broomstick (two or three to a nail). Can be long or short - a long one can be banged on the floor - or make a more elaborate shape.



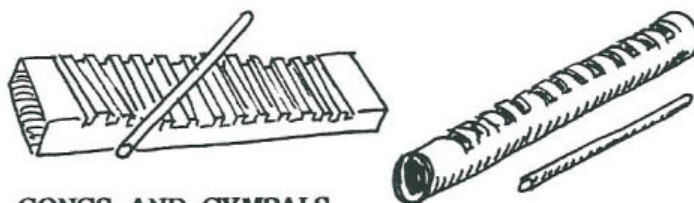
RHYTHM STICKS



Two lengths of dowel, broomstick or, best of all, curtain pole to knock together. Different lengths make different sounds.

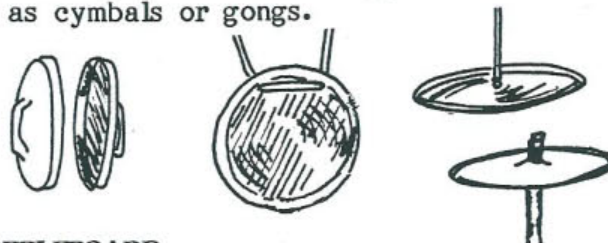
SCRAPERS (GUIROS)

You can probably find junk objects with ridges or corrugations that are ready-made scrapers. Or use a saw to cut a series of grooves across a piece of wood or thick bamboo. Scrape with wooden stick or cane.



GONGS AND CYMBALS

Old pan-lids are ideal cymbals. The metal lids from industrial fibre-board containers (see under DRUMS) can be pierced and hung up as cymbals or gongs.



WOBBLEBOARD

Any large firm piece of sheet material should make a distinctive sound when shaken or "wobbled". Sheet metal is probably best but hardboard and other materials also work well.

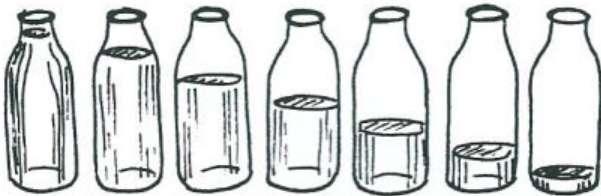
COCONUT SHELLS

- for the classic "clip-clop" sound!

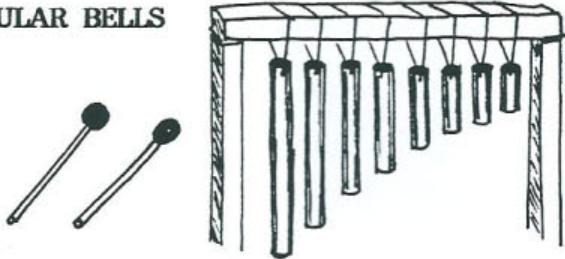
Tuned Percussion

GLASS XYLOPHONE

Easiest to make is the row of milk bottles filled with water to different levels and played with a spoon. You can tune them to a scale by adjusting the water levels. As always, be careful with the glass bottles. By the way, you'll get a much prettier sound if you take the trouble to hang all the bottles by a string tied tight around the neck from a horizontal bar or frame.



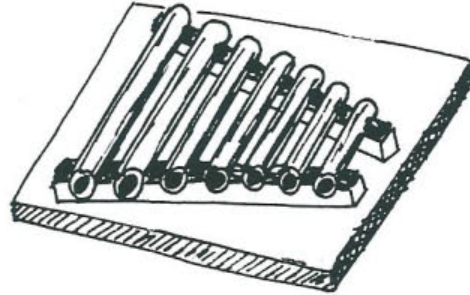
TUBULAR BELLS



Cut different lengths of metal tube and drill holes for hanging (Alternatively try a set of spanners!). Difficult to get an accurate scale, but sounds good anyway. Play with a wooden beater or hard rubber ball on stick.

TUBOPHONE

Nail two pieces of wood (about 1"x1") to a board and glue lengths of foam draught excluder or similar along the top. Glue small extra pieces on top as shown to keep the tubes in place. Cut lengths of tube as for tubular bells and lay them in position. Again use a wooden or rubber beater.



XYLOPHONE

A proper xylophone is similar but with bars cut from a strip of hardwood. You need good wood to get a decent sound. Or if you have scrap pieces of metal strip you can make a glockenspiel on the same principle.

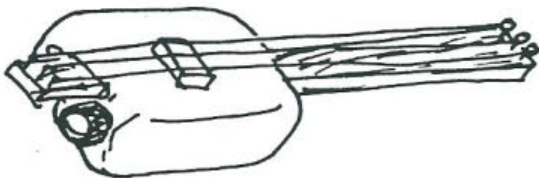
STEEL PANS

Perhaps the greatest of all "junk" instruments, the "pans" of the Caribbean steel band, are, of course, made out of old oil drums. Making and tuning these is a special skill so see if you can find a local contact.

Strings

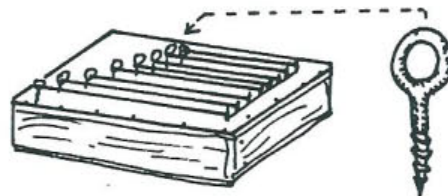
GUITARS/BANJOS

You need a length of wood to hold the strings and an empty container to form a sound-box. Fishing line (or old guitar strings) is best for strings and ordinary screw-eyes make ideal tuning pegs. This version uses a gallon plastic container but biscuit tins, ice-cream tubs etc. can also be used.



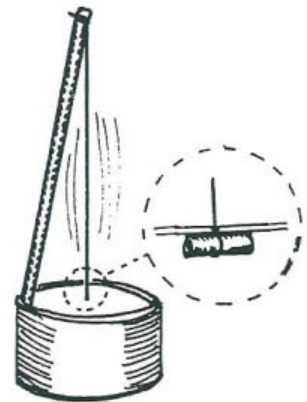
HARPS/ZITHERS

A large wooden box will give the best sound, but a flat board will do. Fishing line or wire strings. Tune with screw eyes.



WASHTUB BASS

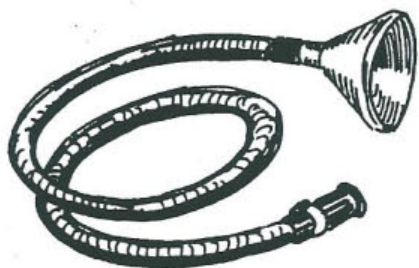
A fibreboard drum (see above) or a tea-chest may be easier to find than a wash-tub. If it has a rim on the bottom, rest the end of the broomstick against this; if not make a suitable notch from scrap wood. ordinary string (e.g. sisal) works fine. Pull the stick back to stretch the string and raise the note, forward to lower the note. Rest one foot on the edge of the drum to keep it steady.



Wind Instruments

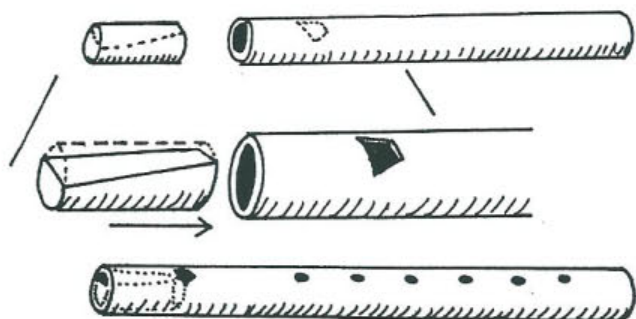
HOSE HORN

Take a length of old hose-pipe and fit a tap-attachment at one end for a mouth-piece and a plastic (or cardboard) funnel at the other. To play it purse your lips like a trumpet player and blow hard. It should come with practice and can sound very impressive. Using a proper mouthpiece from an old brass instrument gives even better results.



BAMBOO/HOSEPIPE FLUTE

You need a piece of dowelling that fits exactly inside your bamboo or tube. Shave off one side as shown and push it in. Cut an air hole and adjust the shape and position of the mouthpiece plug till you get a clear note. Drill holes along the tube which can be fingered to make different notes.



PAN-PIPES

Bamboo, plastic or metal tube can be used. Cut lengths and block off one end with plasticene or corks. Fix together with sticky tape and blow across the top.



KAZOO HORNS

This is cheating. Buy some plastic kazoos from a toy or music shop. Now you can create any shape or size of horn your imagination can dream up, using whatever junk materials are available. Simply selotape the kazoo into the end to form the mouth-piece and it will immediately play any tune you like. Your horn or tube will even amplify the original kazoo sound and a band of half a dozen or so, complete with percussion, sounds wonderful.



N.B. If you can't afford to hand out free kazoos, make sure you have a clear understanding about giving them back before you start!

See the Ideas Bank leaflet **MUSIC** for ideas for a junk band parade.

More Ideas

If you want to make more sophisticated instruments - and ones that really do play in tune - you will find more detailed instructions in these books:

* Jardine, Maggie; **Bang! Rattle!! Shake!!!** (N.A.Y.C.)

- * Roberts, Ronald; **Musical Instruments Made to be Played** (Dryad, 1976)
- * **The Musical Instrument Recipe Book** (Penguin Education)
- * Southworth, Mary; **Making Musical Sounds** (Studio Vista)
- * Williams, Peter; **Making Musical Instruments** (Mills and Boon)
- * Kemp, Anthony; **Fun to Make Music** (Hamlyn)

For more Play Ideas Bank leaflets go to:

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