

Asian Arts

Taiko Drums (Japan, East Asia)

1 Read about Taiko drums. What questions can you now answer about the drum in this photograph?

2 Role play an interview with a taiko drummer with your questions and answers!!

The word taiko means simply "drum" in Japanese. Outside Japan, the word is often used to refer to any of the various Japanese drums and to the relatively recent art form of ensemble taiko drumming, sometimes called more specifically, "kumi-daiko".



Japanese taiko drums have been developed into a wide range of percussion instruments that are used in both Japanese folk and classical musical traditions.

Taiko are stick percussion instruments. Most taiko are struck with drumsticks. They have heads on both sides of the drum body. Taiko are also characterized by a high amount of tension on the drum heads, with a corresponding high pitch. This high tension likely developed in response to Japan's wet and humid summers when most festivals take place.

Taiko are categorized into two types of construction. Byou-uchi daiko taiko have heads nailed to the body. Tsukushime-daiko have heads sewn onto iron rings, which are then laced to each other around the drum body.

In feudal Japan, taiko were often used in warfare to motivate troops, to help set a marching pace, and to call out orders or announcements, sometimes in code. Drums were also used for court music and in special religious ceremonies.

Bharatanatyam (India, South Asia)

The word Bharata, some believe, signifies the author of the famous Sanskrit treatise on stagecraft, called NatyaShastra, and the word Bharatanatyam is sometimes given a meaning: Bha for Bhava or abhinaya and expression, Ra for raga or melody, and Ta for tala or rhythm.

Comparing Dance Styles

Think of a dance style that you are familiar with (e.g., ballet, ballroom, folk, hip hop, jazz, etc.). As you read the following information about Bharatanatyam, think about the answers to these questions:

1. What do the dancers in the two dance styles have in common in their training?
2. What is different about their training?
3. What is similar about the dance styles?
4. What is different about the dance styles?

Bharatanatyam (India, South Asia)

Bharatanatyam is a traditional dance-form known for its graceful, pure, tender, and sculptural poses. Today, it is one of the most popular and widely performed dance styles and is practised by male and female dancers all over India.

Bharatanatyam is a classical dance form originating from Tamil Nadu, a state in Southern India. This popular Tamil dance form called Bharatanatyam is a 20th century version of Kathir, the art of temple dancers.

Bharatanatyam is thought to have been created by Bharata Muni, a Hindu sage, who wrote the Natya Shastra, the most important ancient treatise on classical Indian dance. It is also called the fifth Veda in reference to the foundation of Hindu religion and philosophy, from which sprang the related South Indian musical tradition of Carnatic music.

In ancient times it was performed in Hindu temples. Many of the ancient sculptures in Hindu temples are based on Bharatanatyam dance postures or karanas. Many Hindu temples traditionally maintained complements of trained musicians and dancers, as did Indian rulers.

Bharatanatyam is the embodiment of music in visual form, a ceremony, and an act of devotion. Dance and music are inseparable. Bharatanatyam has three distinct elements to it:

- Nritta, rhythmic dance movements,
- Natya, mime, or dance with a dramatic aspect,
- Nritya, combination of Nritta and Natya.

A very important feature of Indian classical dances is the use of Mudras or hand gestures. Mudras are used by the artists to express their feeling or even the whole story.



Zheng (China, East Asia)



The *Zheng*, commonly known as Guzheng, pronounced "Goo-Zheng"), is a plucked string instrument that is part of the zither family. It is one of the most ancient Chinese musical instruments according to the documents written in the Qin dynasty (before 206 BC). It was developed from a small instrument made from bamboo, originally used by herdsman.

The *Zheng* has an arched surface and is elongated-trapezoidal with 13 to 21 strings stretched over individual bridges. Although metal strings are common today, the strings were of silk in ancient times. The *zheng* rests on two pedestals and is played using 3 to 4 imitation fingernails. On the right side of the bridges, both hands pluck the strings and on the left side, the left fingers bend the strings to change pitch or to provide embellishment. Its playing range spans three to four octaves.

Zheng is the forerunner of Japanese *koto*, Korean *kayagum*, Mongolian *yatag*, and Vietnamese *dan tranh*. Since the mid-19th century, *guzheng* solo repertoire has been growing and becoming increasingly complex.

Brainstorm with your class all the names of stringed instruments from around the world.

Folk Dances: Tinikling (Philippines, Southeast Asia) Indian Tribal Dance (India, South Asia)



Philippine Tinikling

Honored as the Philippine national dance, Tinikling is a favorite in the Visayan islands, especially on the island of Leyte. The dance imitates the movement of the tikling birds as they walk between grass stems, run over tree branches, or dodge bamboo traps set by rice farmers. Dancers imitate the tikling bird's legendary grace and speed by skillfully maneuvering between large bamboo poles.

The dance consists of at least one team of two people hitting two parallel bamboo poles on the ground, raising them slightly, then clapping the poles against each other near the ground with a rhythm. Meanwhile, at least one dancer hops over and around the clashing poles in a manner not entirely unlike jumping rope.

Other variations consist of four people holding a pair of bamboo in a tic-tac-toe like pattern; this form of the dance would usually travel in a circular pattern, increasing the difficulty of staying on rhythm. The poles may be repositioned during the dance in order to create new patterns, and it is not uncommon to have the dancers and pole-handlers switch places in more complicated choreographies.

Indian Folk and Tribal Dances

Folk dances are performed for every possible occasion, to celebrate the arrival of seasons, birth of a child, a wedding and festivals. The dances are extremely simple with minimum of steps or movement. The dances burst with verve and vitality. Men and women perform some dances exclusively, while in some performances men and women dance together. On most occasions, the dancers sing themselves, while being accompanied by artists on the instruments. Each form of dance has a specific costume. Most costumes are flamboyant with extensive jewels.

There are hundreds of Indian folk and tribal dances. Each region of India has its own folk dance. Both men and women perform the bamboo dance of Mizoram. While the men hold the bamboo, the women folk dance between the bamboo. In this performance, the sound of the bamboo hitting each other is the rhythm. Though dangerous if a rhythm is missed, these experienced dancers perform with grace and with care.

The chief folk dance of Gujarat, the Dandiya, is performed using sticks. Each performer holds two sticks, which they strike alternately to the right and left while the group dances. They also move diagonally, clockwise, anti-clockwise, as they strike the sticks.