



Buying the Right Didgeridoo

What to look for and look out for when buying your didgeridoo

Want to buy a didgeridoo but don't know where to start. Maybe you have been on the internet and read all about top quality this and authentic that - and some with pretty pictures on them - and ended getting swamped with loads of information, much of which is conflicting.

First things first - what I like, you may not and vice versa, and the rule applies to didgeridoos. I make and play didgeridoos how I like to hear them sound and that may be something totally different to someone else. Whatever a persons taste or preference, the instrument should at least have some basic qualities such as sound construction etc. As the vast majority of didgeridoos on the market are made from wood I won't write about other materials here.

Things to Look for in the Wood



Wood is organic material that expands and contracts in response to heat and moisture. Wood that expands and contracts excessively is prone to crack and split. This is more so if there are points of stress in the wood, by this I mean knots and such like.

Some woods have more knots than others, but knots in themselves are not the issue, they can be a weak spot that is all. Check that the knot is sound and not loose. There are essentially two types of knots. The ones that cause problems have a layer of bark around them. The bark breaks down faster than the wood creating a gap, hence the knot becoming loose. If the knot is treated (I treat mine with epoxy resin as you can still see the wood and the resin provides a strong bond), then no worries. A knot can be replaced with a plug. If this is the case then, so as it has been treated well then once again, no worries.

Look for any other issues such as wood worm. So long as the wood worm has been treated it should not be an issue. Just because a worm has started a burrow, it does not necessarily affect the didge. Obviously if it rife, feels brittle, or too light, then forget it - leave it well alone. This tends to happen more with mass produced instruments that are stored together for periods of time.

Some didges are decorated to cover blemishes of one sort or another. Look out for weirdly placed marks and paint as this may indicate it is covering up something.

Mouthpiece

Firstly the size of the mouthpiece, if you are not sure what is best for you try as many different sizes as possible. Find what feels most comfortable for you.

Most didgeridoos either have no added or altered mouthpiece (using only the wood of the didgeridoo), or have beeswax put on. Beeswax was/is used as it is found naturally in Australia, and also has the benefit of being malleable so that you can experiment very easily



with different size mouthpieces. Can get soft and sticky when warm and some people don't like it because for hygiene reasons.

Other finishes can be applied to the mouthpiece depended on the maker, any of which are ok if applied properly.

Bell



Many didgeridoos can be bought with bark still on the bells, or some such other decoration. Just because a didgeridoo has a large or decorated bell does not improve the didge, or the sound it makes.

The wider the bell the louder the didge as the bore behaves similar to a megaphone. If the bell is too wide it can reduce the sound quality drastically as the sound waves expand too much, too quickly. The result is a reduction in the depth and clarity of sound.

Check the thickness of the walls of the didgeridoo. They should be fairly uniform. If the thickness of the walls goes from thick to thin too much it creates a weak spot and a split could develop.

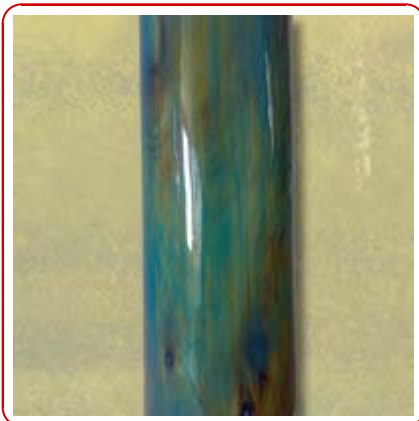
Long and Thin, Short and Fat

Longer and thin didgeridoos have greater backpressure and as a result tend to play a pitch which respond better to quick percussive rhythms. Shorter and wider didgeridoos tend to be lower in pitch with more resonant sound more inclined and associated with slower more gentle rhythms such as used in meditation.

Here's a tip - have a look on YouTube, MySpace and the like for 'didgeridoo' when you find music you like, look at the didge the person is playing and that will give you an indication of the size of didge you might like to buy.

Again there is no right or wrong - it is what sounds best to you (I can't stress this enough ((maybe I can so I'll try to stop))).

Painting, Finishing and Decoration



Quite a lot of money can exchange hands for didgeridoos that have been painted or decorated in some way. Sometimes this is justified, however be advised a lot of what is sold as genuine, authentic, or traditional aboriginal artwork is not what it says on the tin.

If it is made by indigenous Australians, then the seller should be able to give you details of the maker - name, tribe, clan etc. and therefore should also have further information as to the provenance of the artwork, its meaning and so on.

As I mentioned earlier, some didges are (disgracefully) painted to cover blemishes, repairs and other nasty nightmares. Always ask (politely) if you are unsure, and seek to check the didge over (inside as well) thoroughly.

Split Didges

One of the most popular techniques used to make didgeridoos that are not hollowed by termites is to cut the wood in half, scoop out the middle bit and glue the two halves back together. This is the method I adopt and prefer - I have provided a whole section in my website on how I make a wooden didgeridoo.

Make sure the bond is true and sound - there will invariably a line off glue standing proud of the join line. From the outside the join should barely be visible, ideally a horizontal cut which helps any moisture to run down the bore without covering the glue.

Shipping

Unfortunately, a lot of didges succumb to poor treatment when shipped, either by being thrown around or exposed to quick and extreme change in temperature (in the hold of an aeroplane). If you buy something that is shipped half way round the world, make sure it is insured against damage and that it is well packaged.



Play Before You Buy

Wherever and whenever possible play the didgeridoo before you buy, just because it says concert class, does not mean it is. Just because the sound sample sounds good does not mean it will sound the same when you play. Invariably didge samples are recorded by professional or near professional players so they should sound good.

Hopefully this info has proved useful to you.

Happy Didgin'

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