



About the Instrument

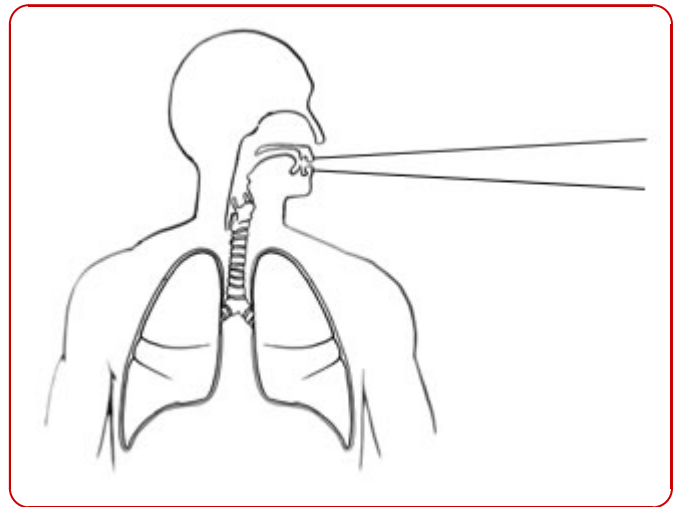
A little bit of background to the didgeridoo as a musical instrument.

Each didgeridoo is unique, unlike modern mass produced instruments where everyone is identical. Some playing styles and techniques are harder or easier on one type of didgeridoo than another type. Learning and developing an understanding of the basic building blocks of what creates the sound in a didgeridoo will significantly improve your playing.

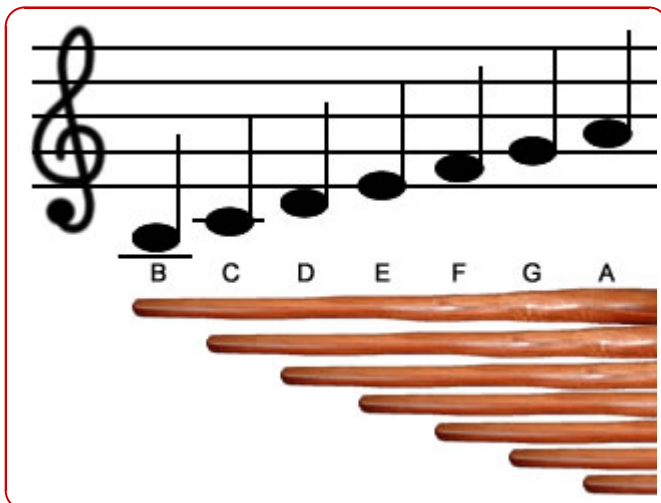
The Sound a Didgeridoo Makes

The sound of a didgeridoo depends on three factors: - the person playing the didgeridoo, the instrument itself and the environment it is played in.

We are all different, we look different and sound different, maybe similar in many respects and almost identical in others, but different none the less. This is also true with playing the didgeridoo. Whilst a technique, style, or rhythm may sound a certain way with one person playing the instrument it often sounds different when played by a different person. Mouth, lips, cheeks, tongue, throat, nose, vocal chords, diaphragm and lungs are all used to produce the sound that is projected into and through the bore of the didgeridoo. The person playing is the first part of the sound.



The didgeridoo itself is the second factor, with every didge being different in some way, whether high pitched, low pitched, long, short fat, thin etc. and therefore each one will produce a unique sound. Almost every aspect of the didgeridoo will affect the reproduction of sound from the material it is made from, the thickness of the walls, bore size and shape and so on. Understanding and knowing these differences and their significance will help you find and play the right didge for you.



Thirdly, the environment the instrument is played in will affect the sound. Outside or inside the sound produced will be different in some way. As a didgeridoo is played, the sound wave carries. Further as there are less obstructions. Indoors the walls in the room will act to bounce the sound wave back thus creating resonance to a greater or lesser degree. To example this, play a didge in the living area then in the bathroom and note the difference. Play the didge on a carpet or rug then on a hard surface such as wood, concrete, or tiles and note the difference. Play in a cave where there is an echo and the sound will be completely different.

It is the balance of these three factors that will deliver the sound you are looking for, and quite

simply, if these things are not in balance, then you will not get the sound you are after.

Keys and Pitches

Contemporary didgeridoos i.e. those outside the remit of 'traditional' yidaki and mago are measured against the modern musical scale:

A A# B C C# D D# E F F# G G#

When buying didges, sellers makers and dealers will most often claim that a didge is a particular key. It is best to take this with a pinch of salt as the didge will sound different with each different person playing it so best say to yourself - approximately.

By classifying a didge as a specific key it allows musicians to play the instrument with other modern instruments in tune with each other. 'Traditional' yidaki's and mago's were and are made for performing at a specific event or ceremony and is made purely on the quality of sound appropriate to that event or ceremony - not to be a particular pitch eg E, F, F# etc.

Do not be fooled or suckered by someone selling a didge as 'concert pitch or quality' as that may indeed be the case for the person playing but if that person is not you then the information is totally irrelevant.

Different Didgeridoo Shapes

Scouting around the internet and other resources you will find didgeridoos of all manner of sizes and shapes made from all manner of materials - wood, plastic, metal and clay to name but a few. Regardless of the material used to make the didge, they will all have certain traits or characteristics in common. Knowing these characteristics will help you identify what a didgeridoo may sound like without even playing it, however, never assume anything because the didgeridoo has a habit of being completely different to what is expected!

Some of these characteristics are:

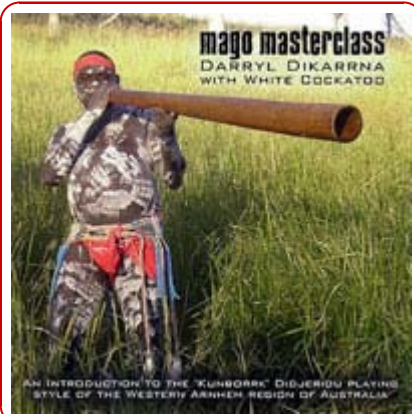
- Longer didge, lower pitch.
- Shorter didge, higher pitch.
- Narrower bore, high pitch and back pressure.
- Wider bore, low pitch and back pressure.
- Narrow bore, easy to toot or overtone.
- Wider bore, harder to toot or overtone.
- Larger bell, louder - more volume.
- Bell to large, loss of quality of sound, clarity and mid range tone.



If a didgeridoo has a bell that gets progressively larger i.e. cone shaped it will amplify the sound. The amount it does this and how well depends on the size shape and contour of the bell. Like a speaker trumpet for old gramophone records the bell changes the sound, however - beware - trying to go too large will adversely affect the sound causing the tonal quality to be lost around the mid range and loss of clarity so that a rhythm becomes less of a rhythm and more of a cadence.

Strangely enough, having a didgeridoo with a curve in it does not normally affect the sound - providing the column of air is able to travel down the bore without obstruction. Some people prefer straight didges because they are easier to pack, store and carry as well as being easier to place on a stand when performing, others may prefer curves in the wood as it often adds to the aesthetics of the instrument.

Playing Techniques/Styles



As you may expect, there are a number of styles/techniques of playing the didgeridoo from around the globe. The didgeridoo does not have a universal tablature so different people from different nations interpret in their own way.

Reading up on the internet or listening to experienced players you may hear the words 'NEAL' and 'WAL' used with reference to particular playing technique or style. These are simply acronyms: NEAL = North East Arnhem Land, WAL = Western Arnhem Land.

These two techniques relate to the traditional playing styles of the yidaki and mago and originate in the areas they mention. Although I may make reference to these techniques on the odd occasion, I do not teach or share these styles. I am looking at the didgeridoo from a

contemporary, western point of view. If you have an interest in more traditional forms of playing there are a number of good reference and instructional CD's, website's and forums.

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