

English presentation : Didgeridoo

May I have your attention please, thx.

I will take a few minutes of your time to present the didgeridoo, the people behind it and its different cultural meanings.

So, to start with, let me introduce this wind musical instrument played by the indigenous Australians. It's originally an artefact from the North Australian Aborigines, mainly from around Darwin and the Arnhem Land, that is represented on the visual, but also from western Australia and the gulf country in Queensland. It should be noted that its spelling can sometimes be different, since this name is in fact an onomatopoeia and absolutely not of indigenous origin. As a matter of fact this word reminds of the sound it produces. All the various tribes playing Didgeridoo use a specific name in their own dialect, but the better known is Yidaki, which is the type of didgeridoo used by the Yolngu of North East Arnhem Land. Just one more thing, even though some people believe Australian aborigines were already playing didgeridoo 40 000 years ago, there is no painting on cave walls proving the existence of players older than 2000 years.

*Let me now tell you how those instruments are made. Australian Aborigines have become master craftsmen of the didgeridoo, and are now able to recognise on sight an eucalyptus that have been suitably hollowed by **termites**. It's indeed a surprising fact that those instruments are mostly made by the nature, and that's by the way one of the reasons why its sound is sometimes called the voice of earth. Afterwards, when a suitable-looking tree is found, a piece of bark is removed from it and the wood can therefore be tapped lightly with a finger in order to analyse the sound it makes and evaluate the hollow size. Once the tree is cut down, the chamber is visually inspected and hopefully a log from between 1 and 1.5 meters is cut off. Finally, the last step consists in playing into the log as the craftsman would into a didgeridoo. If this step meets the player's expectations, the new didgeridoo is cured to avoid cracks, its bark is stripped and excess layers of wood may be removed in order to reduce the thickness of the walls of the sound chamber. The instrument may be painted or left undecorated.*

At this point, I would like you to pay attention to the function and use of this instrument. The didgeridoo is a very complex instrument to play, since you have to practice a special breathing technique called 'circular breathing' in order to maintain your lips vibrating. You'll be surprised to hear that this method enables you to keep on blowing into the didgeridoo with your mouth, thanks to your tongue and cheeks, while breathing in through your nose. On top of that, it's quite complicated to create the various sounds with the shape of your mouth. However, some famous didgeridoo players such as Mark Atkins are able to play continuously, that is to say without any pause to breathe, during almost an hour. As for its traditional use, even though it is sometimes played only for recreational purposes, it is mostly used to accompany dancing and singing in ceremonial rituals, as clapsticks do. As you can realise from this slide, clapsticks are paired stick-shaped instruments. The rhythm of the didgeridoo and the beat of the clapsticks are precise during religious rituals, and these patterns have been handed down from generation to generation. These two instruments are mainly played by men, which are also the main singers in ceremonies. I would like to point out that women never play during ceremonies. However both men and women dance, and there are occasions where women role play and take the instrument to caricature men, such as in the entertaining phases of circumcision rituals.

Finally, you may be wondering what are the different myths related with this artefact. To begin with, it should be noted that aborigines think spirits used to play didgeridoo to imitate animal calls long before they even knew how to use it. However, there is a way more

relevant myth about the didgeridoo, that intend to explain how it was discovered. Let me tell you this story :

"In the beginning, all was cold and dark. Bur Buk Boon was going to prepare woods for the fire in order to bring the protection of the warm and the light to his family. Burbuk Boon added wood in the fire when he noticed a log was empty and a termite family was busy to niddle the soft wood in the center of the log. As he wouldn't injure the termites, Bur Buk Boon brought the empty log to his mouth and started to blow. The termites were projected in the nocturn sky, formed stars and the milk way and lit up the landscape. And for the first time the didgeridoo sound blessed Mother the Earth, protecting her and all Dreamtime spirits, with this vibrant sound for eternity ..."

Just one more thing : there are even nowadays advantages in playing didgeridoo : a recent survey has proved that learning and playing this instrument reduces snoring and sleep apnea, but also prevent from daytime sleepiness.

To sum up, We realise from this presentation and the short story I told you that the didgeridoo is a key element to understanding the aboriginal culture. It's used in their everyday life as well as in ceremonials, and has existed for a very very long time.

Thank you for your attention.