

# Latin American Instruments

Latin American Musical Instruments of the Caribbean, Central and South America today include a wide variety of traditional and modern instruments influenced by African, European, and Native peoples who settled there. Although this book primarily focuses on folk and popular musics, the reader should be aware that a wide range of classical music also exists.

## IDIOPHONES (main parts vibrate)



*Agogo Bell* – a high-pitched double bell played with a stick; a relative of the African *gankogui*

*Cabasa* – (also spelled *cabaca*) a form of rattle that comes in two forms – traditional and modern (pictured). The traditional cabasa is a pear-shaped gourd with ridges running down its length; a netting of beads (like the African *shekere*) over the gourd is held in the palm of one hand while the other twists the gourd handle back and forth.

The modern cabasa is a wooden wheel with a handle attached; around the wheel are metal beads which are played in the same fashion as the traditional cabasa.



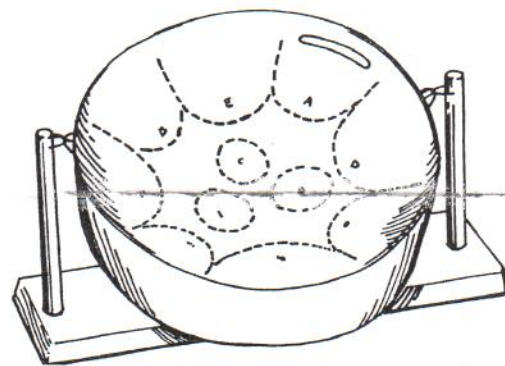
*Claves* (see Video, 21) – two round sticks about 6-8 inches long made of a hard wood such as rosewood. One is held in the trough of a hand, while the other is used to hit it. Claves often play the timeline in Latin American music.

*Cowbell* (see Video, 6) – a single bell played with a stick; either held in the hand or mounted on a stand (sometimes above a set of *timbales*)

*Guiro* (see Video, 22) – a notched gourd scraped with a stick or metal whisk; often decorated in the form of a fish

*Maracas* (see Video, 23) – a pair of small gourd rattles with the shot/beads on the inside

*Quijada* or *Vibraslap* (not pictured) – the *quijada* in traditional form is a mule jawbone with loose teeth that rattle when hit; the *vibraslap*, its modern counterpart, is played the same way



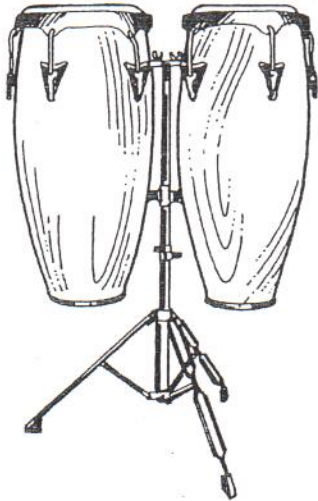
*Steel Drums* – a relative newcomer of a musical instrument (developed in Trinidad after World War II) where the tops of large steel oil drums were heated and hammered to produce a metal instrument with a complete scale played with mallets. Today steel drums, also known as *pans*, come in all sizes and pitch ranges.

*Xylophones and marimbas* (not pictured) – wooden keys played with mallets; may have gourd or other types of resonators under each key. In Central America there are marimbas large enough to be played by four or more people at once.

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### MEMBRANOPHONES (membrane vibrates)

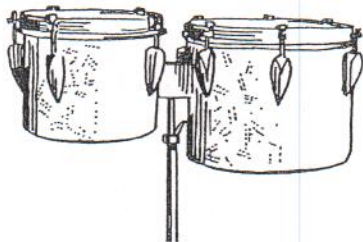
*Bongos* (see Video, 24) – two small drums (higher and lower) attached to each other and either held between the knees or mounted on a stand; usually played with hands



*Congas* – come in three sizes — the *tumba* (largest), *conga* (medium), and *quinto* (smallest); originally each drum was played by a separate player, but in most situations today, one player plays both *tumba* and *conga* at the same time.

*Cuica* (not pictured) – a strange single-headed drum found in many Brazilian samba ensembles; it has a small stick which is fastened to the middle of the inside of the drum head; a barking dog sound is produced by rubbing a damp cloth along the stick. You can make some related sounds by moving a straw up and down in the hole of a plastic lid on a fast food drink.

*Timbales* – consists of two single-headed metal drums on a stand played with sticks.

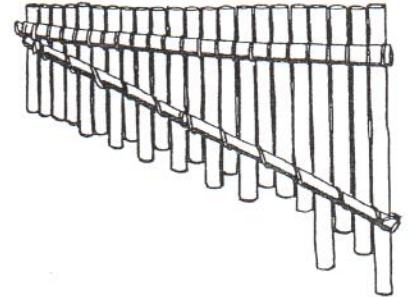


*Tubanos* (see Video, 1, 5) – single-headed cylindrical drums with 10, 12, and 14" heads; developed and modeled after various Caribbean and African conga-type drums

### AEROPHONES (air column vibrates)

*Flutes* (not pictured) – natural wooden flutes of all sorts are played throughout Latin America.

*Panpipes* – a bundle of reeds or hollow wooden tubes of graduated lengths; played by blowing over the top; very popular in the Andes countries of South America



*Trumpets, Saxophones and other "Horns"* (not pictured) – commonly found in modern bands throughout Latin America.

### CHORDOPHONES (string(s) vibrates)

*Guitars* – entire families of guitars (from bass to high soprano) brought over from Spain and Portugal are commonly played in all types of music throughout Latin America.



*Harps* (not pictured) – are common throughout Latin America, particularly Central and South America

*String Basses* (not pictured) – are found in many forms throughout Latin America

*Violins* (not pictured) – are very common