

Traditional African Instruments

Mbira (Mm-beer-ah) or Sansa

There are many different styles of mbiras. Some are made in rectangular shape with two small holes on both sides. On the top of the mbira are metal keys which are struck with both thumbs. Other mbiras are mounted inside gourds to create a louder and more melodious sound. This instrument can be made from various raw materials.



Shekere (Shay-kah-ray)

The Shekere is a gourd with geometrically fashioned beading around it that is held together with cotton string.

Djembe (Jim-bay) Drum

Originated from the Bambara people of West Africa, it is carved from a tree trunk into a vase shape. This drum is designed wide at the top and narrow at the bottom. The head is covered with goat skin, held in place by two metal rings and nylon or cotton rope. The Djembe Drum has three basic sounds. They are base, tone and slap.



Dusengani (Doos-in-gaw-nee)

Originating in Mali, West Africa, among the Wasulu people, this harp had eight strings with four on both sides. Made with a long pole, a large calabash, cowhide and nylon string, this instrument was traditionally played by hunters.



The Kora

This predecessor to the guitar was created in the Senegal-Gambia region of West Africa. The body is made with a large half of a calabash and a long pole. Cowhide covers the gourd and also helps to keep strings mounted and tuned. The Kora strings are made of nylon.

