

## DAF

### Introduction

A daf is a large-sized tambourine used to accompany both popular and classical music in Iran, Azerbaijan, Turkey (where it is called tef), Uzbekistan, India (where it is known as the Dafli) Turkmenistan, and Iranian Kurdistan. Some dafs are equipped with rings or small cymbals. Daf typically indicates the beat and tempo of the music being played, thus acts like the conductor in the monophonic oriental music. Daf comes under the category of Frame Drums. Many variations and types of frame drums can be observed in various regions and cultures throughout the world.

### Construction

A frame drum is a drum that has a drumhead diameter greater than its depth. Usually the single drumhead is made of rawhide or man-made materials. Shells are traditionally constructed of bent wood (rosewood, oak, ash etc.) scarf jointed together; plywood and man-made materials are also used. Some frame drums have mechanical tuning and on many the drumhead is stretched and tacked in place. It is the earliest skin drum known to have existed. Examples are found in many places and cultures.

Frame drums are one of the most ancient types of musical instruments. They have a simple structure with strong spiritual and entertaining effects. They are usually round, made of wood with animal skin and sometimes metal rings or plates incorporated into the drum to provide jingle. They have different sizes (from as small as 12 cm to more than 100 cm); the larger drums are played mainly by men in spiritual rituals and medium size drums are played mainly by women.

Frame drums originated in the ancient Middle East, India, and Rome, and reached medieval Europe through Islamic culture. The similarity of the



names of frame drums in these regions shows the common history of these drums.

Daf has six parts: 1. Frame 2. Skin 3. Pin 4. Hook 5. Ring 6. Leather Band.

1. Frame is wooden. The diameter of the frame is 48-53 centimeters. The width of the frame is 5-7 centimeters.

2. Skin is glued on the frame. The most popular is goatskin.

3. Pins are applied in behind part of the frame in order to keep the skin on the frame tightly.

4. Hooks are applied in order to hang the rings in the inner part of frame.

5. Rings are the jingles of daf.

6. Leather band is applied in order to help the player for long duration performances.

## History

The earliest evidence of Daf dates back to Sassanid Iran. The Pahlavi (an ancient Iranian language) name of Daf is dap. The word daf is therefore the arabicized form of the word dap. Some pictures of dap have been found in the paintings to be painted before the birth of Christ. The presence of Iranian dap in the relief of Bisotun is enlightening and is hard proof that dafs existed long before the rise of Islam. Dafs were part of religious music in Iran much before Sufism. In fact, Iranian music has always been a spiritual tool. It shows that dafs played an important role in Mazdean Iran emerging as an important element during the Sassanian times during the Kâvusakân dynasty. These frame drums (Daf, Tambourine, Riq, Buben, Dayereh etc) were played in the ancient Middle East (chiefly by women in Kurd societies), Greece, and Rome and reached medieval Europe through Islamic culture.

Norouz (the first day of the Iranian New Year and the national festival of the Iranian peoples) and other festive occasions have been accompanied by dap in Sassanid periods (224 A.D. - 651 A.D.). In this period dap was played in order to accompany Iranian classical music. Undoubtedly daps were used in the court to be played in the modes and melodies of traditional music. This

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traditional or classical music was created by Barbod the Great and was named the khosravani after the King Khosrow (Chosroes). Recent research reveals that these modes were used in the recitation of Mazdean (Zoroastrian) prayers. The modes were passed down from master to student and are today known as the Radif and Dastgah system. Many of the melodies were lost, but most of those that remain date to the Sassanid period. Dafs can be played to produce highly complex and intense rhythms, causing one to go under a trance and reach an ecstatic and spiritually-high state. For this reason, they have always been connected with religion in Iran, again, much before Islam. In Iran, Sufis use Daf during their Zikr (spiritual chanting) ritual; in recent years Iranian musicians have successfully integrated it into Persian music.

The Moors introduced Daf and other Middle Eastern musical instruments to Spain, and the Spanish adapted and promoted Daf and other musical instruments (such as the guitar) in medieval Europe. In the 15th century, daf was only used in Sufi ceremonies; the Ottomans reintroduced it to Europe in 17th century.

### **Technique**

In some regions, the daf is held with both hands at shoulder height. Tones of various depth and colours are played by hitting different spots on the skin with the fingers. There is also an Oriental technique of leaning the daf against the knees. The daf is a percussion instrument with a soft, deep tone. It is suitable for playing indoors and to accompany singers and players on the tambura, violin, and other Oriental instruments.

## **Types**

Various types of frame drums -

Bendir (North Africa)  
Bodhrán (Ireland)  
Tar  
Tambourine  
Mazhar (Egypt)  
Daf (Iran, Kurdistan, Azerbaijan, Middle-East)  
Dayereh (Persia, Central Asia, Balkan)  
Pandeiro (Brazil)  
Kanjira (South India)  
Tamborim (Brazil)  
Riq (Egypt)

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