

DHOLAK

Introduction

The dholak is a double sided drum made of one piece wood. It is a north Indian hand drum used in folk music. Its construction is relatively simple. Different types of such hand drums (related to Dholak) exist in many parts of the world.

Construction

The body of dholak has two apertures of different size, one, small, that will generate high pitched sounds and another, wider, for low pitched sounds. It has a simple membrane on the right-hand side. The left-hand membrane has a special coating on the inner surface. This coating is a mixture of tar, clay and sand (dholak masala) which lowers the pitch and provides a well-defined tone. The shell of a dholak is made from one piece of wood, ideally a hardwood such as shesham, which is similar to teak. The harder the wood the sharper and clearer the sound.

There are two ways of tightening the dholak. Sometimes they are laced with rope, in which case, a series of metal rings are pulled to tighten the instrument. Sometimes metal turnbuckles are employed. It is said that this instrument used to occupy a position of considerable prestige. Today it is merely related to film and folk music.



Context

Dholak is a very popular folk drum of northern India. The dholak is often used in Film Sangeet or Indian film music. It is also used extensively in Chutney music, the local Indian music of the Caribbean. It is the main instrument along with the harmonium brought by the indentured immigrants to Trinidad. It is played widely in both Chutney and film songs. It is also the main accompaniment instrument of the Qawwali. It is not used for classical music in north India.
