

Water Drums



The water drum is known throughout North America but the drum has been said to originate in the New York area. It was used primarily for ceremonies and social type settings within the longhouses and lodges of various tribes.

The water drum has a distinct sound that comes from the water inside. This drum is roughly 4-6 inches in diameter and is made from a hollowed out piece of log. A plug is placed in the base of the drum to regulate the amount of water that is within the drum. A piece of leather is stretched over the top and held into place with a ring that is made out of wood and leather or cloth.

Commonly used wood to make the drum are cedar, hickory, hard maple or bass wood.

Inside the drum is water and the amount of water inside helps determine the sound that the drum is going to make. The leather drum head must be wet and the amount of wetness and the tightness of the stretched leather also determines the sound that the drum will make.

The songs that are sung with this drum are social style songs and usually involve the community in the dances. Songs associated with water drums are Smoke Dances, Snake Dances, Moccassin Songs and a variety of stomp dances.

Water drums are now very popular among all tribes and the songs are shared all over Indian Country. There are now Smoke Dance competitions that involve both the dancers and the singers.