

Basic Detail Report



Wege

Date

1973 ca.

Description

The Jew's Harp is found throughout Papua New Guinea, and the method of using a string or piece of cloth to make the lamella vibrate seems to be fairly universal across New Guinea as well. As the string is being pulled, the opposite, pointed end is held in the player's mouth and the vibrations of the lamella are altered with the shape of the mouth and placement of the tongue or larynx. A number of different sources comment on the pitches produced. They point toward the instrument's ability to produce pitches in the harmonic series of the fundamental, with perhaps a bit of deviation. According to Grove Music Online, the Jew's Harp produces a fixed pitch "rich in overtones which correspond closely to a harmonic series" (Wright). In an article by Ledang, she states that "The instrument by itself is capable of creating a rich harmonic spectrum which is only modified by alterations of the mouth cavity (the resonator) during playing". In his article, Hymann confirms that the Jew's Harp can produce the overtones of the harmonic series, with "the ability to cheat out a few extra notes". The origin of the name Jew's Harp is unknown, but probably has no connection to people of Jewish descent. There are a number of sources that address the question. For example, an article on the history of the Jew's Harp can be found on the website of the Jew's Harp Guild. The Guild also stated that they would continue to use the name Jew's Harp, since there doesn't seem to be any negative connotations associated with it, and because it is still the most common term in use. Another article by Harold Steafel also addresses the question. (see Steafel, Harold. "Jew's Harp". *The Galpin Society Journal*, Vol. 29. (May, 1976), pp. 122-123. Accessed through JSTOR, 21 June 2007. <http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=00720127%28197605%2929%3C122%3AJH%3E2.0.CO%3B2-M> "). There is controversy regarding the classification of the Jew's Harp. Under the Sachs/Hornbostel system, it is a plucked idiophone. However, Frederick Crane (from whom the instrument was purchased) and Ola Kai Ledang have published articles arguing for its classification as an aerophone. See "Sources Consulted". In Papua New Guinea, the Jew's Harp is usually played for entertainment. It is also played during courting, when it is used to transmit subtle messages. Sometimes it can be used to imitate sounds in nature, most often bird calls. This particular instrument originates from the town of Onuma, where the local dialect is Dumaka. Instrument is constructed from a hollow, cylindrical bamboo tube. The top end is closed at the node. The front of the tube is cut into a double-armed frame with a lamella, or tongue, that lays between the arms. It is idioglottic, meaning the lamella is carved from the tube itself, not attached separately. There are visible carving marks where the tongue is attached to the frame. The end of the tube, opposite from the node, tapers into a point. It is closed, with the tips of the frame and tongue bound together with a string. The majority of the back part of the tube is cut away so that the main body of the instrument consists of the frame and lamella. Just below the node, a few millimeters of cylindrical tube remains. The back part of the frame is cut just below this section, in a chevron shape. The cylindrical tube continues for

a few centimeters above the node. There is a small hole at the front, just above the node, with a string strung through and knotted at the back. The string is twisted in a braid and is probably the same material used to bind the tips of the frame and lamella together.

Dimensions

Length: 24.5 cm Circumference at node: 10 cm Length of string: 22 cm