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Igbo Musical Instruments : *A Lost Art : Udu Drums*

By Maduagwu Nzubechi

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FEATURE
IMAGE

**BOD-Udu-at-Boddrums-photo credit:
Blackwell original drums**

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IGBO MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

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Udu Drums Udu is both an African aerophone and an idiophone used by the igbo people of Nigeria. The udu is a clay water jug with an additional hole that aids the sound creation. the instrument is played by hand using a soft hand held device and produces a special and unique bass sound by...

Udu is both an African aerophone and an idiophone used by the igbo people of Nigeria. The udu is a clay water jug with an additional hole that aids the sound creation. the instrument is played by hand using a soft hand held device and produces a special and unique bass sound by quickly hitting the big hole.

To play the Udu drum, one typically places it on the lap or holds it between the legs, although some modern iterations of the Udu include a stand to perform standing. By striking or tapping different parts of the drum's body or opening and closing the sound aperture, a skilled player can produce a variety of tones and rhythms. The Udu drum's sound is often characterized as warm, earthy, and soothing, captivating listeners with its organic qualities. The Udu is actually able to produce sounds in a one octave range, making it one of the more unique percussion instruments with an African heritage. In addition to striking the instrument, the sides of the Udu are also used for their percussion accentuation, giving a raspy sound when brushed against by the hand.

The Udu drum is an example of a household object that was also used as an instrument. This unique, pot-shaped instrument used to be rampant across Igboland in precolonial times. It originated from the Igbo women of Nigeria who used the clay pots to store food, carry water and even for beekeeping. Women were the only members of these villages allowed to create the important pottery, or even find the

clay needed for their creations, as it was believed a man would become impotent if he had anything to do with the creation of the Udu. This was due to the connection between the divine feminine (ala/ani) and the female members of the villages, the Udu became an important part of rituals and ceremonies presented to honor their female deities. It was from these rites that the Udu developed into a percussion instrument to play songs that pay tribute to these deities, and its fame and popularity has grown ever since.

udu (pot-drum), 1925–1990. Photo credit: spencer museum of art

Today, Udu is used in the production of afrobeat songs, gospel music and continually highlife and traditional music as an integral music instrument because of its unique sound. It has also found its way into jazz, ambient, fusion, and electronic music. This is because of the unique musical layer it adds to beats, making songs danceable and solemn as the case may be. Udu has stayed relevant in the music industry and true to its roots as a cultural musical instrument.

BOD-Udu-at-Boddrums-photo credit: Blackwell original drums

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR**Maduagwu Nzubechi**

Nzubechi is a history, political enthusiast who dabbles into social commentary once in a while



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