



# Ozi Ikòrò

AFRICAN HISTORY · CULTURE · INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE

---

ANTHROPOLOGY AND ETHNOGRAPHY

## Igbo Musical Instruments : *A Lost Art : Igba*

By Maduagwu Nzubechi

Ozikoro.com · Anthropology and Ethnography · 2 min read

---

FEATURE  
IMAGE

### NO FEATURED IMAGE IN THE RECORD

The article carries no featured image, so this panel is left as an honest empty space rather than filled with one.

Ozi Ikòrò  
IGBO MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

# Igbo Musical Instruments : A Lost Art : Igba

By Maduagwu Nzubechi · Anthropology and Ethnography · Ozikoro.com

*Sound classification: Igba is a membranophone, which means they produce sound from a vibrating stretched membrane. Igba (Cylinder-drum) is a piece of hollow wood covered at one end with animal hide held down tight with metal fasteners. An Igba can be as small as 7 inches or as tall as 3 feet. For the...*

01

## Sound classification:

**I**gba is a membranophone, which means they produce sound from a vibrating stretched membrane. Igba (Cylinder-drum) is a piece of hollow wood covered at one end with animal hide held down tight with metal fasteners. An Igba can be as small as 7 inches or as tall as 3 feet. For the bigger Igba, it is played by hand and while the smaller Igba is played with a stick, (often a curved stick) or a specific type of light wood, which distinguishes its “voice” from the hand-played versions. The drum cover or top cover is made from antelope’s skin.

02

## How its made:

- The Shell (The Body): Traditional carvers usually select hardwoods like Mahogany or Orji because they provide the density needed for a deep, echoing “voice.” Then the trunk is hollowed out to into the desired shape.

- The Membrane/drum cover: Historically, Antelope skin was used because it is the most preferred hide for making its durability and thinness (allowing for higher pitches), some modern versions use cowhide for a deeper, more bass-heavy sound.
- The Tuning System: In the making of Igba the tension is key. This is often achieved using a series of wooden pegs driven into the side of the drum or interwoven ropes. By hammering the pegs deeper or adjusting the rope “laces,” the drummer can change the pitch even mid-performance. Igba Drummers from the Igbo Community.

Wikimedia commons

03

## Significance:

- Lead the Dance: Different tensions signal specific cues to dancers (like the Atilogwu dancers) to change their steps.
- Command Ceremony: A “tight,” high-pitched Igba is often used for announcements or to build excitement during festivals.

The cylinder-drum accompanies dances, songs, religious and secular ceremonies, and its tunes have been known to give special signals for good news as well as bad news.

04

## Types of Igba

Igba comes with different names depending on the size. Depending on the size, the “desired sound” you mentioned can vary:

- Igba Eze: A large “King” drum used for royalty and major titles.
- Igba Nkwa: Standard size used for general dancing and masquerades

Today, igba is used in all sorts of musical genres from bongo, highlife,

afrobeats etc. Igba accompanies songs and dances, used in religious ceremonies like catholic masses, birthday parties or government cultural displays, and has been used historically for communication.

## SOURCES

# References

The article's own bibliography, set as it appears in the record.

- 01 Music Africa Awake. (2019). Igbo traditional music instrument.
- 02 Outravelandtour (2019). Names-of-Igbo-traditional-musical-instruments
- 03 Umuigbo magazine: Egwu Nkwa Ndi Igbo: Igbo Music And Musical Instruments

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

## Maduagwu Nzubechi

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



# Ozi Ikòrò

*History worth reading.*

African history · culture · indigenous knowledge

---