

If It Isn't Baroque . . . The History of Western Music

By Michelle Martin

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If It Isn't Baroque . . . Lesson One—Where Did Music Begin?

I remember watching a Disney short film called *Adventures in Music: Toot, Whistle, Plunk and Boom* when I was a little girl. The animated short film was a light-hearted attempt to depict the origins of western music. Entertaining at best, this little film from 1953 does not do justice to the rich and amazing history of music.

I believe that we are all born musical, but some need a bit more practice. Music can truly connect us all as a people, and experiencing different genres and styles can open our minds to new cultures and ideas. That being said, I must state that there are a variety of scholars who have written articles, books, and papers regarding the origins of music. However, there does not seem to be a universal agreement as to the time or place music began. Some believe music was a response to sounds heard in nature. Others believe music was a form of communication. Some believe it had religious beginnings, and others think music was used for entertainment. However, for the purpose of this curriculum I will simply state that music began when mankind began.

Primitive Musical Instruments

Voice

Even in small babies, the voice is used to communicate happiness, sadness, hunger, and frustration. Thus, it is very likely that the voice itself was the first musical instrument.

Percussion Instruments

For those students who have not completed Music Theory I, or for those who simply need a reminder: percussion instruments are those one hits, shakes, or taps. Hands make excellent percussion instruments, and must have helped early people create basic rhythmic patterns. Rocks, sticks, and other objects could have been tapped together to create beats and different sounds. Dried fruit and/or vegetables could be shaken to make a maraca-like sound.

Flute Instruments

Early people made primitive flutes, whistles, and pipes from bone or wood. Little holes could be carved into the bone in order to make different tones. Some early flutes had up to seven different tones that could be played.

String Instruments

Triangular lutes or harps were made from strings or cords and were plucked.

Even though there might be disagreement with when music began, we can still see primitive instruments used by indigenous groups of people today. Archaeologists are able to use these instruments as a window to our past.

Make A Primitive Instrument

Creating a simple instrument out of household supplies is really quite fun and, in many cases, free. While many options are available with a simple Google search, here are my two favorites from years of teaching.

Guitar

Items Needed:

- empty tissue box
- empty paper towel tube
- rubber bands
- pencil
- hobby knife or scissors
- paper/paints/markers/etc.
- school glue/hot glue gun



**Do not use a sharp knife without your parents' permission or assistance.*

Remove any plastic that remains on the tissue box. Sometimes there is some plastic left around the tissue exit hole, but it comes off quite easily. Cut a hole in the side of the box for the paper towel tube. You may want to use a pencil to draw around the tube, as well as a hobby knife to make a neat hole. Put the paper towel tube into the hole and push in a couple of inches. You can use glue or a hot glue gun to secure it. If you use school glue, make sure to let the instrument dry before the next step. Then decorate the tissue box and paper towel tube as you wish. Add the rubber bands, which will go lengthwise on the box. Now you are ready to strum away!

Flute/Kazoo

Items Needed:

- empty paper towel tube or toilet paper tube
- pencil or awl to make a hole (or holes)
- wax paper
- scissors
- paper/paints/markers/etc.

**Do not use an awl or sharp cutting object without your parents' permission or assistance.*

Decorate your tube with paper, paints, markers, or whatever else your heart desires. Once the tube is completely dry, use a pencil or awl to make at least one hole in the tube. Cut a square piece of wax paper large enough to cover one end of the tube. Make sure to make the square large enough to overlap the sides of the tube. Use your hand to press the wax paper tightly to the tube. Now add the rubber band over the wax paper to secure it. You are ready to hum away! (If it doesn't work properly, make sure to place the tube around the mouth and hum so the wax paper can vibrate!)

Challenge Yourself

Invite your family and/or friends to hear your primitive music. Or, better yet, invite over a group of friends to make primitive instruments and play together.

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