

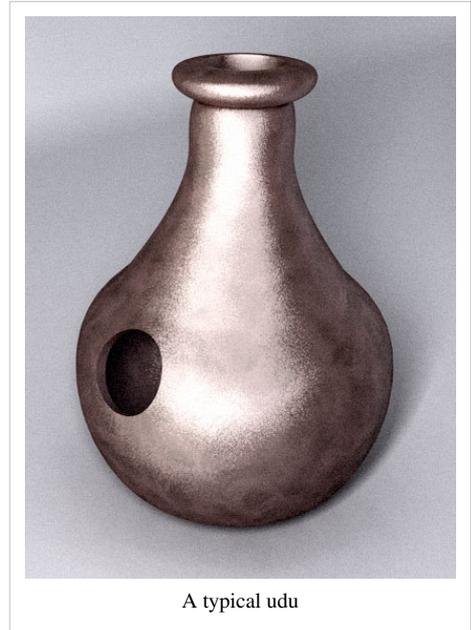
# Igbo music

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**Igbo music** (Igbo: *Egwu nkwa ndi Igbo*) is the music of the Igbo people, who are indigenous to the southeastern part of Nigeria. The Igbo traditionally rely heavily on percussion instruments such as the drum and the gong, which are popular because of their innate ability to provide a diverse array of tempo, sound, and pitch.<sup>[1]</sup> Igbo music is generally lively, upbeat, and spontaneous which creates a variety of sounds that enables the Igbo people to incorporate music into almost all the facets of their daily lives. Some very popular Igbo music styles are Highlife, Odumodu and Waka.

## History

When examining the impact that music has on the culture of the Igbo people, one would have to look no further than the earliest accounts of the vast history of Igbo in Nigeria. Igbo people were most likely descendents of the people of the Nok culture that inhabited much of Nigeria from 500 BC to 200 AD.<sup>[1]</sup> The Nok civilization is very popular because of the vast amount of colorful artifacts that they left behind, which include an array of musical instruments. It is from these humble beginnings that the first vestiges of Igbo music sprung up and began to influence and shape the culture in many ways.



A typical udu

## Cultural Impact

Traditionally music has been used to:

- Enhance celebrations, such as during the New Year, weddings, birthday parties, childbirth and naming ceremonies
- To bring about a historically sacred ambiance at church services, funerals, and eulogies
- For pleasure, such as when lullabies are sung by parents to their children
- For sports and labor
- To guide historians as they recant stories

## Instruments

### Drums

The drum is the most important musical instrument for Nigerians, and especially the Igbo people.<sup>[2]</sup> This instrument is extensively used during celebrations, rites of passage, funerals, war, town meetings and an array of other events. Since this instrument is so diverse, many types of drums have been crafted and perfected over the years.

### Pot Drum

The pot drum instrument is called the Kim- Kim or Udo.<sup>[3]</sup> It is typically dumb-bell shaped, and is around 27 cm-29 cm in height with an opening at the top that is about three to five centimeters.<sup>[3]</sup> The base of the drum is about 13 cm- 15 cm wide, and the head is around eight to nine centimeters wide. This instrument is typically used to produce bass. To achieve a low and deep sound, a minimal amount of water is added. To maintain a higher sound, a considerable amount of water is added to the pot.<sup>[3]</sup> To play this instrument, the musician will brace it between her

legs and grip the neck with her left hand. In order to produce a sound, the musician will cup her hand and beat the opening very rapidly. Usually, this instrument has been played by women and is used for traditional rites of passage, weddings, and community club meetings.

### Talking Drum

The Udu is the most common and popular drum.<sup>[2]</sup> This instrument is also known as Nkwa, Egwe, or Egede, depending on the part of the country.<sup>[2]</sup> These drums are also known as the talking drums because they produce a sound which is tonal, syncopated, and accented in ways that are very similar to way in which the Igbo people speak.<sup>[2]</sup> The body of the drum is usually constructed from a hollowed out pear or cotton tree which is very durable yet malleable. The drum is then covered with antelope or cow skin.<sup>[2]</sup> The hide is fastened tightly to the top and bottom of the instrument with seven to eight studs, and with rope in a decorative manner. The studs are able to be adjusted for tuning purposes and sound accommodation. If the studs are tightened a high pitch is emitted. The opposite effect is heard if the studs are loosened. Typically, more than one Igba is played by several drummers at a time. The drum can be played by using four fingers from each hand. The right hand is used to beat the head of the drum, and the left hand is used to stop the vibration. If the musician stops the vibration closer to the edge of the drum head, a low pitch will be emitted. If the musician stops the vibration closer to the center, then a higher pitch will be emitted. The Igba can also be played using a curved drum stick, which can be found wrapped in fiber to produce a soft sound, or “naked” to produce hard sound. This drum is very versatile and is usually played during celebrations, festivals, weddings, male and female rites of passage, and sometimes funerals.<sup>[3]</sup>

### Slit Drum (Ekwe)

The slit drum called the Ekwe is also very popular amongst the Igbo.<sup>[2]</sup> This drum is constructed from a hollowed out palm, bamboo, or pear tree trunk. Once the trunk has been cleaned, two horizontal slits are carved into the base as well as a narrow slit connecting the two. This drum is played using a “naked” wooden drum stick to strike the head. The Ekwe produces a distinct sound and for this reason is usually used for signaling an emergency, community meetings, or warning of intruders’ presence.<sup>[2]</sup>

### Gongs

These instruments are another important part of Igbo music. While not as important as the drum, these instruments do provide much needed rhythm and accompaniment.

The most prominent gongs are the Olu and the Ogene.<sup>[2]</sup> The Olu is a large gong, about four feet long. The Ogene is smaller gong and is about eight inches long. The Olu and Ogene are played by rhythmically beating the base of these instruments in cadence with the rest of the ensemble.<sup>[3]</sup> The Ogene is used mostly for complimenting drums and other percussion instruments. It is also very useful in helping dancers time their movements and gestures. The Olu produces a very distinct sound and is mostly used to warn the community of any danger or as a call for attention in case of an important announcement.<sup>[2]</sup>

### Other instruments

Other instruments include a woodblock known as **okpola**, a wind instrument similar to the flute, called an **oja** and the **ichaka**. The Igbo also have a style of music called **Ikorodo**, which is when all the musical instruments are played together with vocal accompaniment.

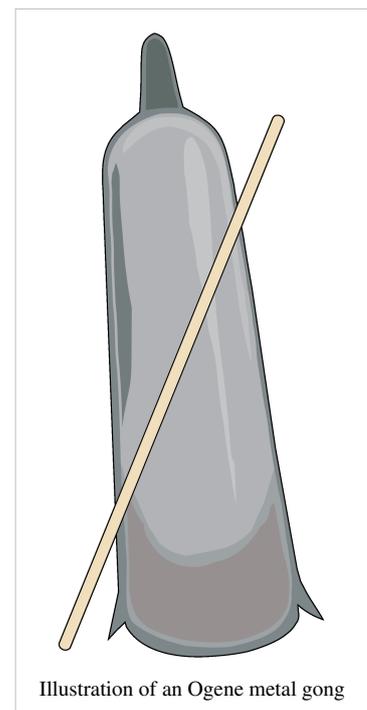


Illustration of an Ogene metal gong

## Udu

The instrument is played by hand and produces a special and unique bass sound [4] by quickly hitting the big hole. Furthermore the whole corpus can be played by fingers (some experienced players also use toes). Today it is widely used by percussionists in different music styles.

## Igbo Music Today

Though Igbo music remains very traditional, it has undergone some changes in old times. In the 60's and 70's a new genre of music was born called High-Life.<sup>[5]</sup> This was a fusion of traditional West African Music and music from Western cultures. It combined fast tempo Hispanic beats and colorful Reggae, with rhythmic West African sounds.<sup>[5]</sup> Recently, Nigerian rappers have also brought changes to the palates of the Igbo people with the infusion of hip-hop. This music is a cross between American rap beats and Igbo lyrics.

## Notable Igbo Musicians

Some popular Igbo musicians include: Sir Warrior (Head of Highlife), Oliver de Coque (King of Highlife), Celestine Ukwu, Onyeka Onwenu, Chief Stephen Osita Osadebe, Bright Chimezie (Duke of Highlife), Nico Mbarga, Oriental Brothers (Stars of Music), Faze, Dr Alban, Lemar and Nnenna Freelon. More...

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- [4] [http://www.schlagwerk-percussion.de/sound/ududrums/u80\\_neckudu.mp3](http://www.schlagwerk-percussion.de/sound/ududrums/u80_neckudu.mp3)
- [5] "Naijajams. <http://www.naijajams.com/category/music/nigerian-highlife/>."

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