

Ratchet (instrument)

A **ratchet**, also called a **noisemaker** (or, when used in Judaism, a **gragger** or **grogger** (etymologically from Yiddish: גראָגער) or *ra'ashan* (Hebrew: רַעשָׁן)), is an orchestral musical instrument played by percussionists. Operating on the principle of the ratchet device, a gearwheel and a stiff board is mounted on a handle, which can be freely rotated. The handle is held and the whole mechanism is swung around, the momentum causing the board to click against the gearwheel, making a clicking and rattling noise. One popular design consists of a thick wooden cog wheel attached to a handle and two wooden flanges which alternately hit the teeth of the cog when the handle is turned. Alternatively, smaller ratchets are sometimes held still or mounted and the handle turned rapidly by the player.

The ratchet is similar to a football rattle, which is sometimes used in its place when a particularly loud sound is needed. An example of its use is Richard Strauss's piece *Till Eulenspiegel's Merry Pranks* and Arnold Schoenberg's *Gurre-Lieder*. In the 18th and 19th centuries, British policemen used a similar device called a "policeman's rattle" to summon assistance.^[1] They also used the device during the Second World War, to warn of the presence of poison gas.^[2]



A Purim gragger, a kind of ratchet used in Judaism.



A plastic version of the gragger.

Use in Jewish tradition

In Judaism, the gragger is used for the holiday of Purim. The gragger is used every time Haman's name is mentioned during the reading of the Megillah.^[3] Because Haman persecuted the Jews, his name is supposed to be drowned out by noise. The gragger developed to assist with making noise during the reading.^[4]

References

- [1] Taylor, J. "The Victorian Police Rattle Mystery" (<http://www.constabulary.com/mystery/rattle.htm>) *The Constabulary* (2003)
- [2] Lincolnshire Special Constabulary Bulletin No. 27 (<http://boar.org.uk/ariwxo3LCSBul27.htm>) - September, 1942.
- [3] Einstein, Stephen J.; Kukoff Lydia (1989). *Every person's guide to Judaism*. URJ Books and Music, ISBN 9780807404348
- [4] Karesh, Sara E.; Hurvitz, Mitchell M. (2006). *Encyclopedia of Judaism*. Infobase Publishing, ISBN 9780816054572

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