

Boobam

The **boobam** is a percussion instrument of the membranophone family consisting of an array of tubes with membranes stretched on one end, the other end open.^[1] The tuning depends partly on the tension on the membrane but mostly on the length of the tube.

The boobams are probably an ancestor of the modern octoban.

The tubes were originally made from lengths of giant bamboo although pipes of wood, plastic, metal, and cardboard also have been used. The membranes were originally goat or calfskin but most are now plastic.

The name *boobam* was coined in Mill Valley, California in 1954 and was described as "bamboo spelled sideways".

In 1948 Harry Partch, an American composer, developed a system of music that depended on the building of various exotic instruments that could play non-tempered scales. Some of them were based on Greek models and some on more primitive instruments like marimbas. Musician David Buck Wheat and his roommate in Sausalito, California, Bill Loughborough, a musician and electronic engineer, built such instruments for Partch as a marimba which was hit with a large soft mallet over the chamber. This device delivered low-cycled tones that were barely audible. Loughborough had scientific instruments borrowed from the Navy Yard, and using an oscilloscope and audio oscillator he and Wheat were able to work on a new technical level that had not been possible before.

Together they moved onto a Sausalito barge with Jak Simpson who in 1954 founded a business named the "BooBam Bamboo Drum Company".^[2] Buckwheat was working on the President Lines as a bass player, sailing to the Orient. In the Philippines he would buy large diameter giant bamboo and bring back sticks on the ship which they used to build the Pacific Island bamboo drums. Jazz groups were fascinated and added the boobams to their percussion sections. In 1956 Chet Baker's Ensemble used them on the Today Show. Their unique sound inspired Nick Reynolds of the Kingston Trio who eagerly included them on their tour with his percussion solo being featured on "O Ken Karanga" on the album *College Concert* recorded at UCLA in 1962.

Construction

Boobams (bamboo reversed syllabically) are tuned bongos constructed with a shell of natural bamboo. The available width and depth of the shell, which contributes to the desired pitch, is limited only by the size of available bamboo found typically in the tropical islands of the Pacific Ocean. Although appearing as ethnic drums in these areas, the modern instrument found its way into current use through its appearance on numerous recordings in Hollywood beginning in the 1950s. Two sets of boobams were owned and used by West Coast jazz drummer Shelly Manne for numerous recording sessions in the Los Angeles studios.

References

- [1] Jones, Alexandra (2007-07-28). "Bang Bang: EMF Percussion Ensemble Rips Through Diverse Repertoire" (<http://www.cvnc.org/reviews/2007/072007/EMF15.html>). *Classical Voice of North Carolina* (Greensboro, North Carolina). . Retrieved 2008-02-17.
- [2] Gerd Stern, " From Beat Scene Poet to Psychedelic Multimedia Artist in San Francisco and Beyond, 1948-1978 (http://content.cdlib.org/xtf/view?docId=kt409nb28g&brand=oac&doc.view=entire_text)," an oral history conducted in 1996 by Victoria Morris Byerly, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 2001. Retrieved on August 15, 2008.

External links

- Boobam sound clip (<http://www.oddmusic.com/clips/boobams.mp3>)
 - Boobams - Percussive Art Society Museum (<http://web.archive.org/20071002091437/http://www.pas.org/Museum/tour/0304.cfm>) at the Wayback Machine (*archived October 2, 2007*)
 - Chet Baker featuring boobams on Today show, 1956 (<http://www.boobam.org/jpg-images/me+chet.jpg>)
 - Kingston Trio recording with Boobams (<http://antilles-trio.com/img/nick04.gif>)
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