



Here are some instruments you might see in People Like Me 2001. For pictures of all the instruments and more instrument information from around the world, check out the musical instrument page at <http://www.worldartswest.org/plm/guide2001/locator/instruments.html>

### Chordophones (Stringed instruments)

The **kora** is played in the westernmost part of Africa in Mali, Gambia, Burkina Faso, Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Senegal. Each region has a characteristic playing style. The kora is made from a half a gourd calabash with a hardwood post that runs through it to which the strings, made of monofilament fishing line, are attached. Cowhide is stretched over the open side of the half calabash and then left in the sun to dry tight and hold the handposts in place. A tall bridge is mounted upright on the skin face of the instrument and separates the strings into two planes. The kora player supports the instrument with the 3rd, 4th, and 5th fingers and the notes are played with the thumbs and forefingers of both hands. A traditional kora has 21 strings but it is very common to see a 22 string kora with an extra bass string used in the style known as Yenyengo (get up and dance). In the Cassamance region of southern Senegal it is also common to see the 25 string Kora Cassamance.

The **banjo's** origins are from West Africa, a distant lute family cousin of the kora. Originally, the African forerunner of the banjo was made from a gourd, with a goat skin stretched across an opening. With a fingerboard neck attached to the gourd and as few as two strings, you have a banjo in its original state. Construction of the banjo changed over time in the Southern U.S.- using wood and/or metal to create the body frame, replacing the gourd. Steel strings, and fiberglass heads instead of skin, a very recent development, have altered the sound and function of the banjo.

Currently the four string banjo is sometimes played with Irish music and with Dixieland bands. The open backed five string banjo is typically played with old-time country music, in the clawhammer style, strumming down on the strings. Bluegrass banjos (also with five strings) are "picked" with metal finger-picks, and have a resonator on the back of the instrument, giving it a brassier, louder sound. The fifth



string (located half way up the neck) is tuned an octave higher and strummed with the thumb to provide a backbeat to the melody.

The **guitar** is a descendant of various Middle Eastern instruments including "el 'ud" - the lute - and "tar", a long-necked lute of Persia. ("tar" means "string"). Today's acoustic guitar has six steel or nylon strings stretched across a fretboard and a hollow wooden body. (Mexican style guitars traditionally use nylon strings.)

### **Ideophones (instruments which are struck or shaken)**

A **balafon** is a frame xylophone played by the Maninka or Mandeng people. It usually has from 16 to 20 slats, with calabash (gourd) resonators below each slat. The resonators have holes cut in them, over which cigarette paper is stretched so as to make a buzzing sound when the slat is struck. The balafon is believed to date from the time of Sunjata, the legendary founder of the Mali empire in the 13th century.

### **Membranophones (Drums)**

The **djembe** is a single-headed goblet drum from West Africa. Its body is carved from the trunk of a tree and the widest end is covered with skin. The unique shape of the drum gives it a deep tone when played in the center and higher-pitched tone played closer to the edges. It is played by hand.

**Batá drums** consist of a set of three conical or cylindrical drums, each drum having two laced heads, one larger and one smaller. Each drum is laid on a player's lap and the three players sit side by side, playing by hand. As an ensemble, batá drums accompany Afro-Cuban singing and dancing for Yoruba spiritual entities called Orishas. The intricate rhythms of the batá are based on prayers in the tonal Yoruba language, so the drums are actually speaking! The smallest drum, called the okonkolo, is the timekeeper, and generally holds a repetitive phrase to help the rhythms stay on track. The largest drum, called the Iya or mother drum, "calls" or initiates the changes in rhythm, and holds conversations with the middle drum, the itótele.

A **cajón** is a rectangular wooden box played as a drum. It's varied form and dimensions depend on the player's comfort, since the player usually sits on it while playing. The cajón usually has a circular hole called "boca," or mouth, in the rear face, to amplify sound. The cajón is played by beating with both hands on the front side, which is the thinnest side, though it is played on the sides and even sometimes on the back as well. There are many ways to play, including with the base of the palm of the hand, with the forefingers excluding the thumb, with the palm folded, or with tapping of the fingertips.

The **cajita** is a wooden box with a hinged top. It is hung from the player's neck with a string, hanging a little bit above the waist, allowing the player to walk while playing. Its size and shape is approximately like the size and shape of a shoebox. The cajita is played by opening and closing the lid with one hand, while the other hand hits the instrument with a stick.



**Tumbadoras (Congas):** These drums, of relatively recent popularity, are played with the hands. They are originally from the Antilles islands. They are commonly used in a set of three, standing on the floor or putting them in special stands. The medium sized drum is called conga, the large size (low tone) is the tumba, and the smallest and highest in pitch is called quinto. The two biggest have approximately the same height, the tumba the largest in diameter. The tumbadoras have one head, on the top, and are open at the bottom.