



Echoes from the Past

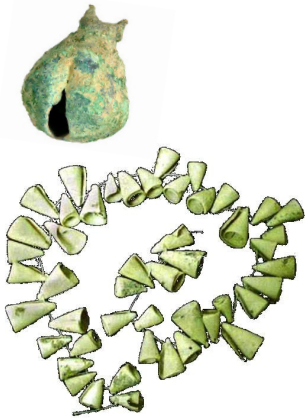


Ancient Traditions

The traditions of the modern Pueblo people have been practiced for over a thousand years. The songs and ceremonies of ancient times survive through their continued practice and the oral history of the people.

Music is one of the only traditions shared by all cultures around the world, and it was certainly a central part of ancestral Pueblo society. Archeological sites across the Southwest, from Great Houses to pit structures, reveal the extensive collection of instruments that defined ancestral Pueblo music.

Bells, Shells, and Trumpets



Some instruments found in sites like Aztec Ruins were items for which the ancestral Pueblo people had to trade. They obtained shells and copper bells through their trade networks.

Copper bells came from what is now Mexico. These bells are still used today and have been used as clothing adornments that jingle as the dancers move.

Conus shells, used as tinklers, came from what is now California. Like the bells, these tinklers have been attached to clothing and

worn on bandoliers or sashes across the chest to make sound as the dancer moves.

Much larger shells were used as shell trumpets. These murex shells originated from the Gulf of California. One of these instruments can be heard from miles away!



Rasps and Rattles



Not all instruments came from trade. Many were made from materials readily available to the ancestral Pueblo.

Rasps are typically made of bone. For these instruments, an unmodified stick or bone is rubbed across a notched bone to produce a sound.

Most rattles were made of hollowed out gourd, filled with seeds or small pebbles. Other rattles, generally confined

to the Four Corners region, were made of clay. Clay rattles in particular were usually mugs or ladles with hollow compartments that contained small pellets of clay or stone (photo below).



Whistles and Flutes



Bone whistles are perhaps the most common musical instrument found in archeological sites throughout the southwest. This instrument is capable of only one or two tones and may have been used to imitate bird calls for either hunting or ceremonial purposes.

Flutes, in contrast with the limited tone production of whistles, are capable of producing three or more tones. Most of the flutes found were made of wood and reed, while only a few were made of bone.



Drums



Though drums are prominent in modern Pueblo society, there have been no drums recognized in the archeological record of the ancestral Pueblo culture of Aztec Ruins National Monument. A few explanations exist for this phenomenon.

Drums of the past may have been constructed in a way that we cannot recognize them as such today. Examples of such drums might be ones made of ceramic, basketry, or gourds. Over time, the membrane of the drum would deteriorate, leaving behind what seems to be a pot, basket, or gourd fragment.

Another theory claiming the existence of drums in this culture is the use of the Great Kiva vaults as foot drums. This is probably the most widely accepted theory, with evidence from both archeology and oral tradition of the descendents of the ancestral Pueblos.

Voice



A commonly overlooked instrument is the voice. The human body is capable of creating hundreds of sounds, so it makes sense that cultures around the world make use of this talent while creating music.

While the voice cannot be left behind as an archeological artifact, it is acknowledged that this musical instrument was well used since the earliest dates of human existence.

The modern Pueblo people have hundreds, if not thousands, of songs for almost every aspect of life. For corn grinding alone, the Pueblo have over one hundred songs.

Like their descendents, the ancestral Pueblo people used the human voice as an expression of their sacred songs and ceremonial prayers.

From Past to Present

Many of the instruments from ages ago are still used today in the ceremonies and songs of the modern Pueblo people. Pueblos throughout New Mexico as well as Hopi in Arizona are open to public visitation during the year.

Some also welcome outsiders for special feast days, which are a unique blend of modern (sometimes Catholic) and ancient traditions. If you visit on a feast day, you will hear instruments that may be very similar to the ones used in ancient times. You will hear echoes from the past.

The Modern Pueblo People

