



The diddley bow is essentially a single-stringed instrument, typically constructed from readily available materials, such as a wooden board, a wire string, and two bridges. The sound is produced by plucking or sliding a metal object, such as a bottle neck or a piece of metal, along the string, creating a range of notes and tones. This rudimentary design belies the instrument's rich history and its significant role in the development of music, particularly the blues.

The diddley bow is more than just a instrument; it's a cultural artefact, Its simplicity makes it accessible, allowing individuals with limited resources to create music and express themselves. The resonant, raw sound of the diddley bow carries the weight of its history, reminding us of the origins of some of the most influential musical forms in the world.

The diddley bow is classified as a chordophone, basically, a single-stringed zither. This classification places it within a broad family of stringed instruments found across various cultures. Chordophones are defined by the production of sound through the vibration of strings stretched between two points. In the case of the diddley bow, the single string is stretched along a wooden plank or board, with bridges at each end to raise the string and allow it to vibrate freely. The stick zither category further specifies that the instrument's resonator is a rigid, elongated body, such as a plank or stick. Unlike instruments with a separate sound box, the diddley bow's body itself serves as the resonator, amplifying the vibrations of the string. This direct connection between the string and the body results in a unique tonal quality. The simplicity of its design, with its single string and basic construction, sets it apart from the more complex chordophones. However, it shares the fundamental principle of sound production through string vibration, linking it to a vast lineage of stringed instruments worldwide.

The diddley bow's history is deeply rooted in the African the cultural exchange that occurred during the era of slavery and its aftermath in the United States. Its origins can be traced back to similar single-stringed instruments found in various parts of Africa, particularly West Africa. These instruments, were

brought to the Americas by enslaved Africans. In the United States, although there is evidence of its existence as far back as the 17th Century, the diddley bow, in the familiar form emerged in the rural South during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It served as a means of musical expression and entertainment for African American communities, particularly in the Mississippi Delta. Many early blues musicians learned to play on diddley bows before transitioning to guitars. The instrument's sound became an integral part of the blues sound, reflecting the hardship and resilience of the African American experience.

The diddley bow has been used in a wide variety of musical genres, including blues, rock 'n'roll, and even folk music. Its sound has made it a favourite among musicians seeking to create a unique and authentic sound. The instrument's simplicity and accessibility have also made it a popular choice for beginners and experimental musicians.

In the blues genre, the diddley bow played a crucial role in the development of the Delta blues style. Its sound perfectly captured the emotional intensity of the blues. Musicians such as Bo Diddley, who took his name from the instrument, popularised the diddley bow in the early days of rock and roll. His use of the instrument in songs like *Bo Diddley* and *Who Do You Love* helped to establish the diddley bow as a symbol of rock and roll's rebellious spirit. It is common in folk music, particularly in the Appalachian region. Its simple construction and portability made it a popular choice for travelling musicians. It has also been used in experimental music, where its unique sound and unconventional playing techniques have been explored by avant-garde composers and performers.

In modern music, the diddley bow is often used as a novelty instrument or as a way to add a unique and authentic sound to recordings. Its use in contemporary blues and rock music serves as a reminder of the instrument's rich history and its continued relevance in the world of music.

Several musicians have played a significant role in popularising the diddley bow and shaping its sound. One of the most influential players is Bo Diddley. His use of the instrument in his early recordings helped to establish the diddley bow as a symbol of rock and roll. Diddley's innovative playing techniques and his ability to create a wide range of sounds with the instrument helped to expand its musical possibilities. Another influential player is Lonnie Pitchford; he was a blues musician who dedicated his life to preserving the tradition of

the diddley bow. He was a master of the instrument and his playing style was deeply rooted in the Delta blues tradition. Lonnie's recordings and performances helped to introduce the instrument to a wider audience and to ensure that its legacy would continue.

Glen Faulkner is another modern player who has been vital to keeping the diddley bow alive. He has performed, taught and written extensively, and is considered a master of the instrument. He has also built many examples of the instrument. Other notable diddley bow players include Seasick Steve, who has incorporated the instrument into his unique brand of blues rock, and Justin Johnson, a contemporary player who demonstrates a very wide range of diddley bow techniques. These musicians, among others, have helped to ensure that the diddley bow remains a vital part of American musical heritage. Their playing styles and their dedication to the instrument have helped to inspire new generations of musicians to explore its possibilities.

One String Sam ... A perhaps lesser known artist we are featuring in this article Sam was an early exponent of the instrument. **Sam Wilson**, known as **One String Sam**, was an American Detroit blues musician. Details of his life are scant, but he recorded two tracks described as an eerie, spooky, and riveting version of country blues. In 1973 and later in 1974, he performed at the Ann Arbor Blues and Jazz Festival, he subsequently recorded two tracks, *I need a hundred dollars* and *I got to go*.



After this, details of One String Sam's ongoing existence are not recorded; he seems to have literally disappeared into obscurity.

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