



THE KENNEDY CENTER  
**Performing Arts Series**

ARTS-BASED PROGRAMMING VIA SATELLITE/WEB

presented in cooperation with PRINCE WILLIAM NETWORK

**Tambuco Percussion Ensemble of Mexico**

Tuesday, February 20, 2001

Grades 7 - 12

**When viewing *Tambuco Percussion Ensemble of Mexico* and participating in this guide's suggested activities, the following National Standards for Music will be addressed: 4, 7, 9.**

## Background Information

Tambuco is a percussion quartet founded in 1993 by four Mexican musicians – Alfred Bringas, Ricardo Galardo (Artistic Director), Ivan Manzanilla, and Raul Tudon. Playing drums, cymbals, bells, xylophones, and other rhythm instruments, Tambuco performs concerts around the world. The group has won numerous awards and prizes and has recorded four highly praised CDs. Tambuco's *Ritmicas* was selected by Audiophile Audition as one of the best CDs recorded in 1997.

Tambuco's performances weave music, instruments, and playing techniques from all over the world into a colorful tapestry of sounds, some familiar and some completely new. Most of the music performed by Tambuco was composed in the twentieth century, some of it as early as 1930.

The quartet also performs music composed especially for them in recent years.

Since 1993, Tambuco has collected more than one hundred percussion instruments from a wide variety of cultures. From West Africa come two powerful drums – the deep sounding *djun-djun* (JUN-JUN) and the higher-pitched *djembe* (JIM-bay). From the Middle East comes the goblet-shaped drum that has been played there for 3000 years—the *darabuca* (dare-a-BOO-ka).

When collaborating with composers in the creation of new music, Tambuco encourages them to experiment with these and other instruments in new and unusual ways. The performers delight in presenting audiences with the resulting music: vibrant, exciting new sounds which are both fascinating and emotionally powerful.

## Percussion Music

Percussion music, perhaps more than any other, is music of touch. Percussionists use bare hands, sticks, and mallets to strike, scrape, rub, slap, and tap surfaces of metal, skin, wood, or plastic. With great physical force they can make sounds of earsplitting intensity: Cymbals crash, big drums pound and boom! Or with the gentlest delicacy, percussionists can make barely-detectable sounds: Bells tinkle, rattles rustle, and whisper.

Percussion music is also music of the heartbeat. From the moment of birth, all people on earth depend upon the steady beats of their hearts to keep them alive. A simple, steady beat on a drum is reminiscent of a heartbeat. Percussionists can extend and embellish that simple heartbeat into complexities of rhythm.

## What to Look and Listen For in Percussion Music

● **An ensemble** is a musical performing group. For the members of an ensemble to play well together, each must listen to the others and modify their own playing according to what they hear. Listen and watch for how the members of Tambuco play together.

● **Timbre** (TAM-ber) is tone-color—the quality of tone that distinguishes one instrument’s sound from another. Listen for similarities and differences between or among instruments of metal, wood, plastic, or skin.

● **Dynamics** are gradations of loudness and softness in music. Listen to the dynamic contrasts in each piece—from loud to soft or soft to loud with many gradations in between. Also listen for the dynamic level of each individual instrument. Close your eyes while you listen and the subtle contrasts in dynamics will be easier to hear.

● **Rhythm** is the placement and accent of musical sounds in time. An accent is the amount of stress or emphasis given to a note. Rhythms can be as simple and steady as a heartbeat or as complex and chaotic as street sounds in a big city. Listen for steady beats that make you want to dance for complicated rhythms that are not at all regular.

● **Pitch** is the highness or lowness of a tone, as in “Do-Re-Mi.” Some percussion instruments are pitched and can play melodies, while others are unpitched and cannot. Listen for the difference.

Marching band drummers in sharp uniforms, casual groups of drummers in a city park, and hip-hop drummers on the radio all keep people listening and moving to their beat.

Percussion music is also old music. Throughout history people have created percussion music for personal expression, public ceremony, and pure pleasure. From log drums in Africa’s rainforests to tribal drums on Native America’s Great Plains to bronze gongs in ancient Southeast Asia, people made rhythms that enriched their lives. Many of these beats still go on today.

### About the Program

As part of the Kennedy Center’s AmericArtes\*, a festival of Latin American arts and culture, Tambuco will perform traditional and contemporary music inspired by the popular and folk music of

Mexico. Using a variety of percussion instruments from bongos to vibraphones, Tambuco’s musicians will demonstrate the unique sounds of their instruments, discuss the culture and traditions of Mexico as expressed through music, and perform in traditional costumes.



### Instructional Activity Be Percussionists

Find objects in your classroom that can serve as percussion instruments. For example, a pencil can serve as a drumstick which produces different timbres depending



upon which part of the pencil is used to strike another object’s surface. A desktop, paperback book, or even another pencil can serve as an idiophone, an instrument made of solid, resonant material.

When you have found an “instrument” you like, pair with another student and improvise (make up) a stream of rhythm. When you and your partner are happy with the result, form a quartet with another pair. See how large an ensemble you can create before keeping together in time becomes too difficult. If your whole class can play together successfully, congratulations!

## Resources

### On the Web:

[kennedy-center.org/pwtv](http://kennedy-center.org/pwtv)

[npr.org/programs/specials/milestones](http://npr.org/programs/specials/milestones)

This site offers a 27-minute radio program exploring the history of percussion and its role in the orchestra. Requires RealAudio player.

### Print:

Hart, Mickey and Lieberman, Frederic. Planet Drum: A Celebration of Percussion and Rhythm. Novato, CA: Grateful Dead Books, 1998.

### Recordings:

Tambuco. Ritmicas. (Dorian DOR-90245).

Tambuco. Cuerteto do Percusiones de Mexico. (Quindecim QP-004).

*\*AmericArtes is funded in part by the Inter-American Development Bank through the Cultural Foundation of the Americas and by Mr. and Mrs. Thomas F. McLarty III.*