

TEACHERS

# The Instruments of the 1927 Bristol Sessions

RESOURCE DOCUMENT





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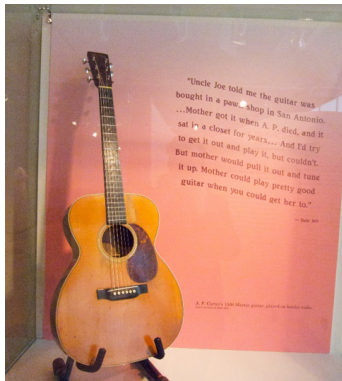
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## INTRODUCTION

Original instruments from the 1927 Bristol Sessions remain difficult to find, and therefore the instruments on display at the Birthplace of Country Music Museum are **iconic** or related examples of the typical Bristol Sessions instruments rather than any of the ones actually played during those recordings. There are a few reasons why the museum doesn't have any of these original instruments. Some of the musicians from 1927 played fairly cheap instruments that they bought from mail-order catalogs, and often these instruments were not kept – or did not survive – for **posterity**. And of course, at the time, many of the musicians did not realize the

importance of these recording sessions so they did not think to preserve the instruments as historical objects. Most importantly, instruments are often passed down through families, and so some of these instruments still live with – and are played by – descendants of the 1927 Bristol Sessions artists.



A. P. Carter's 1936 Martin guitar, which he played on "border radio" in the 1930s. It is now owned and played by his grandson Dale Jett.

Credit: © Birthplace of Country Music



A facsimile of the 1927 edition of the Sears, Roebuck Catalogue, along with a page from their instrument section showing a variety of guitars for sale.  
Credit: Birthplace of Country Music Museum Collection

The primary instruments played on the 1927 Bristol Sessions recordings were the fiddle, banjo, and guitar, which are also the main string band instruments. Other stringed instruments used to various degrees were the mandolin, ukulele, autoharp, harp guitar, and piano. Finally, four mouth or **percussive instruments** were also played: harmonica, jaw harp, bones, and kazoo. There was also one **anomaly**: a dance band based at Hotel Bristol called Red Snodgrass & His Alabamians whose jazzy number "Weary Blues" was accompanied by a **cornet**, two clarinets, a trombone, a piano, a banjo, and **trap drums**.



## THE THREE MAIN STRINGED INSTRUMENTS AT THE 1927 BRISTOL SESSIONS

### FIDDLE

The violin or fiddle is believed to have originated in 16th-century Italy, though there are certainly earlier instruments, particularly from the Middle East, that are viewed as part of the fiddle's "family tree." Soon after its appearance or development in Italy, the modern fiddle began to move into other areas of Europe, including England, Ireland, and Scotland, and it was primarily immigrants from these areas who brought the fiddle across the Atlantic to North America. By 1736, we begin to see written accounts of fiddle contests in the South. Despite the instrument's common association with white rural musicians, a strong African American fiddle tradition developed in the 19th century and Native Americans and Mexican Americans also explored their own fiddle styles in the Southwest.



This 1919 fiddle was owned by early country music player Herbert Sweet. The inside of the fiddle case is decorated with a record of the different places he played, including WOPI in Bristol, and artists he played with, including Ernest Stoneman. Credit: Birthplace of Country Music Museum Collection, donated by Ruth Roe

The fiddle was the primary musical instrument in southern Appalachia through World War II and was often accompanied by the banjo, making them the foundational instruments for string band music. The four-stringed instrument is played with a bow, though it can also be strummed or plucked. People tend to use the term violin when the instrument is played for classical or chamber music, symphonies, or orchestras, while the term fiddle is associated with Cajun, Irish, bluegrass, folk, old-time, and country music.



A formal photograph of Ernest Stoneman (seated center with guitar) and some of the family and friends who joined with him to perform and record. Uncle Eck Dunford and Hattie Stoneman with their fiddles can be seen standing at the back.

Credit: From the [John Edwards Memorial Foundation Records](#), #20001, Southern Folklife Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Historically, the fiddle was sometimes referred to as *"The Devil's Box"* because many people associated the fiddle with dancing, drinking, and merry-making – activities viewed by some as improper.

### RESOURCES

- Clip of fiddle sound: [LISTEN HERE](#)
- Sample 1927 Bristol Sessions song: ["The Longest Train I Ever Saw," Tenneva Ramblers](#)





## THE THREE MAIN STRINGED INSTRUMENTS AT THE 1927 BRISTOL SESSIONS

### BANJO

The banjo, a four- or five-stringed instrument with a head of hide or plastic stretched over a gourd sound box or a circular wooden rim, evolved from a related family of African gourd instruments – banjars, bandoras, and banzas. The knowledge of these instruments was brought to America by enslaved people in the late 1700s. There are many references to the “banjar” and its variants with reference to enslaved populations, including an 18th-century painting called



This [Creole banjo](#) is the earliest known banjo to still exist, dated to sometime before 1777.  
Credit: [Creative Commons](#)

*Music and Dance in Beaufort County* (also known as *The Old Plantation*) showing several enslaved people playing music and engaging in other activities together. In his *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1785), Thomas Jefferson stated: “The instrument proper to them is the banjar, which they brought hither from Africa...”



*Music and Dance in Beaufort County* (also known as *The Old Plantation*), attributed to John Rose, Beaufort County, South Carolina, circa 1785. Credit: The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation. Gift of Abby Aldrich Rockefeller

By the early 19th century, African American banjo playing was influencing the music of the Appalachians as traditional fiddle music mixed with the musical styles and traditions of the banjo. Despite the existence of Black string bands, when commercial recording of music began and music was played over the radio and on records, the **segregation of genres** and the targeting of music to specific audiences became common. String band, banjo and fiddle tunes, and sacred songs became

Jimmie Rodgers (wearing glasses) and Jack and Claude Grant with banjos and what looks to be a banjo uke; Jack Pierce holds a guitar. At the 1927 Bristol Sessions, Rodgers would end up recording as a solo artist, while the two Grants and Pierce recorded as the Tenneva Ramblers. Credit: From the [John Edwards Memorial Foundation Records](#), #20001, Southern Folklife Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill



known as “hillbilly music,” while country blues, gospel, and many vaudeville songs were considered “race records.” This meant that the banjo began to be more and more associated with hillbilly music rather than race records music – which in turn impacted its development as a typical string band instrument heard in hillbilly recordings.

### RESOURCES

- Clip of banjo sound: [LISTEN HERE](#)
- Sample 1927 Bristol Sessions song: [“Oh Molly Dear,” B. F. Shelton](#)



## THE THREE MAIN STRINGED INSTRUMENTS AT THE 1927 BRISTOL SESSIONS

### GUITAR

Singing with rhythm guitar accompaniment is one of the strongest and most recognizable sounds in American music. This combination is found in several genres – from blues and R&B to jazz and rock – and acoustic six-stringed guitars were played on numerous songs recorded at the Bristol Sessions. The improved recording technologies of the electric microphone and the isolated, controlled environment of the studio helped the voice and guitar to stand out on Bristol Sessions tracks in comparison to earlier location recordings.

The guitar was brought to America by the Spanish in the 1700s, and smaller “parlor” guitars were fairly popular by the 1800s. Two well-known acoustic guitar manufacturers were founded in America in the 19th century: Martin (1833) and Gibson (1894), both making steel-stringed guitars. Despite its iconic status now, the acoustic guitar was a latecomer to old-time music in Appalachia – however, it quickly became one of the integral parts of southern Appalachian string band music in the 20th century. The guitar’s popularity owed much to Sears & Roebuck, the first company to distribute it commercially and make it more widely available to consumers through their mail-order catalogs. Sears sold a whole range of inexpensive guitars, costing between \$2.70 and \$10.30 (equivalent to \$30 to \$140 today). It also rose in popularity when American soldiers returning from World War I brought guitars back from Europe.



In this early photograph of The Carter Family, Maybelle holds her guitar, while Sara has her autoharp on her lap. Credit: From the [John Edwards Memorial Foundation Records](#), #20001, Southern Folklife Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill



Jimmie Rodgers with his custom-decorated guitar. His name – written out in an inlay script – is seen on the neck of the guitar. Credit: Courtesy of [Country Music Hall of Fame® and Museum](#)

#### [Maybelle Carter is particularly well known for her guitar playing.](#)

Her driving sound as part of The Carter Family’s instrumentation was influential in bringing the guitar to the forefront of country music and making it into a solo instrument in country bands. Through the Carters work with [Lesley Riddle](#), Maybelle developed a playing style called the “Carter scratch,” where she combined rhythm with great, forceful chords on the guitar’s higher strings and melody on the lower base strings. Jimmie Rodgers also made much of his guitar as a performer. After recording his hit “T for Texas (Blue Yodel)” for Victor at another recording session later in 1927, Rodgers shot to stardom, and soon he was performing with a custom-decorated guitar that had his name written on the neck and the word “Thanks!” on the guitar’s back.

#### RESOURCES

- Clip of guitar sound: [LISTEN HERE](#)
- Sample 1927 Bristol Sessions song: [“Single Girl, Married Girl,” The Carter Family](#)



## OTHER STRINGED INSTRUMENTS AT THE 1927 BRISTOL SESSIONS

### MANDOLIN

The mandolin comes from the **lute** family, and its origins can be traced back to central Europe during the medieval period. Mandolins have eight strings and are usually played with a **plectrum**. Three different types of mandolin are common – Neapolitan or round-backed, archtop, and flat-backed – and each is typically associated with a different style of music. The archtop mandolin is the one most often used in old-time, folk, and bluegrass music.

Mandolins were available in Appalachia by the late 19th century. They became a mainstay of traditional and popular music, and appeared in several Appalachian string bands, including The Powers Family and The Stoneman Family. Jack Grant, a mandolin player for the Tenneva Ramblers, also made a name for the instrument on the group's



This statue of famous mandolin player Bill Monroe stands beside the "Birth of Bluegrass" sign outside the Ryman Auditorium in Nashville, Tennessee.

Credit: © Brian Crawford

celebrated 1927 Bristol Sessions track, "The Longest Train I Ever Saw." The only African American act recorded at the 1928 Bristol Sessions was Tarter & Gay, a duo who usually played guitar and mandolin together and performed regularly for white and Black audiences at dances. However, they both played guitar on the two sides they recorded in Bristol in 1928: "Brownie Blues" and "Unknown Blues." **Mandolin orchestras** - made up of instruments from the mandolin family, along with guitars and even harp guitars – became quite popular during the early 20th century.

### RESOURCES

- Clip of mandolin sound: [LISTEN HERE](#)
- Sample 1927 Bristol Sessions song: ["Miss Liza, Poor Gal," Tenneva Ramblers](#)



Bill Monroe owned and signed this 1992 F-5L Model Gibson mandolin, which he played on the Grand Ole Opry stage in Nashville, Tennessee. It is currently on display in the museum. Credit: On loan from the collection of Joseph R. Gregory





## OTHER STRINGED INSTRUMENTS AT THE 1927 BRISTOL SESSIONS

### UKULELE

The ukulele belongs to the lute family of stringed instruments. Derived from several guitar-like instruments that first came to Hawaii in the 1870s with Portuguese immigrants, the ukulele is smaller than a guitar and has only four strings. The name “ukulele” means “jumping flea,” perhaps descriptive of the way a player’s fingers seem to jump quickly across the strings! The instrument soon became firmly associated with Hawaiian music and culture. Much of its popularity can be attributed to the way that King Kalakaua, monarch of the island nation in the late 19th century, promoted it at official gatherings and events.

Ukuleles were formally introduced to the mainland United States at various “cultural expositions,” including the 1901 Pan-American Exposition and the 1915 Panama-Pacific International Exposition, and it soon became popular with Tin Pan Alley songwriters and vaudeville performers, and within jazz

and popular music. It also became common in early commercial country music with artists like Jimmie Rodgers, Ernest Stoneman, and the Hill Billies sometimes bringing the ukulele into their recordings.

As with guitars, players can strum or fingerpick a ukulele. The **clawhammer** style – common to banjo playing, especially for old-time music – is also often used by ukulele musicians. The ukulele was played on several 1927 Bristol Sessions recordings, including Uncle Eck Dunford’s “Skip To Ma Lou, My Darling,” the Blue Ridge Corn Shuckers’ “Old Time Corn Shuckin’, Parts 1 and 2,” and the West Virginia Coon Hunters “Greasy String.”



Anthony Zablan playing the ukulele at the Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo, New York, in 1901.

Credit: Courtesy of Hawaii State Archives



A ukulele made by luthier Jayne Henderson. Credit: Courtesy of Jayne Henderson of [EJ Henderson Guitars and Ukuleles](#)

### RESOURCES

- Clip of ukulele sound: [LISTEN HERE](#)
- Sample 1927 Bristol Sessions song: [“Old Time Corn Shuckin,’ Part 1,” Blue Ridge Corn Shuckers](#)





## OTHER STRINGED INSTRUMENTS AT THE 1927 BRISTOL SESSIONS

### AUTOHARP



Janette Carter's Orthey autoharp – she played this instrument at The Carter Fold in Hiltons, Virginia, and later signed it. It is currently on display at the museum.

Credit: On loan from the collection of Joseph R. Gregory

The autoharp is configured in a similar way to the European **zither**, with the addition of chorded keys that allow the player to press the notes and strum or pick the strings. Most modern autoharps carry 36 strings, though there are some with 47 or, more rarely, 48. When pushed down, the chorded keys mute the strings that are not needed to make the desired chord.

There are two German connections in the autoharp's origins. First, Charles Zimmerman, a German immigrant living in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, **patented** a similar instrument he called an "autoharp" in 1882, though it is unclear if he ever used this design to commercially manufacture these instruments. A year or so later, a German named Karl August Gütter patented an instrument he called

a "Volkszither," one that was much more like the modern autoharp we know today. After visiting Germany in 1885, Zimmerman began producing instruments with Gütter's design back in America – he once again used the name "autoharp" for these instruments and attached his name to them, thus mistakenly becoming known as the inventor.



Ernest Stoneman playing the autoharp and harmonica.

Credit: Courtesy of Patsy Stoneman



Maybelle became so well-known for her autoharp playing that companies like Sears sold affordable autoharps with "How to Play Like Mother Maybelle" instructions, as seen here in a display from the museum's *Hometown Stars* special exhibit in 2017. Credit: From the Birthplace of Country Music Museum Collection, donated by Charles and Nancy Casey

Ernest Stoneman made the first recording with an autoharp on "The Titanic" in 1924. The autoharp is also synonymous with The Carter Family. Sara played it on "Bury Me Under the Weeping Willow," "Little Log Cabin by the Sea," "The Poor Orphan Child," and "Single Girl, Married Girl" at the 1927 Bristol Sessions. Maybelle began performing with the autoharp when she later toured as Mother Maybelle and The Carter Sisters.

### RESOURCES

- Clip of autoharp sound: [LISTEN HERE](#)
- Sample autoharp solo by Mother Maybelle Carter: [From Johnny Cash Show](#)



## OTHER STRINGED INSTRUMENTS AT THE 1927 BRISTOL SESSIONS

### HARP GUITAR

The main body of the harp guitar resembles a normal guitar and bears six strings. However, what makes this instrument distinctive is the second “neck” or sound chamber that curves out from the instrument’s shoulder and carries usually up to 12 additional **unfretted** strings. These strings are harp-like and can be plucked individually.

The origins of harp guitars are a bit murky – there are references to similar instruments as early as 1650 in Europe, but it really developed in America in 1890 with several **artisans** building these unusual instruments. Harp guitars became increasingly popular in the 1910s and appeared throughout the United States as part of mandolin orchestra ensembles in particular.



Alfred Karnes photographed  
with his harp guitar.

Credit: Courtesy of [Blue Ridge Institute and Museum at Ferrum College](#)

There is some debate about whether the harp guitar is played on any of the 1927 Bristol Sessions recordings. Alfred Karnes was well-known for playing the harp guitar, and some scholars think that they can hear the instrument on some of his numbers. However, others are equally convinced that Karnes only plays the guitar at the Sessions, another instrument he was very skilled at and known for playing.

### RESOURCES

- Sample harp guitar performance:  
[“November,” Stephen Bennett](#)



Harp guitars, like this model by the Gibson Company that is currently on display in the museum, became popular in the 1910s and appeared throughout the United States as part of mandolin orchestra ensembles.  
Credit: On loan from the collection of Joseph R. Gregory

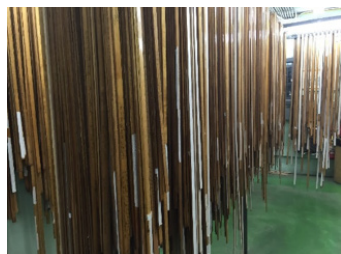


## OTHER STRINGED INSTRUMENTS AT THE 1927 BRISTOL SESSIONS

### PIANO

The piano was invented in Italy around 1700 by Bartolomeo Cristofori, and while it looks nothing like the instruments that come to mind when we say “stringed instrument,” with around 230 strings that is exactly what it is! Modern pianos usually have 88 black and white keys and therefore can play 88 different pitches or notes.

One of the most well-known piano companies in the United States is [Steinway & Sons](#), which was founded in 1853 in New York by a German piano builder. Local company [Mapes Strings](#), located in Elizabethton, Tennessee, makes piano strings for Steinway, along with almost all brands of guitar strings and strings for several other instruments. Steinway has used Mapes Strings in their pianos for around 100 years.



In the Mapes factory, there is a “library” of nearly 8,000 scale sticks, each stick marked with the measurements of piano strings for nearly every make and model piano dating back to the 1700s. Mapes likely holds the largest and most comprehensive collection of this information in the world.

Credit: © Birthplace of Country Music, with permission of Mapes String

If a piano had not already been in the spaces used for the recording studio in the Taylor-Christian Hat Company Building, it might not have been featured on the 1927 Bristol Sessions at all. Large and expensive, pianos were mostly found in bars, churches, and private homes at that time.

### RESOURCES

- Clip of piano sound: [LISTEN HERE](#)
- Sample piano playing from 1928 Bristol Sessions: [“I’ll Be Happy,” The Stamps Quartet](#)



This Pompeian-style Clayton piano, sold in Montgomery Ward & Co.'s Windsor Piano catalog circa 1920, included a four-legged stool, reduced-price music lessons, an instruction book, and a velvet scarf with its purchase. Credit: Courtesy of Michael Stinnett, Antique Piano Shop Inc., [www.antiquepianoshop.com](http://www.antiquepianoshop.com)





## MOUTH AND PERCUSSIVE INSTRUMENTS AT THE 1927 BRISTOL SESSIONS

### HARMONICA



This circa 1920 Hohner harmonica was known as the “Tuckaway.” It is seen here with its original box.  
Credit: Birthplace of Country Music Museum Collection

The harmonica is a “free reed instrument,” also known as a French harp. It is a popular instrument that can be heard in a number of musical genres, including country, blues, and folk – and somewhat more surprisingly in jazz, rock, and classical! In order to produce sound from the harmonica, a player uses their mouth to direct air into the holes along the mouthpiece.

While free reed instruments were common in East Asia from early times, instruments similar to the harmonica as we know it were first developed in Europe – specifically Vienna, Austria – during the early 19th century. Several versions were produced by different inventors or manufacturers at this time, but it was Matthias Hohner who became the first to mass produce this small instrument in the late 1850s, and by 1868, he was supplying the United States where it became very popular – the Hohner company even claimed Abraham Lincoln as a harmonica player in a 1927 ad (based on a story in Carl Sandburg’s *Lincoln, The Prairie Years*), though there is no definitive evidence that Lincoln ever actually owned or played a harmonica. Two other historic figures associated with the harmonica are famous lawman Wyatt Earpp and infamous outlaw Billy the Kid!

By the 1920s, the affordable, portable harmonica had become popular in country and blues music. The harmonica can be heard on several sides recorded at the 1927 Bristol Sessions, and the way that these sides were marketed reflects the way genre was often defined along subjective lines – for instance, similar harmonica pieces by Henry Whitter and El Watson were marketed as “hillbilly music” for the former, a white musician, and “race records” for the latter, a Black musician.

Two interesting pieces of information about harmonicas:

- Musicians often used harmonicas to imitate the sounds of trains – a good example is DeFord Bailey, the first African American performer on the Grand Ole Opry, and his tune [“Pan American Blues.”](#)
- Harmonica players often combine this instrument with playing other instruments at the same time. To do so, they wear a device called a “rack” that slips around the player’s neck so that the harmonica can be held steady in front of his or her mouth, leaving the hands free for the other instrument.



DeFord Bailey playing harmonica on the stage of the Grand Ole Opry in 1974. Credit: Photograph by Henry Horenstein, [Collection of the National Museum of American History](#)

### RESOURCES

- Clip of harmonica sound: [LISTEN HERE](#)
- Sample 1927 Bristol Sessions songs: [“Pot Licker Blues,” El Watson](#) and [“Henry Whitter’s Fox Chase,” Henry Whitter](#)



## MOUTH AND PERCUSSIVE INSTRUMENTS AT THE 1927 BRISTOL SESSIONS

### JAW HARP

The jaw harp – also called a Jew’s harp – is a small, crossbow-shaped folk instrument with medieval origins (possibly in Asia) and later brought to North America by 17th-century European traders. **The narrow part of its frame is held against the player’s teeth and a small bent metal tongue is plucked to produce different tones.**

The jaw harp makes one appearance at the 1927 Bristol Sessions on the Blue Ridge Corn Shuckers’ “Old Time Corn’ Shuckin,’ Parts 1 and 2,” where it is joined by another “folksier” instrument, the kazoo, along with the harmonica, guitar, fiddle, banjo, and ukulele.



A jaw harp. Credit: [Public domain](#)

### RESOURCES

- Clip of jaw harp sound: [LISTEN HERE](#)
- Sample 1927 Bristol Sessions song: [“Old Time Corn Shuckin,’ Part 1,” Blue Ridge Corn Shuckers](#)

### BONES

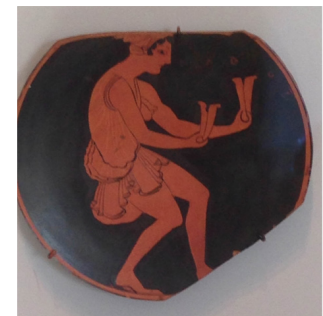


Two sets of bones, circa 1927.  
Credit: Birthplace of Country Music Museum, donated by Dom Flemons

Used as a musical instrument for centuries, the **bones** serve as a percussive instrument. Different versions of bones can be found in several ancient cultures. Archaeologists have excavated bones (as instruments) from graves and tombs in prehistoric Mesopotamia and Egypt, and also discovered images of musicians playing the bones on Greek pottery. There is also evidence of the bones being played in the Roman Empire and ancient China. In the 18th and 19th centuries, Irish and English immigrants – who used the bones as a way to keep a steady beat for their **jigs and reels** – brought this instrument to North America.

Bones were originally made from animal bones, usually the rib or shin bones of sheep, cows, and sometimes horses. The instruments’ shape, which is often slightly curved, reflects the natural shape of these bones. While modern bones are sometimes still made from animal bones, you can also find ones made from wood and plastic. **The bones can be held in one or both hands, and the player moves his or her hands in such a way that the bones knock against each other.**

African American musician El Watson played the bones on two Johnson Brothers recordings – “Two Brothers Are We” and “I Want to See My Mother (Ten Thousand Miles Away).” These recordings, along with the accompaniment by Charles Johnson on guitar for Watson’s two harmonica numbers, are some of the earliest integrated country music recordings.



Fragment of a terra cotta red-figure kylix or cup, Greek, 510-500 BC. The image is of a dancer using a bones-like instrument as part of the performance.

Credit: [Public domain](#)

### RESOURCES

- Clip of bones sound: [LISTEN HERE](#)
- Sample 1927 Bristol Sessions song: [“Two Brothers Are We,” Johnson Brothers with El Watson](#)



## MOUTH AND PERCUSSIVE INSTRUMENTS AT THE 1927 BRISTOL SESSIONS

### KAZOO

Many people make fun of kazooos as simply a party favor, and they are often the bane of parents' existence when sent home from children's birthday parties. However, [kazooos are real instruments that are classified as membranophones](#), where the tonal qualities are produced as the player hums. They are also related to mirlitons, vibrating membrane instruments that were first found in Africa. Mirlitons were made from cow horns or gourds, and their membranes were constructed from spider egg silk. African horn-mirlitons were used for ceremonial purposes as a way to distort or mask the human voice. Kazoo-like instruments are also found in ancient Mexico, though these looked more like recorders and the membrane was made from slivers of corn husk.

Players hum into the flattened opening of the kazoo, which makes the membrane vibrate, creating a sound that can be changed by the pitch, loudness, and nature of the humming. By covering the membrane hole, either in part or completely, the player can also alter the sound. Simply blowing into the kazoo to make sounds or music is a common mistake.

Different types of kazoo-like instruments, based on the African mirlitons, were common in folk music and were found in North America by the 1800s. But the kazoo as we know it is attributed to an African-American man named Alabama Vest who came up with the idea of this small instrument and then worked with Thaddeus von Glegg, a German clock manufacturer, to make his concept into reality in the 1840s. By the early 1900s, other innovators and companies had run with the kazoo concept and were mass producing the instrument to great success.

Kazooos were commonly found in jug bands and used for comedy songs, and the 1927 Bristol Sessions recording "Old Time Corn Shuckin,' Parts 1 and 2" by the Blue Ridge Corn Shuckers' (an act made up of Ernest Stoneman and several other musicians) plays host to several small instruments, including the kazoo.

### RESOURCES

- Clip of kazoo sound: [LISTEN HERE](#)
- Sample 1927 Bristol Sessions song: ["Old Time Corn' Shuckin,' Part 1," Blue Ridge Corn Shuckers](#)



The majority of 20th-century kazooos – like this metal one on display in the museum – were made by George D. Smith and his company, The Great American Kazoo Company. Credit: © Birthplace of Country Music; donation of Kazoobie Kazooos





## CONCLUSION

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While the instruments that were played at the 1927 Bristol Sessions serve to illustrate the music and sounds of “hillbilly” or early country music, their geographical, historical, and cultural connections also provide the opportunity to delve into and talk about wider topics in US and world history such as slavery, immigration, and trade. The banjo – held in the memory and the traditions of the enslaved peoples forcibly brought across the Atlantic from Western Africa and recreated by them once they were in the Americas – later became an instrument mostly associated with white country or bluegrass musicians, and one often assumed to have American origins. The fiddle and the bones traveled to America with English, Irish, and Scottish immigrants, even though they originated in different places. Instruments like the autoharp and the harmonica highlight the connections of immigration and trade in bringing musical novelties to America, while the ukulele illustrates the connections between immigration and cultural transmission. Thus, the lesson on the 1927 Bristol Sessions instruments is a great way to use museum content and elements of local history to explore much bigger stories!



## VOCABULARY LIST

*\*The majority of these definitions are taken from Merriam-Webster.*

### Anomaly

Something not like normal

### Artisan

A worker who practices a trade or handicraft

### Clawhammer

A style of banjo playing using the thumb and one or more fingers picking or strumming in a downward direction

### Cornet

A valved brass instrument resembling a trumpet in design and range but having a shorter partly conical tube and less brilliant tone

### Fretted

Has small, raised metal bars on the fingerboard to show the player where to put his/her fingers on the strings in order to produce different notes (see Unfretted)

### Genre

A category of artistic, musical, or literary composition characterized by a particular style, form, or content

### Iconic

Widely recognized and well-established

### Jigs & Reels

Types of dances characterized by lively springy steps (jigs, often solo) and lively steps and patterns (reels, usually with a partner or a group of dancers)

### Lute

A stringed instrument having a large pear-shaped body, a vaulted back, a **fretted** fingerboard, and a head with tuning pegs which is often angled backward from the neck

### Patent

A document or other official notice securing the right to exclude others from making, using, or selling an invention

### Percussive or Percussion Instrument

An instrument that is played by striking, often used to keep the tempo or beat

### Plectrum

Type of pick

### Posterity

Saving for all future generations

### Segregation of Genres

When record labels marketed different genres to different audiences based on perceptions of who that particular music will appeal to, e.g. “hillbilly music” and “race records” (see Genre)

### Trap Drum

The bass drum in a group of percussion instruments (traps) to which are attached the various rhythm devices (as cymbal and block)

### Unfretted

Lacking ridges or bars across the fingerboard of a stringed musical instrument (see Fretted)

### Yodel

To sing by suddenly changing from a natural voice to a falsetto and back

### Zither

A stringed instrument having usually 30 to 40 strings over a shallow horizontal soundboard and played with pick and fingers