

## Tabla: Introduction

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Tabla is the principal percussion instrument of north Indian (Hindustani) classical music, although it is commonly used in folk music, and increasingly in popular music, not only in India, but around the world.

Tabla is primarily an accompaniment instrument in Hindustani classical music, playing theka, a stylized arrangement of drum strokes that define the structural form and divisions of the tala (rhythmic cycle).

Tabla also has a large and sophisticated solo repertoire, with improvised and pre-composed forms, and a typical tabla solo concert is over 1 hour long. See some short videos here.

A set of tabla consists of a treble drum - tabla, or dayan (meaning 'right'), and a bass drum - bayan (meaning 'left'), also sometimes called 'duggi'. The body of the tabla is made of wood, while the baya is made of metal, commonly copper, or brass.

The skins are made most commonly of goat skin, with buffalo hide straps.

The black spot in the centre of the skin (slightly offset on the baya) is known as the 'gab' or "shiyahi" and is made of a mixture of iron filings, charcoal and rice (the starch drying to form a glue). The exact ingredients and mixture are slightly mysterious, being closely guarded trade secrets of each tabla maker.

Tabla has a very rich tonal range, with numerous sounds available from each drum. The treble drum is pitched, being most commonly tuned to the tonic of the scale. The bass drum is not pitched, but the tone can be modulated with pressure and glides to create an expressive range of sounds.

There is a highly developed drum 'language', whereby each stroke has a word, or 'bol' associated with it. New bols are formed by combining strokes. 'Na' on the tabla, combined with 'Ghe' on the baya, produces a new bol: 'Dha'. These bols are strung together into complex patterns, both as pre-composed pieces, and in improvisation. For example, a short fixed composition, known as a Paran, in a 7-beat rhythmic cycle, known as Rupak tal, concluding with a tihai (a rhythmic cadence repeated three times):

Teteketa Ghen - na - Gedighene Dha - Thun - na - ke - te - Dha -  
 Terekite TakeTa - Teteketagedighene Dha - - - Ta - - - Gedighene Dha - - -  
 TerekiteTakeTa - Teteketgedighene Dha - - -  
 TerekiteTakeTa - Teteketgedighene Dha - - -  
 TerekiteTakeTa - Teteketgedighene Dha

More info? Follow the links below: [Part 2: Visual tour of a tabla set](#) [Part 3: Tabla terms and glossary](#)