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# **Make Your Own Wacky Instruments**

**by Jon Madin**



**Illustrated instructions for making musical instruments  
for schools, parades and just for fun.**

*Beatin' Path Publications, LLC*

*BPP-MYOWI*



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## Introduction

- This is an idea and instruction book for making a variety of simple musical instruments and sound making devices. The distinction between sound and music is not always clear, nor does it matter. 'Interesting' sounds are the priority.
- Most of the ideas presented here have an element of originality. I have tried to refrain from direct copying but some of the instruments are clearly adaptations of existing ones. For example, drums, thunder sheets and the dancing poles are included with suggestions for materials and dimensions that have worked well for me. For a number of the instruments, in particular the 'boing pipes' and J-pipes, I know of no previous version.
- With few exceptions, the instruments described here are not particularly loud. Playing soft instruments, lots of people can be involved. The sound texture produced is very different to the small group / loud instruments approach. A bonus is that singing and chanting works well with J-pipes, boing pipes and the softer drums.
- In the field of homemade instruments, ideas tend to go round and round with no one knowing exactly where they came from. Here are a few ideas that come from a shed in Herne Hill.

Alas, this book does not include instructions for making **echocellos** and **musical bikes**. Perhaps there will be a new volume soon with these new instruments and more.

## Tools

- Most of these instruments can be made with hand tools - saws, hammers, chisels, hand drill, screwdriver, file, sandpaper, tape measure, etc. There is a tendency for adults to use power tools such as cordless drills, jigsaws, electric sanders, etc., without considering the possibility of using the unpowered version, i.e. brace and bit drill, keyhole saw and sandpaper, which are more appropriate when involving children in these projects. Access to a vice and a strong workbench is recommended. A useful substitute is the 'workmate', a portable workbench which grips your work securely. If unusual tools or processes are required (e.g. glass cutting), they are mentioned in the text.

## Chromatic Tuners

- A chromatic tuner is invaluable for tuning instruments. It is a little more expensive than a guitar tuner, but is very easy to use. Kids get the idea quickly.



*Jon in his cluttered shed*

# J-Pipes

**Corrugated drainage pipe  
bent into a 'J'  
makes a great parade instrument**



*Brunswick Street Fringe Parade*

I was told that if you bend aggy pipe (unslotted corrugated flexible poly drainage pipe) and hit it, it makes sound. It certainly does, but only if hit in certain ways and hit in certain places. I tried circles and U's and pretzels and S's but the shape that really worked was the J. Short lengths of 50 mm pipe (say, down to 1 metre) work well, but the most impressive are the big J's made from 100 mm pipe. About 10 feet long and with streamers flying from the end, they are surprisingly easy to carry in 'events' and parades. They make a great sound, especially in multiples of the same pitch. The thin stick that keeps the pipe straight also doubles as a good percussive instrument when hit by the wooden part of a beater. Aggy pipe is available at plumbers suppliers and plastic plumbing places.

	Approximate length of pipe	Stick or bamboo length
<b>Low A</b>	2880	2080
<b>Low C</b>	2400	1600



*J-pipes, triple boings and shaker rings*

### **Beaters for J-pipes**

Cut 22 mm hardwood dowel into 300 mm lengths.

Sand the ends smooth with sandpaper or by scraping them on concrete paving.

Push an automotive shock absorber bush (available at auto parts stores) onto the dowel. The J-pipe is played by holding the string where it joins the straight section with one hand and hitting the inside of the curved section with a beater in the other hand.

For the small J-pipes described later, use smaller bushes on 300 mm lengths of 19 mm dowel.

Avoid using commercial xylophone mallets as they are usually too thin to produce an interesting sound when you click them together or hit sticks with them.

# Heath Robinson Instruments

**Here are a few instruments that were highly impractical and which no longer exist. It was fun making them.**

*What some poor children have to put up with. A fan-driven, amplified, swinging bed pan instrument made for a hospital music project*





*A bass glove hooter with milk bottle lid and wire key mechanism.  
It worked, but only for show and tell.*



*A barrel mounted 3-player boing pipe instrument made for the  
Melbourne Fringe Festival Parade*

Jon has worked in many areas associated with music playing, teaching, folkdance and instrument making. He has led workshops at kindergarten, all kinds of schools, tertiary institutions, and at many festivals.

He began making marimbas in 1990 after being introduced to the idea by Andy Rigby. Large versions of the marimbas were immediately popular with the junior secondary students, likewise with primary age children.

When you have a shed full of bits and pieces of pipe, dowel, wood, etc., the temptation to experiment with sound possibilities is hard to resist.

This book is the result.

# Profile

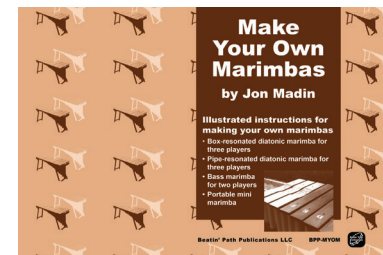
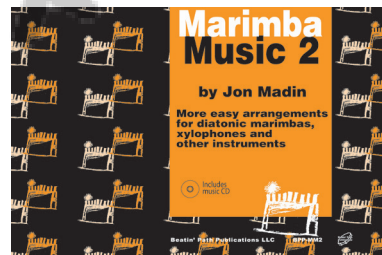
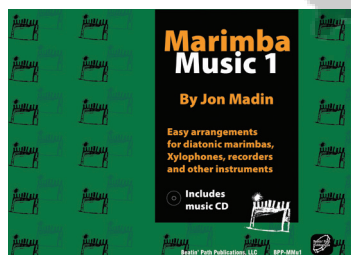


*Community marimba playing in Geelong*

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### **The Herringbone-a-phone**

*A golf ball rolls down and strikes the marimba bars (or aluminium tubing). The bars can be repositioned to play different tunes.*

*Padded bars make rests. A smaller version would be more practical.*

*This setup plays 'Jingle Bells!'*

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