

**WOODEN CASK DRUMS.** A LARGE NUMBER OF BEECH SLATS ARE GLUED TOGETHER TO FORM THE DRUM BODY. THE DRUMHEAD IS MADE OF NATURAL CALFSKIN AND THE ROPES ARE MADE OF HEMP. THE TECHNIQUE USED WAS WELL KNOWN DURING THE MEDIEVAL AND RENAISSANCE PERIODS.



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Drums made with calfskin, as any drummer knows, are very sensitive to humidity. Performing in an unheated locale on a rainy summer day can be practically impossible without the aid of a hairdryer (carefully, of course!). It's hard to believe it's the same instrument one played indoors in February when the humidity was very low. The calfskins sensitivity to humidity makes it imperative to slacken the lines when the drum is not in use. Make it a habit to do so after use.

The drum can be tightened and, if necessary, tuned. A properly tuned drum is more important in the base register. In the higher register tuning is not quite as important. Tuning a drum can be somewhat tricky. The drum's base tone is not particularly much stronger than its nearest overtones. This makes it difficult to hear which the base tone is and which the nearest overtones are. When tuning you must decide if the base tone or the fifth is to harmonise with the key being played, since the tuning interval is approximately a fourth.

When you tighten the drum you should tighten the leather straps in opposite pairs. Start with "6 o'clock and 12 o'clock". Continue with "3 o'clock and 9 o'clock" and so forth. If you can't get the tone low enough even after loosening the straps, try pressing against the skin with your palm.

The drone (the string stretched across the skin) is a controversial issue. The modern ear perceives it often as distortion. In pictures from the period, though, the drone is almost always clearly visible. The musician plays the drum on the same side as the drone. It is tightened so that it will "buzz" the maximum length of time in unison with the skin. Play lightly on the drum while you adjust the tuning screw. Not too tight for the best result.

After a while the ropes will have stretched so that it may be impossible to tune the drum high enough. Slacken the drum again and shorten the rope. A pair of flat nosed pliers can be used for tightening the rope if you are careful with them. Check that the rope is equally tight all around the drum. The knot or handle must then be retied. Carefully inspect how this is done before you untie the rope. Before you shorten the rope in this manner, make very sure that the slackness is not due to temporarily high humidity. Otherwise the drum could be destroyed when the humidity returns to lower levels.