



# Rebab

The **rebab** (Arabic: *ربابة*, *rabāba*, variously spelled *rebat*, *rubob*, *rebeb*, *rababa*, *rabeba*, *robab*, *rubab*, *rebob*, etc) is the name of several related string instruments that independently spread via Islamic trading routes over much of North Africa, Middle East, Central Asia, Southeast Asia, and parts of Europe.<sup>[1]</sup> The instrument is typically bowed, but is sometimes plucked. It is one of the earliest known bowed instruments, named no later than the 8th century, and is the parent of many bowed and stringed instruments.

## Variants

There are chiefly three main types:

A long-necked bowed variety that often has a spike at the bottom to rest on the ground (see first image to the right); thus this is called a **spike fiddle** in certain areas. Some of the instruments developing from this variant have vestigial spikes.

A short-necked double-chested or "boat-shaped" variant; plucked versions like the *Maghreb rebab* and the *kabuli rebab* (sometimes referred to as the *robab* or *rubab*) also exist.

Besides the spike fiddle variant, a variant with a pear-shaped body, quite similar to the Byzantine lyra and the Cretan lyra, also exists. This latter variant travelled to western Europe in the 11th century,<sup>[2]</sup> and became the rebec. This *rabāb* is the ancestor of many European bowed instruments, including the *rebec* and the *lyra*,<sup>[3]</sup> though not of those bowed instruments in the lyre family such as the *crwth*, *jouhikko*, *talharpa* and *gue*.

This article will only concentrate on the spike-fiddle Rebab, which usually consists of a small, usually rounded body, the front of which is covered in a membrane such as parchment or sheepskin and has a long neck attached. It has a long thin neck with a pegbox at the end, and has one, two or three strings. It also lacks a fingerboard. The instrument is held upright, either resting on the lap or on the floor. The bow is usually more curved than that of the violin.



St.Cecilia's - Rebab 1970



St. Cecilia's -1900 Tayaw

The Rebab, though valued for its voice-like tone, has a very limited range (a little over an octave), and was gradually replaced throughout much of the Arab world by the violin and kemenche. The Iraqi version of the instrument (*jawza* or *joza*) has four strings.

## Construction

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The Rebab is used in a wide variety of musical ensembles and genres, corresponding with its wide distribution, and is built and played somewhat differently in different areas. Following the principle of construction in Iran, Ahvaz, the rebab is a large instrument with a range similar to the viola da gamba, whereas versions of the instrument further west tend to be smaller and higher-pitched. The body varies from being ornately carved, as in Java, to simpler models such as the 2-string Egyptian "fiddle of the Nile." They may have a body made of half a coconut shell, while the more sophisticated versions have a metal soundbox, and the front may be half-covered with beaten copper, and half with cowskin. an endpin is similar to the cello.

## History

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According to Richard Wallaschek, bowed rebab was developed under Muslim culture.<sup>[4]</sup> The Rebab was heavily used, and continues to be used, in Arabic Bedouin music and is mentioned by Johann Ludwig Burckhardt in his travelog *Travels in Arabia*:<sup>[5]</sup>

"Of instruments they possess only the *rababa*, (a kind of guitar,) the *ney*, (a species of clarinet,) and the *tambour*, or tambourine."

It is called "joza" in Iraq, named after the sound box material made of a coconut shell. There is also a bowed instrument in Persian music named Kamanche which has similar shape and structure. It spread to different regions including South East Asia through Islamic trading routes.<sup>[6]</sup>

For a famous Iranian singer and rebab player see Hassaan Egzaar Chenani.

## Southeast Asia

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K.P.H. Notoprojo, famous Indonesian rebab player



Iraqi *jawza* (جوزه) player Salih Shemayil at the first Cairo Congress of Arab Music (1932)

In the Indonesian gamelan the rebab is an essential elaborating instrument, ornamenting the basic melody. A two-string bowed lute consisting of a wooden body, traditionally though now rarely a single coconut shell, covered with very fine stretched skin.<sup>[7]</sup> Two brass strings are tuned a fifth apart and the horse hair bow is tied loosely (unlike modern Western stringed instruments) with the proper tension controlled by the players bow hand, contributing to the difficult technique.<sup>[7]</sup> There are typically two per ensemble, one for pelog and one for slendro, never played together.<sup>[7]</sup>

The rebab does not have to conform exactly to the scale of the other gamelan instruments and can be played in relatively free time, finishing its phrases after the beat of the gong ageng (the big gong that "rules" the ensemble, see: colotomy). The rebab also frequently plays the buka when it is part of the ensemble.<sup>[8]</sup>

In Malaysia, especially the eastern Malaysian states of Kelantan and northern Terengganu (Besut), Rebab is one of important traditional music instruments. Its appearance is significantly different from rebabs from other regions. It has 3 strings, 3 tuning pegs (telinga), a decorative, detachable headstock (kepala), a skin made of cow's stomach and a small, nipple-like mute mechanism (puting). The Rebab is used in the makyong ensemble, tarik selampit and also in a healing ritual called "Main Peteri".

## See also

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- Ektara, one-string instrument used in traditional music from Bangladesh, Egypt, India, and Pakistan.
- Erhu
- Gadulka
- Gudok
- Gusle
- Kobyz
- Lijerica
- Masenqo

## References

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2. "rabab (musical instrument) - Encyclopædia Britannica" (<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/487848/rabab>). Britannica.com. Retrieved 2013-08-17.
3. Encyclopædia Britannica (2009), *lira* (<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/343204/lira>), Encyclopædia Britannica Online, retrieved 2009-02-20
4. Wallaschek, Richard (1893). *Primitive Music: An Inquiry Into the Origin and Development of Music, Songs, Instruments, Dances, and Pantomimes of Savage Races* (<https://books.google>



Rebabs, Mevlâna mausoleum, Konya, Turkey



Rebab from Yemen.

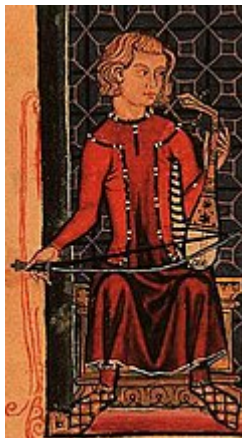


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8. Neil Sorrell. *A Guide to the Gamelan*. London: Faber and Faber, 1990. Pp. 97–98.



Bedouin playing a rebab during World War II



Rebab player



Three-string rebabs.



Rebabs.

The *Cantigas de Santa Maria*, c. 1260, captured some of the musical instruments introduced from Muslim dominated *Andalusia* to Southern Europe. The plucked and bowed versions existed alongside each other.<sup>[9]</sup>

The bowed instruments became the *rebec* or *rabel* and the plucked instruments became the *gittern*. Curt Sachs linked this instrument with the *mandola*, the *kopuz* and the *gambus*, and named the bowed version *rabâb*.<sup>[9]</sup>

9. Sachs, Curt (1940). *The History of Musical Instruments*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company. pp. 151–153.

## Sources

- Margaret J. Kartomi: *On Concepts and Classifications of Musical Instruments*. Chicago

## External links

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- [Turkish Rebab Master Ibrahim Metin Ugur \(http://www.rebab.net\)](http://www.rebab.net)
  - [Nay-Nava the encyclopedia of persian music instruments \(https://web.archive.org/web/20060819022716/http://nay-nava.blogfa.com/\)](https://web.archive.org/web/20060819022716/http://nay-nava.blogfa.com/)
  - [Rebab \(http://www.fiddlingaround.co.uk/med/Med+mid%20frame.html\)](http://www.fiddlingaround.co.uk/med/Med+mid%20frame.html)
  - [The Rebab \(http://www.chandrakantha.com/articles/indian\\_music/rabab.html\)](http://www.chandrakantha.com/articles/indian_music/rabab.html)
  - [Arabic rababa photo \(https://web.archive.org/web/20061213104646/http://www.nilecommerce.net:80/images/musical/accessories/web/rababa.jpg\)](https://web.archive.org/web/20061213104646/http://www.nilecommerce.net:80/images/musical/accessories/web/rababa.jpg)
  - [nuke.liuteriaetnica.it \(http://nuke.liuteriaetnica.it/Default.aspx?tabid=91\)](http://nuke.liuteriaetnica.it)
  - [FERNWOOD \(http://fernwoodmusicgroup.com/\)](http://fernwoodmusicgroup.com/), an American music group that uses a Rebab.
  - [Matthaios Tsahouridis \(http://www.tsahouridis.com\)](http://www.tsahouridis.com)
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