

# Balofon



**PEBA105**      pentatonic

The African Balafon is the ancestor of the family of idiophones like the Xylophone, Vibraphone, Marimbaphone and Glockenspiel. The culture of Balafon music is far advanced and still alive, especially in the countries south of the Sahel zone and the tropical rainforest area .

Balafon music reached its zenith in the 16th century at the royal court of Sikasso (Mali). With the generous promotion of the ruler at that time, the arts could blossom freely. The court musicians dedicated themselves to the development of their playing without any material hardship and brought the tradition of Balafon music to a high standard, influencing even non-African music.

Special features of the Balafon are the Calabashes, hollow pumpkins underneath the wooden sound plates that work as resonating chambers. The sides of the pumpkins are pierced at 2 or 3 places and covered with thin membranes. They start humming when the Balafon is played, similar to the effect of the Kazoo.

According to different cultures the instruments vary in construction and sound. Therefore you will find different sizes and tunings. The most common are the pentatonic and a kind of diatonic tuning that sounds unusual to Westerners: the African natural scale.