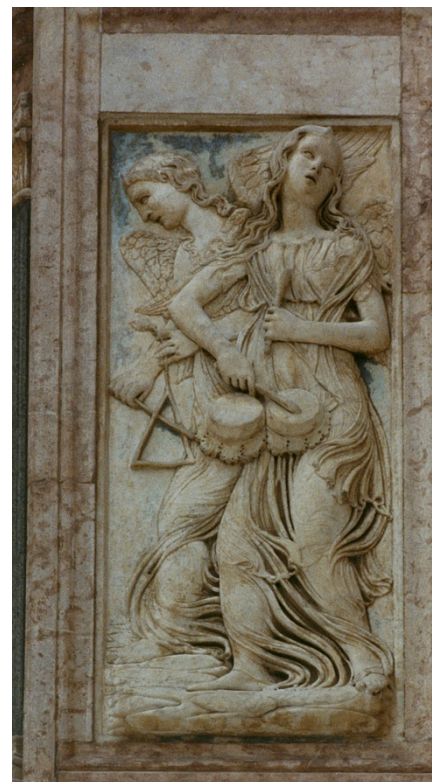


from Angels to Orchestra (PART II): *an iconographic history of the triangle through the 19th Century* by Mark Berry - last revision 09/22/2016

As was presented in PART I, the triangle is historically, an "allied cousin" of the sistrum. Prior scholarship regarding the first mention of a triangle in history was clarified and added to. We see triangles in iconography from the fourteenth century on. Many of these instruments had jingling rings attached to the horizontal bar. The iconography often depicts the triangle in a religious/contemplative context, almost always being played by angels (and sometimes muses).

Triangles Without Jingling Rings

Triangles without jingling rings are also found from the mid-fifteenth century up until modern times. Iconography of triangles without rings is abundant, however triangles with jingling rings appear a bit more frequently.



Curiously, the first known use of the *written* term “triangle” occurs in an inventory list in Wurttemberg, Germany from 1589, nearly two hundred years after the appearance of the triangle in the late fourteenth century.

Throughout the centuries, other terms for the triangle have included:

muthallath (Arab.)
scalischins (Fr.)
shalischim (Heb.)
staffa (It.)
staffetto (It.)
steigereif (Ger.)
trapezium (British Eng.)
trepie (Fr.)

trepit (Fr.)
trespié (Fr.)
triangel (Ger.)
triangolo (It.)
triangulo (Sp.)
tripet (Fr.)
tripos colybaeus (Lat.)
turianta (Arab. Colloq.)
zimbel (Ger.)



Metamorphoses: *from angels to orchestra ...*

Around the eighteenth century, a metamorphosis occurs. The use of the triangle begins to expand. The sound of the triangle begins to bring about new musical connotations and associations. This metamorphoses begins with the *Janissary Corps*.

The Janissary Corps

Janissaries were the elite infantry soldiers that formed the troops and bodyguards of the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire for nearly 500 years. Sultan Murad I created the force in 1383. The music of the Janissaries is considered to be the oldest form of marching military music in the world. Their bands were known as ***mehterân***. The purpose of *mehter music* was to terrify the enemy, and to inspire the Janissary soldiers in battle.



The mehterân utilized several percussion instruments, including the *kös*, the *davul*, the *nakkare*, the *zil*, and the *cevgen*. These instruments are still used today in historic reenactments.



The **cevgen** (also called the Turkish Crescent or The Jingling Johnnie) was a percussion instrument typically used by the mehterân. The instrument had numerous brass or bronze bells suspended from it. The cevgen was playing by shaking or stamping the instrument in rhythm while marching. There are small varieties which are carried over the shoulder, and large varieties, held upright in the manner of a flag.



The cevgen is also known by other names:

chapeau chinois (Fr.)
jingling johnnie (Eng.)
pavillon chinois (Fr.)
schnellenbaum (Ger.)
turkish crescent (Eng.)



"Turquerie"

The *turkish craze* or *turquerie* was a trend in Europe through the 17th and 18th Century reflecting the European fascination with Turkish art, music, and culture. A form of **exoticism**, Europeans were intrigued by all things Turkish. The increasing trade routes and diplomatic relationships between European nations and the Ottoman Empire helped fuel this fascination. Ambassadors and traders often told tales of exotic lands and their adventures. It was common for wealthy aristocrats to dress in lavish Turkish-style clothing and have their portraits painted.

"Turkish sounding" music was in vogue. Piano builders even built "Janissary Pedals" and "Turkish Stops" into their instruments to provide percussive sounds to accompany piano music having a "Turkish" flair.

The music of the *mehteran*, more specifically, it's exotic, soul-stirring power, greatly influenced European orchestral composers such as:

- Josef Haydn (*Symphony 100 "Military"*)
- Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (*Rondo alla Turca*, *Abduction from the Seraglio*)
- Ludwig van Beethoven (*Symphony No. 9*, *The Ruins of Athens*).



Usage

The triangle was not used in functional *mehter* music. The triangle was not used by Janissaries or *mehteran* while providing music for battle. However, when Janissary bands are mentioned in musical reference books, and the instrumentation is listed, the triangle *IS* included. For example, Willi Apel provides the following list: "bass drums, cymbals, triangles, military glockenspiel, Turkish crescent" (W. Apel, *The Harvard Dictionary of Music*, Cambridge, 1951). A longer list is supplied by James Blades: "a full Janissary band could include a number of bass drums, numerous pairs of cymbals, small kettle-drums, triangles, tambourines and one or more Turkish crescents" (J. Blades, *Percussion Instruments and Their History*).

The triangle was *not* used in functional *mehter* music.

The triangle was *not* used by Janissaries or *mehteran* while providing music for battle.

... however ...

These references may be a bit confusing at first. Triangles in a Janissary band? Triangles listed as being part of the instrumentation of the *mehterân*? Surely the *mehterân*, the bands of the Janissary soldiers, wouldn't be seen or heard with a triangle--an instrument that so vividly symbolized the Christian west. Blade's and Apel's listings can only be understood fully by examining the context of cultural and political ambassadorship and diplomacy of the times.

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Ambassadorship and Diplomacy

A 1453 treaty between Suleiman and King Francois I of France was cause for Francois to send an entire orchestra of musicians and instruments to

Suleiman as a gesture of friendship. In the 1500's, Ottoman business and exchange with Europe increased as diplomatic and commercial relations were expanded. In 1720, Augustus II of Poland received a *mehter* band and instruments as a gift from Sultan Ahmed III. The Polish military was quick to adopt Turkish elements into its own band. Empress Anna of Russia was given a *mehter* band as a gift from Turkey in 1725. It played for the signing of the Treaty of Belgrade ceremony in 1739. France and Austria followed suit and by the late 1700s, nearly all the military bands in Europe were utilizing elements of Turkish music, creating a "Janissary-like" sound of their own.

The triangle was the available instrument in Europe for composers to write rhythmically, and with a metallic color. The sound conjured images of exotic lands, music, and military might – quite a metamorphoses from its religious roots.

The gifts of diplomacy were highly valued and soon most European military units had bands that employed "Turkish-style" percussion, especially bass drum and cymbals. However, the military units still found the original Turkish *mehter* music to be harsh and displeasing. They were quick to add their own style, which included the use of the triangle. This is the reason the triangle is sometimes included as part of the instrumentation of the Janissary Band. Though not of true Turkish origin, the triangle was indeed found in European "Turkish-style" / "Janissary-style" bands.

Influenced by ambassadorship, diplomacy, "*Turquerie*" and the new sounds of their own military bands, European orchestral composers began to write for the triangle as a means of *emulating* the sounds of the *mehterân* -- the metallic sounds of the *zil* and *cevgen*, combined with the rhythmic pulse of the *kös*, *davul*, and *nakkare*. The triangle was the available instrument in Europe for composers to write rhythmically, and with a metallic color. The sound conjured images of exotic lands, music, and military might – quite a metamorphosis from its religious roots. The combination of "musical diplomacy" and "cultural fascination" is the primary means of metamorphoses --- *from angels to orchestra*.

Early writing / scoring for the triangle

The early use of the triangle in an orchestral/operatic setting was often not notated, and simply performed by ear. When a triangle part was notated, it was almost always in steady, repetitive eighth or sixteenth notes. This reflects the instrument's rhythmic roots. The context of early writing for the triangle is usually that of military music or an emulation of exotic *mehter* music. Composers began to write for the sound of the entire "Janissary-like" band. This came to be called, ***Banda Turca***, and is often found in an operatic context.

Early writing for the triangle include Cristoph Willibald Gluck's operas *La Cythère Assiégée* (1759), *Le Cade dupé* (1761), *La recontre imprévue ou The Pilgrims of Mecca* (1764), *Iphigénia en Tauride* (1778), and *Echo and Narcissus* (1779). Also, André Modeste Grétry's operas, *La fausse magie* (1775), *Lucille* (1783), and *La Caravane du Caire* (1783).

The 1820s

1820 – marks the start of the Romantic Era in music, a time when composers began to explore the sustaining qualities of the triangle

1824 – Beethoven completes Symphony No. 9, writing in an *Alla Turca* style for the final movement. However, by 1824, the style had become so fused with European elements that it hardly sounded exotic at the time of its premiere.

1826 – “The Auspicious Incident” - In 1826, the Janissary Corps had become both powerful and corrupt. Sultan Mahmud II saw a need to build a new army in a modern style. This change was a threat to the Janissaries who quickly revolted. However, Mahmud’s forces greatly outnumbered the Janissaries and a massacre ensued. This became known as “The Auspicious Incident” and it marks the end of the centuries-old Janissary Corps

Thus, the jingling rings associated with the triangle for five centuries prior, fell out of use.

Today, the 1820’s can serve as a point of reference for percussionists when considering whether or not to use a triangle with jingling rings in modern performance. Generally, a triangle with jingling rings is historically and musically appropriate for all European and American music prior to the 1820’s including orchestral, symphonic, operatic, sacred, secular, and military music.

Nineteenth Century Romanticism

As the nineteenth century progressed, European “Turquerie” went into decline. What replaced it was a strong sense of *Romanticism* in art, literature, and music. Composers begin to explore Romantic ideals such as the power of nature, existentialism, the supernatural, the macabre, and a sense of “high art” for posterity. Composers began to write massive, large-scale symphonic works and tone poems that captured these ideals. These large works required a large orchestra, and with a large orchestra came an expanded musical use of tone color.

Seeking new tone colors, Romantic-era composers began to explore the sustaining qualities of the triangle. Preference was given towards a long, sustaining sound that only triangles *without* rings could provide.

Thus, the jingling rings associated with the triangle for five centuries prior, fell out of use.



Images

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Page 8: middle left - organ, The Church of Our Lady of Bordeaux (1785) - upper right: stained glass, Beauchamp Chapel at St. Mary's Warwick Cathedral (mid-15th C.) - lower left: SS Phillip and James Church in Oxford, England(1862) - middle: choir screen, Lichfield, Staffordshire cathedral - lower right: panel, Oratory of Saint Bernardino, Perugia

Page 9: left: organ, Cintegabelle commune - right: fresco, Flavacourt commune

Page 10: top: Levni, *Mehterhâne*, from the "Surname-ı Vehbi" (fol. 172a - left- and 171b - right), Topkapi Palace in Istanbul, Turkey - lower left, middle, right: ©Michal Mañas, CC-BY-SA-2.5 Wikimedia Commons

Page: 11: upper left, right: ©Michal Mañas, CC-BY-SA-2.5 Wikimedia Commons - lower: Anthony van Dyck, *Sir Robert Shirley* (1622).

Page 13: stained glass, Church of Saint Séverin

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Dr. Berry is a founding member of the cello / percussion duo, Col [Legno](#).

Dr. Berry has earned degrees from the University of Michigan (DMA, MM) as well as from The Ohio State University (BMusEd). His principal teachers include Michael Udow and Salvatore Rabbio, with additional studies with Michael Bump, Julie Spencer, Ted [Piltzecker](#), Fernando Meza, and James L. Moore.

