

A Instructor's Guide to

Teaching Finger Cymbal History

By Dawn Devine ~ Davina

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Hello! I'm Dawn Devine ~ Davina and I'm an author, historian, and independent researcher. I'm currently engaged in archival research, tracking down the sources and imagery that helps us trace the history of our dance art.

"Teaching Finger Cymbal History" is a 45-minute slide-presentation followed by a 15 min Q&A session. During this talk, I'll be sharing "sound bite history" facts that you can add to your patter when talking to your students, or simply to build your knowledge base if you're a belly dance enthusiast. It's not just for teachers, but for all ambassadors of dance.

Key Concepts

- Dancers perform with a set of four cymbals worn on the thumb and second fingers of both hands.
- Belly dancers, of many genres, use finger cymbals today to carry on the tradition. Finger cymbals define our dance art.
- Finger cymbals are the deepest connection to our dancing ancestors. Ancient cymbals dating back 5 centuries have been found by archeologists.
- "Finger Cymbals" are the generic term used in English. Other terms come from different languages, the two most common "Zills" Turkish and "Sagat" Egyptian Arabic. There are many other terms.

Key Dates

Stone Age - Broken into three periods

- **Paleolithic** - "Old Stone Age" - 24,000-22,000 B.C.E
- **Neolithic** "New Stone Age" - 9000 BCE - 3500 BCE
- **Chalcolithic** "Copper Era" - 3000 - 2500

Bronze Age - Broken into three periods

- **Early Bronze Age** - 3000-2100 BCE
- **Middle Bronze Age** - 2100 - 1550 BCE
- **Late Bronze Age** - 1550 - 1200 BCE

Iron Age - 500 BCE - 332 BCE

Major Civilizations Mentioned in this talk

- **Phoenician** - 1200 - 800 BCE
- **Greek** - 1000 - 338 BCE
- **Greek Hellenistic** - 323 - 31 BCE
- **Roman** - 753 BCE - 395 CE
- **Byzantine** - 330 CE - 1453 CE
- **Islamic Era** - 570 CE
- **Ottoman Empire** - 1298 - 1919 CE
- **Industrial Revolution** - 1760 CE

Egypt - A country under successive waves of colonization

- Nile Valley Settled - 7000 BCE
- Upper and Lower Unite - 3000 BCE
- Pyramids - 2500 BCE
- Assyrian Rule- 669 BCE
- Persian Conquest - 525
- Greek Era - 332
- Roman Era - 31 BCE
- Christian Era - 33 CE
- Arab Conquest - 642 CE
- Cairo Established - 969
- Mameluke - 1250- 1517
- Ottoman Empire - 1517
- French Invasion - 1798
- Ottoman/Mohammad Ali - 1805 - 1953
- British Protectorate - 1882 - 1922

Key Vocabulary

What determines the quality of Finger Cymbals

- **Composition** - Metal quality
- **Shape** - Bell - Rim - Edge - slots or hole
- **Gauge** - Thickness of the metal
- **Dimensions** - Diameter & Height

Finger Cymbals is the American/English name. The name will vary from country to country including:

- Zills
- Sagat
- Toura
- Sanj
- Chumpar
- Nuiqs
- Zel

Finger Cymbals are Concussive Idiophones - instruments that when struck, resonate from the vibrations made of their composition.

Ancient Relatives

- **Clappers**
- **Sistrum** (Egypt)
- **Crotale** (Rattle)

Modern Relatives

- Turkish **Spoons**
- Spanish **Castanets**
- Moroccan **Qarkebs**

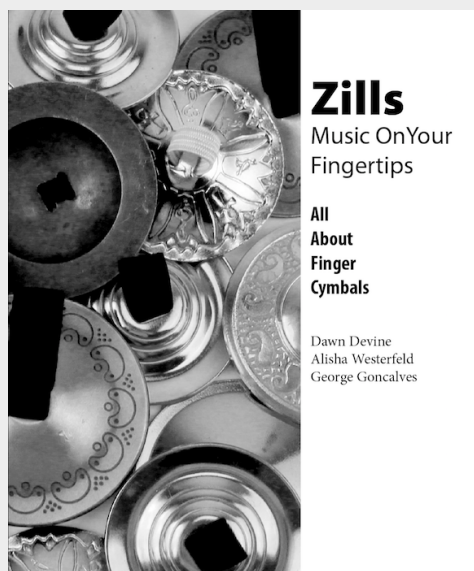
Finger Cymbal Alloys

- **Bronze** = Copper + Tin
- **Brass** = Copper + Zinc
- **Nickel Silver** = Copper + Tin + Zinc

To get the most ancient sound, purchase a set of 2.5" diameter cast bronze finger cymbals with a single hole.

Fast Facts for Ambassadors of Dance

- Finger Cymbals are ancient! The earliest examples of finger cymbals date to the bronze era, 3000 BCE.
- Ancient finger cymbals are found around the eastern rim of the Mediterranean including Greece, Turkey, Lebanon, Israel, and Egypt.
- Finger cymbals get their "ring" from the presence of copper in the alloy, or metal recipe.
- Historically, finger cymbals appear in the historical record in this order:
 - **Bronze** (3000 BCE)
 - **Brass** (17th century CE)
 - **German Silver** (19th century CE)
- Belly Dance enters the historic record with the advent of pictorial arts the time varies from location to location.
- Before the invention of elastic (1845) dancers used metal rings or ties to wear their finger cymbals.
- Before the invention of recorded music (1857), finger cymbals allowed dancers to make their own music and dance anytime!
- Throughout history, finger cymbals are made using three methods:
 - **Sand Cast** - Since Deep Antiquity
 - **Hammered** - Iron Age
 - **Machine Made** - 19th century CE



Like this Talk? Grab my Book!

"Zills: Music on Your Fingertips" is the book I wrote for my dance students to share the history of cymbals. It also includes approaches to making sounds, techniques for practice and play, selection, care, cleaning, and storing.

- Print & Digital - Studio Davina [Etsy Store](#)
- Print on [Amazon.com](#)
- Ask your Favorite Bellydance Dealer