Instrument:
*Naqqāra*, military kettledrums

Country:
Turkey

Flag:
Red has been prominent in Turkish flags for 700 years. The star and crescent are Muslim symbols. The star was added by the Christian Emperor Constantine for the Virgin Mary, and the Ottoman Turks retained it in 1493. The flag has been used since 1844 and became official in 1936.

Size and Population:
Turkey has an area of 300,948 square miles, slightly larger than Texas, and has a coastline of 2,211 miles. It has an estimated population of 80,694,485 as of July 2013; ranked 17th in the world.

Geography and Climate:
Turkey lies both in Europe and in Asia. The southeastern tip of Europe is Thrace, the site of Turkey’s largest city, Istanbul. To the east is the rest of Turkey, a large mountainous peninsula called Anatolia or Asia Minor, an area with several large cities including the capital Ankara. This land has rich farmland but much of it is rocky and barren. Turkey borders Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, Iran, Iraq, and Syria. Three seas border the nation: the northern Black Sea, the western Aegean Sea, and the southern Mediterranean Sea. The Straits, three important bodies of water that have played a major role in Turkish history, separate Thrace from Anatolia. The western valleys are fertile areas for growing barley, corn, wheat, and olives but a narrow strip along the Mediterranean Sea requires irrigation for grain, fruits, and cotton. The eastern plateau has high mountains extending to Turkey’s border. The Pontic Mountains in the north have few roads and railroads crossing them. The southern Taurus Mountains cut off most of the Mediterranean Sea from the central plateau region. The Mesopotamian lowlands, bordered by the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers in the southeast, are excellent farming areas.

Turkey’s climate varies greatly across the country. The coasts have rainy winters and dry summers. The Aegean Sea coast can get temperatures above 90° F. while northern Turkey has mild summers and very cold winters with temperatures as low as -40° F. Rainfall ranges from 20
inches along the western Aegean Sea to more than 100 inches near the Black Sea in the north. There is little rainfall on the western plateau making it difficult for farmers.

**Background and History:**  
Turkey is one of seventeen Middle Eastern countries that are interconnected by history, religion, and culture. Asian and European peoples have ruled what is now Turkey since ancient times. In the 1300s, Muslim Turks called the Ottomans began building a strong empire that controlled much of the Middle East, southeastern Europe and northern Africa. This meant that Islamic law controlled Turkish life for almost 1,000 years.

The earliest known people of Turkey, the Hittites, ruled Anatolia around 1500 B.C. They were conquered by the Romans in 63 B.C. After his conversion to Christianity in 330 A.D., Constantine the Great moved the capital of the Roman Empire to Constantinople, what is now Istanbul. In 1071 A.D., the Seljuk Turks conquered most of Anatolia (now central Turkey), and almost three hundred years later the Ottoman Turks captured Constantinople, which marked the historical beginnings of the Ottoman Empire (1326-1922). The Ottomans captured Constantinople in 1453, ending the Byzantine Empire. The Ottoman Empire reached its peak in the 1500s, ruling much of the Middle East as well as parts of northern Africa and southeastern Europe. In 1923, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (a title meaning “father of the Turks”) set up the Republic of Turkey and began a nationwide modernization effort that included doing away with many Islamic traditions. 

A series of military defeats between 1783 and 1914 gradually reduced the territory of the Ottomans, and as an ally of Germany, Turkey lost much of its remaining land after WWI. In 1923, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (a title meaning “father of the Turks”) set up the Republic of Turkey and began a nationwide modernization effort that included doing away with many Islamic traditions. Turkey joined the United Nations in 1945 and soon afterward the U.S. gave aid for Turkey’s resistance to Soviet expansion. After a military coup in 1960, free elections followed a year later. Turkey intervened militarily on the island of Cyprus in 1974 to protect Turkish Cypriots and prevent a Greek takeover. There was a second military takeover in Turkey in 1980 and again a return to civilian control in 1983.

Relations between Turkey and Greece have improved over the past several years. Turkey is now in a period of economic growth.

**Culture:**  
Nearly all of the Turkish people are Muslims, followers of Islam. However, in the 1920s the government discouraged or forbade people from practicing Ottoman traditions of the past, particularly those customs associated with Islam. Turkish people are 70-75 percent Turkish and 18 percent Kurdish, an Islamic group living in southeast Turkey. The population is 99.8 per cent Muslim with the remainder composed of Christians and Jews. The official language is Turkish, but Kurdish, Arabic, Armenian and Greek are also spoken. As a developing country, over half of the workers are farmers but since the 1940s the economy has become more industrialized. About half of present-day Turks live in the cities and half live on farms. Houses range from thatched roof homes to those built with cement blocks for the middle class. Turks are famous for their *shish kebab* (shish kah-bob), meat and vegetables cooked on a stick. A favorite sport is wrestling while covered in olive oil. Students are required to attend school until age 15, and 87 percent of people over the age of 15 can read and write. One of
Turkey’s major artistic contributions is in architecture, particularly its great domed Byzantine cathedrals and Islamic mosques.

The musical focus of this lesson is the naqqāra (nah-car-ah), two small kettledrums used in one of the most influential types of music from Turkey’s past, the Janissary (jan-uh-sehr-ee) or Mehter (mek-tair) military band. In Turkish military terms a Janissary is a highly trained professional soldier forming the core of the sultan’s guard, first established in the 1300s. This group originally consisted of slaves and prisoners of war, but even as disciplined soldiers they were considered slaves of the sultan, a Muslim monarch in Turkey.

Over many centuries the Ottoman Turks expanded their empire through military conquest, and as they did, percussion music was an important part of those battles. Percussion was important for three reasons: it inspired soldiers to win, it signified the importance of the leaders, and it frightened the enemy. This military music was performed as a sign of majesty, splendor, and power even though the music itself evolved from humble carnival music. The dignity and sacred nature of the state are expressed in the hitting of the drum. Composers of this type of music carefully used these instruments for this desired effect. During a war the ruler was housed in a large tent and the ruler’s two large kettledrums or kös (coss) stood in front of his tent. The kös are a larger version of the original naqqāra kettledrums. The Janissary or Mehter band played under the ruler’s standard or emblem, and the two were always used together.

The Mehter band began in 1299 when Osman Gazi was given a tabl or davul as a symbol of his new high rank of bey or lord. The Mehter band played when the ruler left the tent, and the kös played special beats to demonstrate the ruler’s power (called “beating the nevbet”), especially to cause fear in the enemy. The kös would signal the soldiers when to attack or halt. If the Mehter was destroyed the battle could more easily be lost. During peace the drums and Mehter were used to help spread news and announcements on behalf of the state. The largest and most important Mehter, the Sultan’s Mehter Band or “Tabl ü alem-I hassa” would have nine of each instrument (see Music: Instruments & Rhythm section below); later up to sixteen might be used. Aside from the ruler, other important people in the government might have their own Mehter band and these groups would be found in many provinces in the country.

As Ottoman expansion moved into southeastern Europe, the power and effect of Mehter music made a tremendous impression on European composers. The German Christoph Gluck (1714-87), the Austrian Wolfgang Mozart (1756-91) and the German Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827) were impressed by these bands and incorporated this music and these instruments into their compositions. As a result of this influence, many of the wind and percussion instruments found today in the modern marching band and concert orchestra came from the Turkish Janissary bands. Today’s drum majors likely originated with the Mehter conductor. The long association of kettledrums with trumpets can be heard today in the theme music for the Olympic Games.

Janissaries lasted for hundreds of years but were dissolved in 1826 when they threatened the sultan’s authority. Reestablished in 1914, the Royal Mehter Band, called the Mehterhane-I Hakani, was attached to the Imperial Military Museum. The band was abolished again in 1935 until 1952 when it was reformed as an institution of historical importance at the Istanbul Military Museum. Today this band performs several times a week and at special official ceremonies. It
reminds the Turkish people and visitors about the significance and history of the Ottoman Empire.

**Music: Instruments & Rhythms**

**Instruments:** The Mehter band might have six long trumpets or borus (bo-ruz), ten long oboes or zurnas (zur-nahs), six pairs of cymbals or zils (zilz), eight large cylindrical drums or davuls (duh-vuls), several pairs of large kettledrums or kös, and eight sets of small kettledrums or naqqāra. Whether marching or mounted on horseback, this ensemble projected a wall of sound that could be heard far into the distance. Percussion instruments used in the Mehter band are shown below in the Resources section.

The Arabic naqqāra has many names including nakkare, naghara, and naker; today it is commonly referred to as küdüm in Turkey. Its forms vary as well, but the instrument mainly consists of two small bowl-shaped kettledrums made of metal, wood, or clay with skin heads that are laced on to the drums. The two drums are slightly different sizes, under a foot in diameter, often have gut snares, and are tied together and attached to the player’s waist or held at the left side against the body. A stick inserted through the lacing on the drum increases tension on the head. Naqqāra are usually played with small cloth-covered beaters. The kös are a large version of the naqqāra made of copper, covered with decorative cloth, and struck with large sticks. A version of the naqqāra called nakers reached Europe by the 1200s and was used in many types of music. Because of this, the Arabic naqqāra are considered the predecessors of the modern European timpani. The naqqāra likely originated in Syria as a portable set of drums with nomadic tribes.

**Rhythms:** There are many Middle Eastern rhythms but this lesson will focus on two distinct Arabic rhythms played by a Mehter band: one has eight fast counts and the other has nine slow counts. When referring to rhythms in the Middle East, the three basic strokes on a drum help with the rhythm. The stroke “dum” stands for a low sound and “tak” for a high sound; two fast high strokes would be “taka,” either two hits by the same hand or a combination of right and left. The musicians march to a distinctive rhythm--after three beats they turn to the right and left, followed by these words in Arabic: “Rahim Allah, Kerim Allah” (Merciful God, Gracious God).

The two rhythms presented in this lesson, Ayub (eye-yoob) and Karsilama (car-see-lah-mah), are two important types of Turkish beats. Ayub is a fast eight-beat count with an alternating “dum” and “tak,” but the “tak” after the first count is slightly delayed. So instead of playing the sounds “dum….tak….dum….tak,” the Ayub rhythm is “dum……tak dum….tak.” The repeated “dum” sound gives the rhythm a trance quality, which is why it is used by the whirling dervishes, a Muslim religious sect in Turkey. The second rhythm, Karsilama, means “face to face,” a reference to its use in dance. Its slow nine-count rhythm has double time or “taka” hits on most of the “tak” strokes as follows: “dum…taka…dum…taka…dum…taka…dum…taka…taka.”

**Listen & Play Along:** *Use Roots of Rhythm CD Notes to support this section.*

*Note to teachers: if instruments are not readily available, consider having students make their own (a general activity for making drums can be found in the Roots of Rhythm: Introduction section, and a specific naqqāra-making activity can be found in the Resources area of this section) or encourage them to improvise - using everyday items such as buckets, containers,
phone books, desk tops, etc., as instruments. Rhythms can also be created with body percussion including hand clapping, foot tapping, finger snapping, etc.

Listen to Track 65 of the Roots of Rhythm Companion CD to hear the sound of the naqqāra in Mehter music. Listen to Track 66 for the Karsilama rhythm. Now it’s time to play along. If you don’t have these instruments, see the Resources section for instructions on how to make your own naqqāra, or use instruments from the music classroom as substitutes. For example, use bongos for the naqqāra, two tom toms, large and small, for the kōs, small “rhythm instrument” cymbals for the zils, and a medium tom-tom for the davul. Find a thin twig to hit the left side of the davul for the “smack” sound.

Listen to Track 67-76 of the Roots of Rhythm Companion CD and play along with the rhythms. Say the “dum” and “tak” sounds along with the Ayub rhythms on the CD. If you can say it, you can play it. Have others say or clap the various rhythmic parts with you, as students do in Turkey. Now add the double “taka” hits as you try the Karsilama rhythm.

Listen to the CD again, read the notation and play the Ayub and Karsilama rhythms provided in the Resources section below. Try the accented rhythms in bold first.

Naqqāra:

Photograph by Craig Woodson.
Resources: The Mehter Percussion Section with Naqqāra Rhythms

**Mehter Percussion Ensemble Rhythms: Ayub and Karsilama**

**Ayub**

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**Karsilama**

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**Notes:**
- **L** = bold for accent
- **R** = low “dum” sound
- **L** (no underline) = high
- **II** = 2 fast hits

**Making Your Own Naqqāra:** Make your own naqqāra with two different sizes of flower pots (Ex. 6” and 7” diameters), packaging tape, two chopsticks, scissors and sandpaper. Follow the steps shown in the Introduction section of this guide, but first sand the top rim of each pot. Add a protective wad of tape before joining the two drums together with a double wrap of tape around both drums.