Shaping

Use your imagination to make the didgeridoo into the shape you want

Creative part of making a didgeridoo out of plastic or PVC. Use your imagination to make it into the shape you want. This page covers shaping of the plastic and how to change the overall look of the instrument. These are just some of the techniques I use, but the list is not exhaustive. For for specific information on fashioning mouthpieces and bells, please see the next page.

Heating the Plastic

I have experimented with different ways of heating plastic pipes, some not so safe but have settled now on two main techniques:

Hot Air Paint Stripper

Available from most diy and hardware shops, the hot air gun can be used to heat small or large areas. Often there are attachments that come with the gun that will help to heat a smaller or larger area. Patience is required when heating the plastic didgeridoo it will slowly warm up and remain stiff and solid then quick quickly become soft. The thing to look for is a change in the surface tension of the plastic. It will go shiny when it is ready to use.

Gas

Whether a kitchen hob indoors or something different like a camping stove, I find this technique easier than the hot air gun mentioned above as the heat source is static and does not require me to hold it. I can therefore use both of my hands to hold, rotate, twist, and position the didgeridoo. The flame is visible so it easier to tell where the heat is affecting the plastic. Different size gas rings will help heating smaller and larger areas and if in a kitchen the extractor fan is always switched on.

I ALWAYS have a source of water nearby and a damp towel (just in case!). The cold water is also used to set the plastic and cool it. If I am holding the didge in position with both hands I can immerse it in water or run under a cold water tap to cool it down, which also speeds the whole process up no end.

Sanding the Bore

Applying paint, glue, and other materials to plastic can be difficult, especially as the surface is so smooth. Invariably the plastic is resistant to many substances as well as being abrasion resistant. By dealing with this now you can save a lot of time and hassle later on.

Before any shaping of any kind, sand the bore of the didgeridoo. This will achieve several objectives. It changes the sound slightly due to the surface of the bore being roughed up the soundwaves do not bounce off the internal surface as smoothly. Many people do not like the sound of plastic didgeridoos as they sound like, er plastic.

By sanding the bore each instrument will have a unique sound.

If you want to apply something to the wall of the didgeridoo the scratches caused by the sanding will provide a key for adhesion. Finally, by sanding the bore now means you won't have to do it later and quite it can't be done later

if the shape has been changed.

To sand the bore I use a long piece of dowel with sandpaper stapled/glued to the end. This makes it quick and easy taking but a minute.

Different Methods to Shape the Bore

Twisting

One effect can be gained by heating the tube and twisting it to greater or lesser degrees. Be carefull with this bit because if the plastic is to hot then it may collapse, end up to thin and lose its strength.

I highly recommend using an off cut or spare piece of plastic to practice on.

You can warm the plastic didgeridoo in small or large areas. The larger the area the more risk there is of overstretching the plastic. Also bear in mind that heat will travel up the didge so make sure you are wearing gloves.

When heating a large area it is best to do it gradually and evenly. Don't heat one area for to long as it will end up hotter than the rest of the plastic and will twist and stretch differently making it more difficult to get and even effect.

Twists can be gradual or sharp, and can be used to make the bore narrower and thus raising the backpressure.

To help with making a long even twist, or to ensure the resultant twist is round, a form can be placed inside the didge. This can be utilised when making a slide didgeridoo to create a snug fit on the smaller pipe (more details on the sliding didge page).

Stretching

Stretching the plastic can create some nice effects but is difficult to do. Unless you use some form of support the plastic becomes weak in the middle (where it is hottest) causing it to sag. Not advisable with thinner walled plastic pipes or if the plastic is brittle (as used in drainpipes). Take your time in heating the plastic to make sure it is at the right temperature - I have thrown away a number of pipes because I tried to rush this!

Having said that, some really good effects can be created by stretching the plastic, especially when enlarging the bell or narrowing the mouthpiece end of the instrument.

Kinks and Creases

Other effects can be created such as imitation in the wood, or creases. This is achieved by heating the plastic with one side being warmer than the other, then bending the pipe at an angle. The warmer and therefore softer the plastic, the more profound the resultant crease will be.

Another technique is to heat the plastic and bend it as suggested above but then try and straighten it again. You won't be able to do this as there will always be some distortion however the finished 'distortion' will have a different aesthetic and be more subtle, reminiscent of stressed wood.

Creases can be put in the plastic. Start by warming the plastic where you want to put the crease, ensuring the plastic is evenly heated. Once the plastic is warm enough hold the didgeridoo either side of the heated part. Keep the plastic level then push the two sides towards each other. This will cause the plastic to buckle outwards. Evenly applied pressure will create an even crease perpendicular to the length of the didgeridoo. Pushing at slight angles will create an angular that will vary according to how much you bend it!

Pressing into the plastic

Some great effects can be created by pressing items into the plastic (do take though). Heat the plastic up then press an object into the surface, however, you do not need to heat the object up.

Some features that occur naturally in wood can be emulated quite well, for example the head of a coach bolt can look like the dents left by knots, missing thorns etc.

How many and where you put them is up to you. One thing that will also happen is that the sound will change as the shape of the bore is changing. Obviously it will depend on the size, depth, number and location of the dents/marks as to exactly how the sound changes and experimentation is the best way to find out what is best for you.

Longer marks or tracks can be pressed into the plastic.

This can help if you plan to attach something to the outside when finished - like a vine or the marks left from a vine (like the didge I made for my daughter Alice).

Pushing the plastic out

A number of other effects can be created by pressing the plastic outwards. This is achieved by using a pole of some sort (e.g. broom handle), I use the dowel with sandpaper on it I use to sand the bore - but use the end without the sandpaper!

If I want to achieve finer outward dents and effects I attach something to the end of the pole/dowel. Normally this is a screw of some sort.

As with pressing in, the bore will change with each impression depending on the size, depth, number and location of marks you make.

I thought to use this technique to create a slowly widening bore, unfortunately if was a dismal failure as the dowel ends up pivoting inside the bore because I had to hold it nearer the end.

Planning

As you get more adventurous you will find it beneficial to plan out what you are going to do. I have lost count of the number of times I put a divot or dent in the plastic, then couldn't get past it to do the next effect which ruined the whole aesthetics.

As a footnote, these are just some of the things you can do with plastic when making a didgeridoo, they are some of the techniques I have used or learnt. The list is not exhaustive and is only limited by your imagination.

Have FUN!

Back to top of page..>>

Back to How to Make a Plastic Didgeridooo Index...>>

© 2006-2011 | Web design: Copperman Web Design