



WATER DRUMS

A particular type of drum evolved with the establishment of the Native American Church in 1918. This church began in the Southwest among the White Mountain Apaches in the latter part of the 19th century. It is a mixture of Christianity and Indian religious practices. Today it is the most widespread indigenous religion among Native Americans in the United States, Canada and Mexico.

The Native American Church holds a cleansing and healing session once a week. A special drum, called a water drum, is central to this ritual. The water drum is a small iron or clay pot with the handles removed. The drum is filled half way with water and then the open end is covered with rawhide. Partially filling the drum produces a special deep sound when it is played. The beating of the drum is continuous throughout the cleansing ceremony. Its rhythmic vibration and special tone are intended to deeply affect the emotions of the participants and increase the power of the ceremony. Beating of the water drum is the only continuous activity during the 24-hour-long session. For the Native American Church, as for Native Americans themselves, drums and drumming are central to a balanced spiritual existence.