

Vocal box holds key to ancient instrument

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Australian researchers have discovered the secret of the ancient art of playing the didgeridoo lies in the voice box.

The didgeridoo is an aboriginal instrument traditionally made from a tree trunk hollowed out by termites. It can produce a wide variety of timbres, though usually playing only a single note.

A skilled player alters the acoustics inside the mouth to set up strong resonances at certain frequencies, the *Journal Nature* reported.

This is done by moving the glottis, the part of the windpipe that contains the vocal cords, say researchers led by Joe Wolfe of the University of New South Wales in Sydney.

This enhances certain frequencies while inhibiting others. It's easy to make a basic sound. But learning these strong formants takes a while.

Skilled didgeridoo players do this subconsciously, Wolfe says. "None of the players to whom we've spoken is aware of it."

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