

Music

Khasi-Jaiñtia music today reflects a range of cultural influences, both indigenous and external. Shillong's Rock scene is famous throughout India and the city's radio stations broadcast songs in Khasi and Pñar alongside the latest Bollywood and Western hits. On Sundays, Gospel music and the occasional Welsh hymn emanate from the churches.



Khasi musician Leonard Syiemlieh performing in Shillong



Rani Marin playing the Tangmuri, a double reed wind instrument

Rhythm is at the centre of Khasi-Jaiñtia music. There are 32 beats, played on a variety of drums ranging in size from the dish-sized *Ka Padiah* to the large bass drum, the *Ka Bom*. During the dances and rituals of the traditional festivals, the drums combine with the high pitch of the *Tangmuri*, a lively double-reed wind instrument.



The large drum *Ka Bom* and other Khasi folk instruments



Behdeinkhlam Festival in Jowai, Jaintia Hills

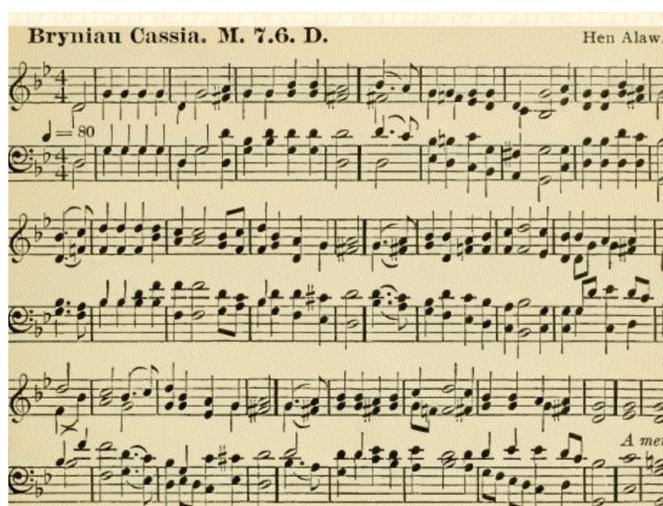


Jai Makri playing the Muin, an instrument made from bamboo

Khasi-Jaiñtia culture has a strong oral tradition, which is passed on around the hearth. Folk tales and songs are often accompanied by the *Duitar*, a wooden instrument played by striking silk strings with a bamboo plectrum called a *Thymbrong*. The oral culture is also evident in the *phawar* tradition, in which singers compete to improvise the best lines, often during sporting events.



The *phawar* singing tradition is often evident at archery competitions



Bryniau Cassia; a hymn named after the Khasi Hills, borrows a Welsh folk melody

The Welsh mission brought many hymns to Meghalaya, translating them to the Khasi and Pñar languages. It is said that the Welsh introduced harmony and choral singing, which explains the popularity of choir competitions in the region today. The missionary John Roberts (1842-1908) translated over 70 hymns as well as the song 'Hen Wlad fy Nhadau' to 'Ri Khasi, Ri Khasi', which became an anthem to the Khasi-Jaiñtia people.

Missionaries also took Indian melodies and lyrics back to Wales. John Roberts was known to sing in Khasi when on furlough back in Wales and missionary John 'Pengwern' Jones set the hymn 'Y Pererin a'r Iesu' to a Bengali fishing song he'd learned in Sylhet.

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