

What to look for in a tabla

Compared to many instruments, tabla are relatively inexpensive to purchase. The hidden cost, however, is in their maintenance. This cost is increased by the following factors:

- Dramatic changes in humidity and temperature
- Careless storage and transportation
- Damage from careless tuning
- Dramatic tuning adjustments
- Poor quality shells and heads
- Sweaty hands
- Overuse of talcum powder
- Intensive playing over a long period of time

I always recommend that instruments are tried before they are bought, but acknowledge that with tabla this is not always possible. I have listed on my web site some mail-order shops which have proved to be reliable over the years for me and my students.

But what if you are a beginner and don't know what to look for in a tabla?

As a general guide, tabla are better if they are:

- More expensive
- Heavier in weight
- Sound resonant and loud
- Sustain well
- Have clean heads without nicks or blemishes

Some more specific criteria for the individual drums:

BAYAN

- 9.25-9.5" head
- Gab (black spot) intact and without buzzes
- Made from copper or nickel-plated brass (not aluminium!)
- Strap without nicks
- One-piece strap (not multiple pieces knotted together)
- Tuning pegs on baya are optional and not necessary

DAYAN

- 5.25-6" head
- Resonant at pitch C or C#
- Gab (black spot) intact and without buzzes
- Made from hardwood such as shisham or rosewood
- Strap without nicks
- One-piece strap (not multiple pieces knotted together)
- Tuning pegs (8) solid condition

Furthermore, your tabla set should come with solid, heavy rings (cushions), good covers to protect the heads, and a heavy tuning hammer. You'll need a decent bag for local transportation and a flight case for airline travel, also.

Jonathan Dimond

<http://www.jonathandimond.com>