

Proposal for Emoji: Maracas

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Date: December 16th, 2019

Identification

A. **CLDR short name:** Maracas

B. **CLDR keywords:** Instrument, Music, Party

Closest Unicode Emojis:



Possible ZWJ:



Images



Sort location

C. *Category: Musical Instrument*

D. *Ordering:*



Reference Emoji(s)

The emojis used for reference are likely the party popper emoji, the musical score emoji, and the drum and/or guitar emoji mixed together.

Abstract:

Music is intrinsically connected to our cultural identities. Maracas, specifically, can be found in a wide variety of musical genres, and their influence is heard within such throughout the world. Maracas are a very common and recognizable instrument on a global scale, while simultaneously represent and typically stands as a symbol for Latin American culture.

Introduction:



Maracas are an instrument that are fundamental to the musical genres of salsa, guaracha, son, and the Afro-Puerto Rican musical tradition known as bomba.⁴ They are integral in Latin American dance bands, and they have become increasingly popular in pop groups and percussion ensembles, as well as primary school music education.⁵ Their importance to salsa can be compared to the role of the snare drum in pop and rock music⁶—an emoji that already exists.

Maracas are commonly known and used in many cultures throughout the world. They share a presence in the Latin American countries of Cuba, Venezuela, Puerto Rico, Colombia, Mexico, and Paraguay, as well as the African countries of Ghana (known as the axaste), Guinea (cjabara), and Liberia (chequere).⁷ While maraca-like instruments are found widely distributed in West African countries, it is the Latin American and Cuban cultures that advanced the performance practices and infused the maraca into

¹ Garabís, Juan Otero. "Las Cuatro Estaciones De Rubén." 80grados, November 23, 2012.

² Hector Aviles, "Latin Music History: The Maracas Indigenous Origins," Latino Music Cafe, December 5, 2019

³ Alberto, Yireen. "Classically Cuban." WFMT, April 29, 2019.

⁴ "Maracas," National Museum of American History (National Museum of American History), accessed December 8, 2019)

⁵ Gallagher, Louise. "10 Facts about the Maracas." OUPblog. Oxford University Press USA, June 21, 2016.

⁶ Evan Bailyn, "Maracas," Music of Puerto Rico, accessed December 8, 2019,

⁷ "Shekere." Wikipedia. Wikimedia Foundation, August 27, 2019.


various musical genres. Maracas can be found within the percussion section of these forms of music, accompanied by the claves, bongos, and guiro.⁸

While they are an instrument, maracas are also used to represent cultural holidays, such as Cinco de Mayo and Día de la Independencia, or parties for many occasions.

Maracas can also be found within the United States where it is sometimes disrespected as an instrument. Here, maracas are often thought of as toys, party favors, and tourist mementos. They might also be depicted on bags of chips or in theme with appropriated items.⁹ While adding the proposed emoji could potentially allow for further disrespect in certain contexts, I believe it would not outweigh the benefit of the cultural recognition and appreciation thereof. The current lack of culturally relevant instruments in the emojis available are ever present, and I propose that maracas are added.

Selection factors inclusion

Compatibility

The Maracas emoji is  applicable within many cultures, music genres, and symbols across the world. While there are many names and uses of the maraca, its traditional form remains generally unchanged and would be recognizable in many contexts.

Expected usage level

Frequency

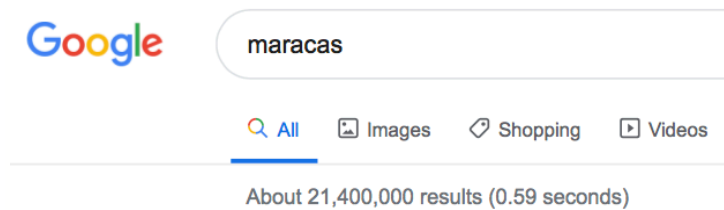
It should be noted that I chose to call the emoji “maracas” rather than a different title because it had the highest frequency of search results.

- **Google Search - 21,400,000 results**
 - A. For a measurable comparison, I specifically chose instruments that are also typically associated with certain musical genres.

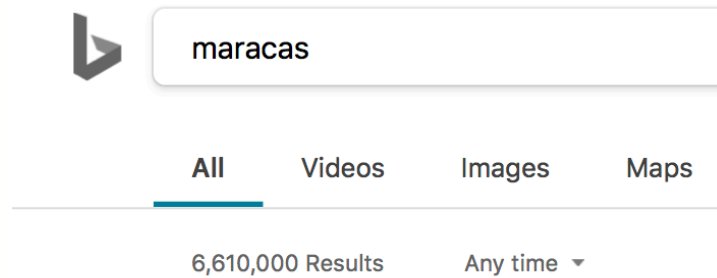
⁸ John Hill, “Shake It, But Don’t Break It. The History and Evolution of Maracas,” *Shake It, But Don’t Break It. The History and Evolution of Maracas*, January 8, 2011, pp. 1-4,

⁹ John Hill, “Shake It, But Don’t Break It. The History and Evolution of Maracas,” *Shake It, But Don’t Break It. The History and Evolution of Maracas*, January 8, 2011, pp. 1-4,

Search Term	Google All	Bing All	Is it an emoji already?
Banjo 🎸	111,000,000	51,700,000	Yes
Bongos	98,400,000	6,130,000	No
Maracas	21,500,000	6,620,000	No
Postal Horn 📯	19,900,000	87,800,000	Yes

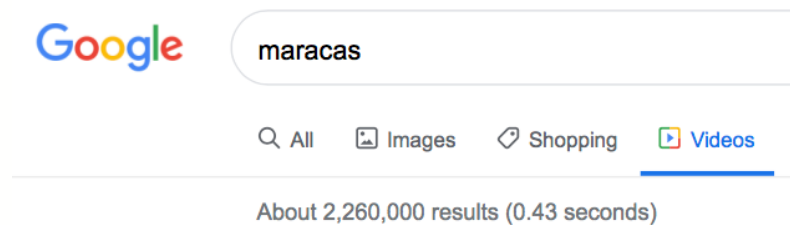


- **Bing Search – 6,610,000 results**



A.

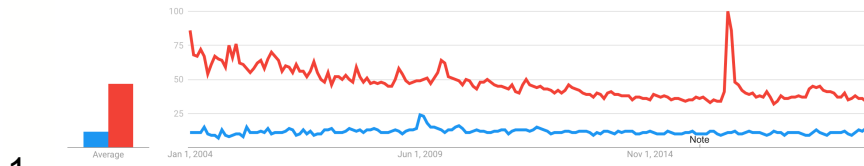
- **Google Video Search – 2,260,000 results**



A.

- **Google Trends: Web Search**

A. Maracas (blue) vs. Banjo (current emoji)



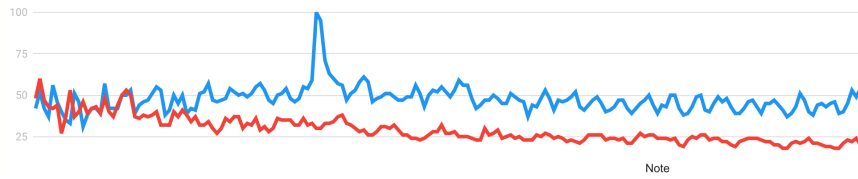
1.

B. Maracas (blue) vs. Postal Horn (current emoji)



1.

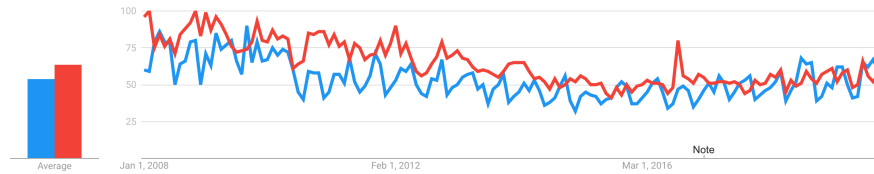
C. Maracas (blue) vs. Snare Drum (current emoji)



1.

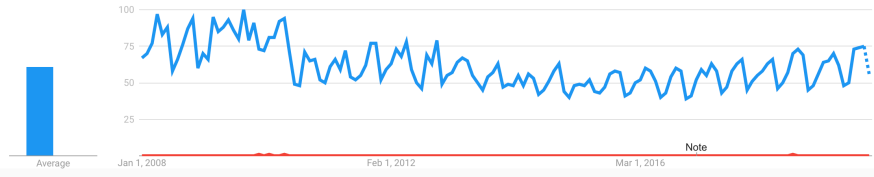
• **Google Trends: Image Search**

A. Maracas (blue) vs. Banjo (current emoji)



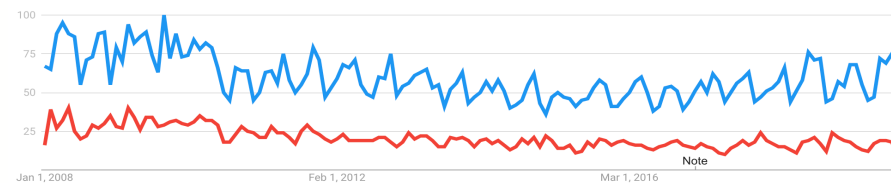
1.

B. Maracas (blue) vs. Postal Horn (current emoji)




1.

C. Maracas (blue) vs. Snare Drum (current emoji)



1.

Multiple usages

Despite being an instrument and object, maracas  can be used to symbolize a celebration or specific cultural holidays like Cinco de Mayo (Fifth of May) and Día de la Independencia (Independence Day of Mexico) in Mexico, or Carnival in Brazil.



They can also be used in a sequence to represent a specific type of music genre. See *'Use in Sequences.'*

Use in Sequences

 +  = Time to party!


 +  = Let's jam!

 +  = Let's listen to music!

 +  = Let's salsa!

Breaking new ground

There are only six instrument emojis that currently exist. The instrument emoji category is surprisingly small, despite the fact that there are more than one thousand genres of popular music that use a variety of different instruments—outside of the emojis that are currently available.

There is also only one other percussion instrument (e.g. the snare drum). The other instruments are from the strings, brass, and keyboard families. There is only an electric guitar—not acoustic—which also limits musical genres like folk, bluegrass, or country. Adding the maracas  would not only highlight other forms of musical genres, but also give merit to the countries and cultures they originated from.

Examples in Context

I am excited for the salsa concert tonight! 🎊

I am excited for the salsa concert tonight! 🎉

I am excited for the salsa concert tonight! 🎵

Feliz Día de la Independencia! 🎊

Feliz Día de la Independencia! 🎉

Feliz Día de la Independencia! 🍺

Image Distinctiveness

The maracas 🎊 will be very distinct from existing emojis since it is not similar to any of the current ones. It is not comparable to any instrument that is currently listed. The other percussion instrument available is the snare drum, which is very clearly different. It would not be mistaken for any current emoji.

Completeness

The proposed maracas 🎊 provides a significant advance in representing greater musical genres and cultural values.

Counter arguments to factors for exclusion

Overly specific

It is true that maracas are not used in every and all musical genres and are limited to a few. However, maracas could also be seen as cultural symbols for Mexican, Latin American, Afro-Puerto Rican, and West African heritage as well. They are also typically used in reference to certain celebrations as listed above. Therefore, their limited musical genre usage should not appear to be overly specific.

Open-ended

It is very clearly a specific type of instrument, and it would not be confused with existing emoji. It is a tangible object, not an elusive emotion that could be misconstrued or unclear initially.

Already representable

The type of instrument that is depicted in the proposed set are not representable with existing emoji. Even a combination of emojis (drums, a music symbol, and a party popper) could not accurately denote maracas; it implies a different meaning altogether.

Logos, brands, UI icons, signage, specific people, specific landmarks, deities

Not applicable. There are no logos, brands, signage or otherwise among the proposed characters.

Faulty comparison

Justification for encoding the maracas emoji does not depend on correspondence with another emoji that were encoded only for compatibility reasons. It does not need to function alongside another emoji in order for its context to be understood; it can be a standalone emoji.

Connection to the Global South

As stated throughout this proposal, maracas have a cultural significance that can be found in many Global South countries. While they are known within Latin American contexts, they are thought to have originated in West Africa, where it was generally known as “shekere.”¹⁰ The instrument was traditionally made from a gourd, filled with beads, seeds, or stones, and when shaken or slapped, produced a variety of musical effects and rhythms.¹¹ Today’s version of the maraca has not widely swayed from its original form.

¹⁰ “Shekere.” Wikipedia. Wikimedia Foundation, August 27, 2019.

¹¹ Holmes, Gillian. “Maracas.” Maracas. Encyclopedia.com, December 8, 2019.

Similar forms of maracas had also existed in the pre-Columbian Americas. The name ‘maraca’ itself is thought to be derived from the Araucanian peoples, who lived in what is now Chile.¹² In the 19th and 20th century, the maraca was introduced to many rhythms that were developing in Latin America and the Caribbean.¹³ In Cuba, they were adopted in the “Son”, “Guaracha”, and “Danzon” and used in pairs.¹⁴ In Puerto Rico, a single maraca is used in their musical style of “bomba.”¹⁵ In Venezuela, singers typically play the maraca as a basic form of rhythmic accompaniment.¹⁶ In Colombia, the maracas are an integral part of the *conjunto de cumbria* and *conjunto de gaitas* ensembles.¹⁷ In Paraguay, their form of the maraca is commonly made from the porrongo gourd.¹⁸ While maracas can be found in a range of sizes and made from a variety of different materials, the rounded oval shape and connected handle is its most globally recognizable form.

Maracas are also connected to various Latin American rhythms and dances such as the rumba, mambo, merengue, and cha-cha.¹⁹ The popular dance music genre Salsa inherited the usage of maracas from the traditionally Cuban genres (Son, Guaracha, and Bolero) and continue to use them in songs today.²⁰

Overall, maracas represent a fusion of indigenous, Spanish, and African musical elements—each of which find themselves within the Global South. Maracas carry an abundance of cultural value, and if accepted into the latest Emoji Unicode, would give recognition to a variety of countries, cultures, and musical genres.

Complete Description of the Emoji and its Relevance

Music is intrinsically connected to our cultural identities. Maracas, specifically, can be found in a wide variety of musical genres, and their influence is heard within such throughout the world. Maracas are a very common and

¹² “maracas,” *Grinnell College Musical Instrument Collection*, accessed December 8, 2019,

¹³ John Hill, “Shake It, But Don’t Break It. The History and Evolution of Maracas,” *Shake It, But Don’t Break It. The History and Evolution of Maracas*, January 8, 2011, pp. 1-4)

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References

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- "Shekere." Wikipedia. Wikimedia Foundation, August 27, 2019. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shekere>.