

- Ud (also spelled **Oud**)



[Picture of Ud]

Description

The Ud (Arabic Lute) is the central symbol of Arabic traditional and classical music. It appeared in Central Asia and the Middle East more than 2000 years ago. Its rounded body gives a full, warm sound and its fretless neck allows for quarter tones and sliding effects. It can have a biting staccato attack. The European Lute derives directly from it; in fact, the word Lute is derived from El Ud (the Ud).

Tuning

The basic Ud has four courses of double strings tuned as follows (concert pitches):

(high) string # 1	- c	(piano notation: C28)
string # 2	- G	(G23)
string # 3	- D	(D18)
string # 4	- AA	(A13)

They will be written an octave higher than their sounding pitches.

Scordaturas and Extensions

There are several kinds of Uds with different numbers of strings. Other than the 4 basic courses which can be taken as a rule of thumb, stringings and tunings vary, and the composer needs to inquire of the performer as to the tuning and range of his specific instrument.

- The 4 string type we take as the basic or 'classical' Ud.
- The contemporary 5 string Ud is very common. The fifth string is added below the lowest AA, and is normally tuned to GG (G11); sometimes it is tuned a 4th below the 4th string to EE (E8). Often this fifth string is a single string. Here is the tuning (the basic Ud is in bold):

(high) string # 1	- c	(C28)
string # 2	- G	(G23)
string # 3	- D	(D18)
string # 4	- AA	(A13)
string # 5	- GG	(G11) or EE (E8)

- There is a 6 string Ud which is tuned in 5 courses of 2 plus one single in the bass end, thus:

(high) string # 1	- c	(C28)
string # 2	- G	(G23)
string # 3	- D	(D18)
string # 4	- AA	(A13)
string # 5	- FF	(F9)
string # 6	- CC	(C4)

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- There are Uds of 6, 7, and 8, strings which take as their basis the contemporary 5 string Ud, and add strings above the 1st string c (C28). Here is the full 8 string Ud and the tunings of its strings:

(high) string # 1	- e _b ¹	(Eb43)
string # 2	- b _b	(Bb38)
string # 3	- f	(F33)
string # 4	- c	(C28)
string # 5	- G	(G23)
string # 6	- D	(D18)
string # 7	- AA	(A13)
string # 8	- GG	(G11)

Range

The safe upper limit on any string is an octave. This would render a c¹ (C40) on the basic Ud's 1st string.

General Considerations

The Ud is short necked and higher up it is more difficult to play, more difficult to intone, and more difficult to create lasting sounds. The length of decay of the notes of the ud is excellent on the open strings but not as good on fingered notes.

It is hard, and such is the case with many plucked strings, to fix its fundamental pitch, thus we have assumed that string # 1 on the basic Ud sounds c (C28), an octave below middle C on the piano keyboard, and have chosen to notate it one octave above, in the bass clef. In its higher reaches of its range we will utilize the treble clef.

In certain manuals this same string # 1 may be taken to sound c¹ (C40), which is middle C itself. If we notate this one octave above, we will obtain written pitches that can be adequately notated with the use of the treble clef alone. It can be assumed that reading musicians can deal with both the treble and bass clefs, but it may help to provide a clarifying note in the score or part. Whenever possible, the composer will do well to ask the performer which system he would prefer.

Dynamics

The ud can be typified dynamically as a delicate chamber music instrument, of baritone range, and of low to medium dynamic output. In Arabic orchestras there are usually several uds in order to give presence to its voice. It is usual, in an intercultural music making context, to provide sound reinforcement for the ud. Of course it all depends upon the actual musical requirements of the composition being performed.

Speed of Execution

In the hands of a professional the ud can move very quickly in scalar runs, perhaps as fast as 16th notes at 160mm to the quarter note. Higher up on any given string intonation becomes more difficult and thus speed of execution here may also be affected. Also, for jumps which require string crossings the composer has to consider that speed of execution may be slower. There is much idiomatic use of open strings together with fingered notes, and these sorts of 'pedal' figures may increase the ease of execution in fast passages. Tremolos on one note can of course be executed with very great speed.

Techniques

I. Technique of Play

The ud is played with a plectrum. The left hand fingers the notes and the right hand plucks the strings. The fingerboard is fretless and chordal work is rarely called for.

II. Vibrato, Tremolo, Glissando etc.

Pitch vibrato is very executable, and tremolos are highly idiomatic. Tremolos are often utilized to extend the sound of a note, in fact the Udist will generally play longer notes in this manner unless specifically instructed not to do so. Both hard and soft tremolos are possible. Glissando is possible everywhere. Tremolando (= tremolo + glissando) is very easy.

III. Harmonics

Harmonics are possible on the ud, as on all fixed length strings. Check their effectiveness with the performer. (editor's note: check how much they are utilized and the specific limitations).

IV. Muted Notes

As on other plucked string instruments the ud strings can be plucked while partially muting them with the right hand. (editor's note: check how much they are utilized and the specific limitations).

V. Accents and Timbres

Both staccato and legato playing are possible, and the timbre may be varied by playing closer (harsher timbre) and further away (softer timbre) from the bridge.

VI. Special Techniques

- Certain techniques of utilizing fingers in combination with plectra are possible, but these are unusual and should not be called for without consulting the performer.
- Chordal work is not usually called for - due to the fretless nature of the instrument these will be very hard to intone. However, with open strings, certain chordal work can be executed. There are also certain 'grace note' possibilities which utilize combinations of notes as a springboard to a main melody note.

VII. Thoughts on Intonation and Arabic Modes

The actual modes of Arabic music utilize notes which are not found in the equal tempered western system. Generally they can be called quarter-tone notes. These notes are built into many of the modes of Arabic music, and the ud, being a chief exponent of the Arabic modal system, and also being a fretless instrument, can play these modes with great fidelity. In order to utilize these modes the composer must consider carefully the harmonic and melodic implications, as well as the training of the performer.

From a western point of view the ud can be utilized in harmonic music, but certain keys and modes are better suited to the ud than others. Those that utilize open strings are much to be preferred, namely: G major; G minor; C major; C minor; A minor; D major; D minor.

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Notation

Arabic music uses a *Do Re Mi* system and the five line staff. There are 24 quarter tones to the octave, and the quarter tones are built into many instruments, such as accordions and organs. The 24 quarter tone system is a theoretical one, in practice the different modal systems in the Near and Middle East call for different sizes of microtones; so the quarter tone system is not completely prescriptive but only a general snapshot of the Arabic-Turkish-Persian modal systems.

Related Instruments

The ud is prevalent in all Arabic-Turkish-Persian music. Though uds may vary in size and number of strings in different geographical regions, the short-necked fretless lute is unique. However, it has many fretted relatives all over Asia. (see below)

Asian/Middle Eastern - fretted lutes

There are many fretted lutes in Asia. Though not directly related to the Oud, like it they are utilized in rendering the modal musics of the Near and Middle East. Here are some notables.

- Bouzouki (Greece)
- Saz (Turkey)
- Tar (Iran)
- Pipa (China)