
TRADITIONAL MUSIC OF THE ARAB WORLD

Music has always enriched the daily life of the Arab people. Arabic music is not built on the Western major and minor scales, but on more ancient forms known as modes. In Arabic these are called Maqams that contain intervals known as quarter, eighth, and sixteenth tones. In Western music, the smallest tonal interval is the halftone.

The most famous Arab musical instrument is the Oud (the ancestor of the European Lute). Other musical instruments include the Nay (a vertical flute), the Mizwij (a double flute), the Daff (a tambourine), the Durbekka (an hourglass-shaped drum), the Rabab (ancestor of the violin), and the Qanun (a trapezoid, stringed instrument that sounds like a harpsichord, and is played while sitting).

Most Arabic music is vocal and it is usually the songs that are the hardest for the Western ear to appreciate because of abundance of 'strange' sounds of the Arabic language. Arabic songs, for the most part, tend to be love songs, praising the beloved, or complaining of a beloved's coldness or indifference. Some songs, on the other hand, are lively and lend themselves to dance, such as the Dabke line dance.

THE OUD

The Oud is a musical instrument, the ancestor of the lute. It represents the hallmark of Arabic music. Half pear-shaped with stripes of inlaid wood, the Oud has 10-12 strings, is unfretted, and is played with a small plectrum or quill.

The word 'Oud' comes from the Arabic word for wood. Combined with 'al' meaning 'the', 'al-oud' became lute when the Crusaders introduced it to the Western world. Unlike the lute in Europe, the Oud has never lost its popularity in the Arab world. Today the Oud remains one of the instruments of an Arab orchestra, and popular radio and music hall singers often have Oud accompaniments.

*The information in this flier was compiled by Rima Houssami for educational use only
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