




Instruments of the Silk Road Ensemble



The question for us as artists is not whether to innovate but how to create innovative music that is authentically rooted in tradition. We share a responsibility to the cultures we represent, on stage and off. We are curious about how they intersect—both as the origin of richly layered musical traditions and as a catalyst for musical innovation.

As a form of communication, music making transcends language and enables us to collaborate even in the face of cultural and political differences. We search for what we have in common, rather than what sets us apart. And far from abandoning our “home” traditions, we return to them with broader perspective and deeper understanding.

—*The Silk Road Ensemble website*

Oud

History and practice

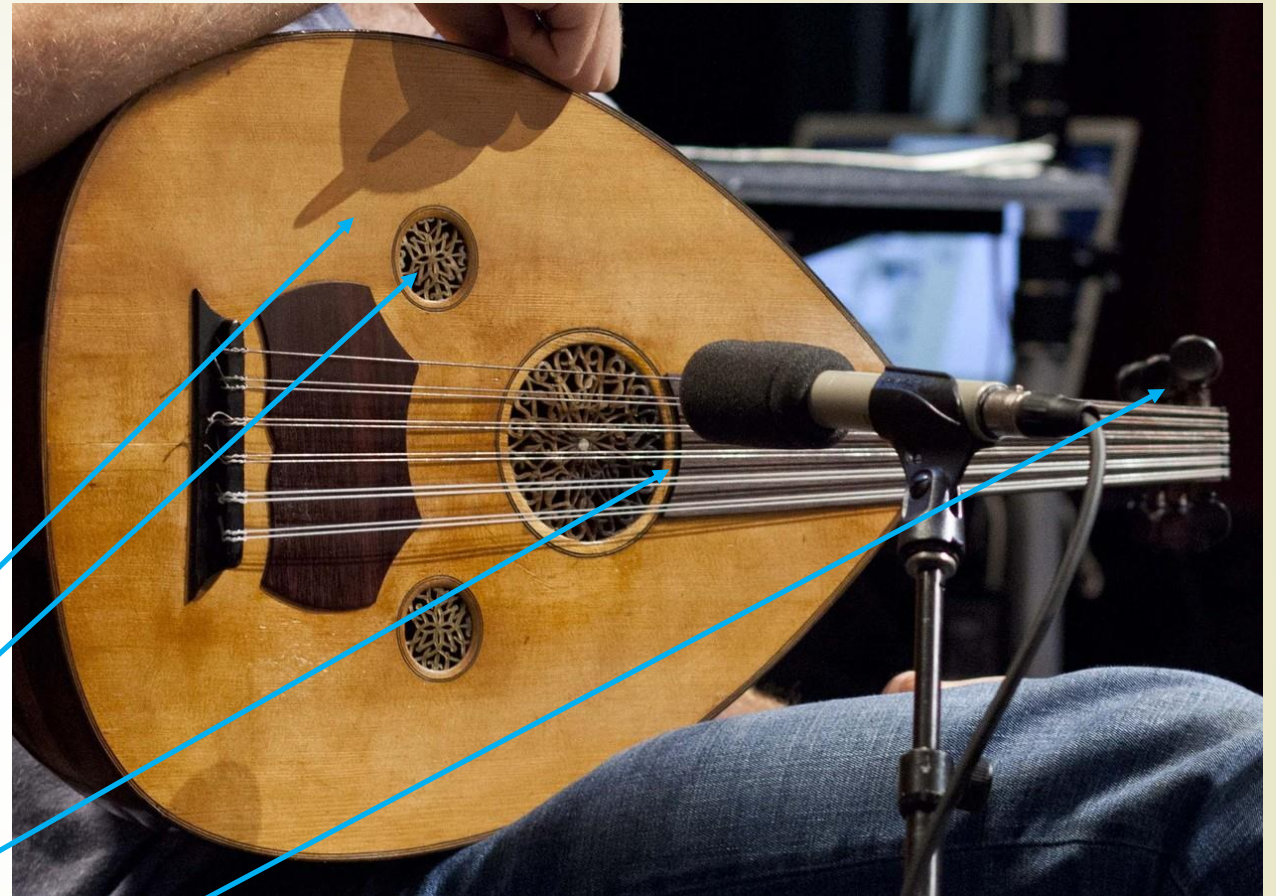


History of the Oud

- Arab origin – considered “the king of instruments”
- Name derivation: Al-oud from the Arabic for “the wood”
- A forefather to the European lute

Design

- Pear-shaped wooden body made from strips of wood and fretless neck
- One to three sound holes in the body
- 11 Strings – 10 paired and 1 lower single string
- Peg box is bent back at a 45 – 90 degree angle



The oud has no frets, which makes it an ideal instrument for improvisation, tonal complexity, and expressive interpretation.

Bringing the OUD to a contemporary audience



Munir Bashir
(1930 – 1997)

- Responsible for introducing the oud to Western audiences and gave it significance as a solo instrument
- Born in Mosul, Iraq; began playing oud at age five
- Studied at the Music Institute in Baghdad as a young boy
- Worked throughout his life to document the traditional music of Iraq
- Studied at the Franz Liszt Conservatory under Zoltan Kodaly

The evolution of the Chinese PIPA (which sounds and looks much like the OUD) is directly related to the Silk Road and Chinese culture.

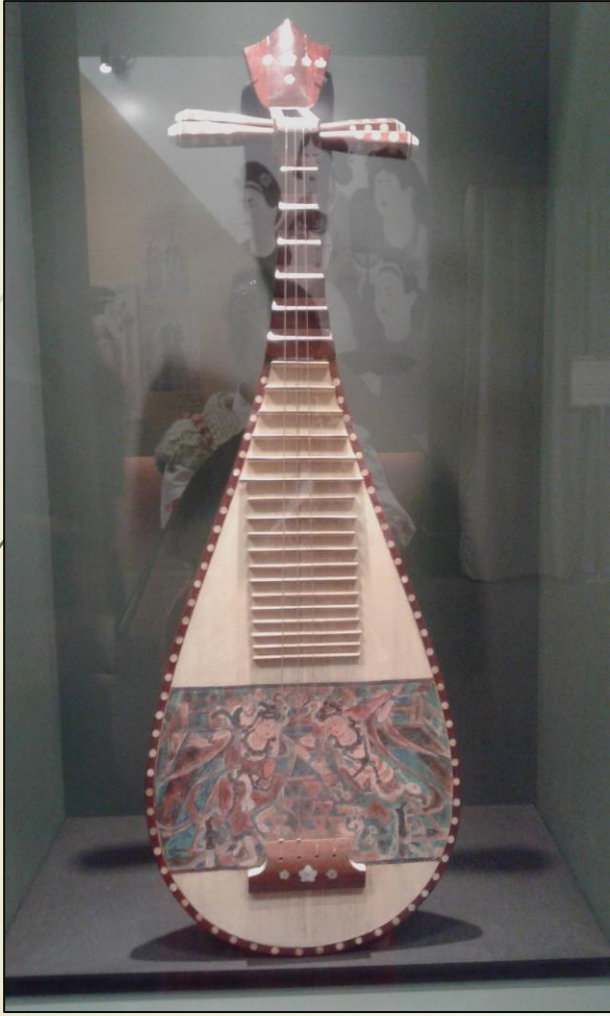
Pre-Tang Dynasty Chinese musicians used an instrument that looked like the modern pipa but with some differences. This instrument was known as the QIN-PIPA

This early version was influenced and ultimately changed by musicians who traveled to China through the Silk Road in the 5th century. These travelers brought a lute-like instrument called the Persian Barbat (hu-pipa). Two centuries later, in the Tang Dynasty, the emperor was enamored with a group of musicians who used this instrument.

Pipa

History and practice





The Tang pipa mimicked the more oblong/pear shape of the Persian Barbat. For some time the neck was straight (see example at left) but the sound that it produced didn't match the Chinese music of the time. After the angle of the neck was changed and the body was made shallower, the sound became more pleasurable to the Chinese ear.

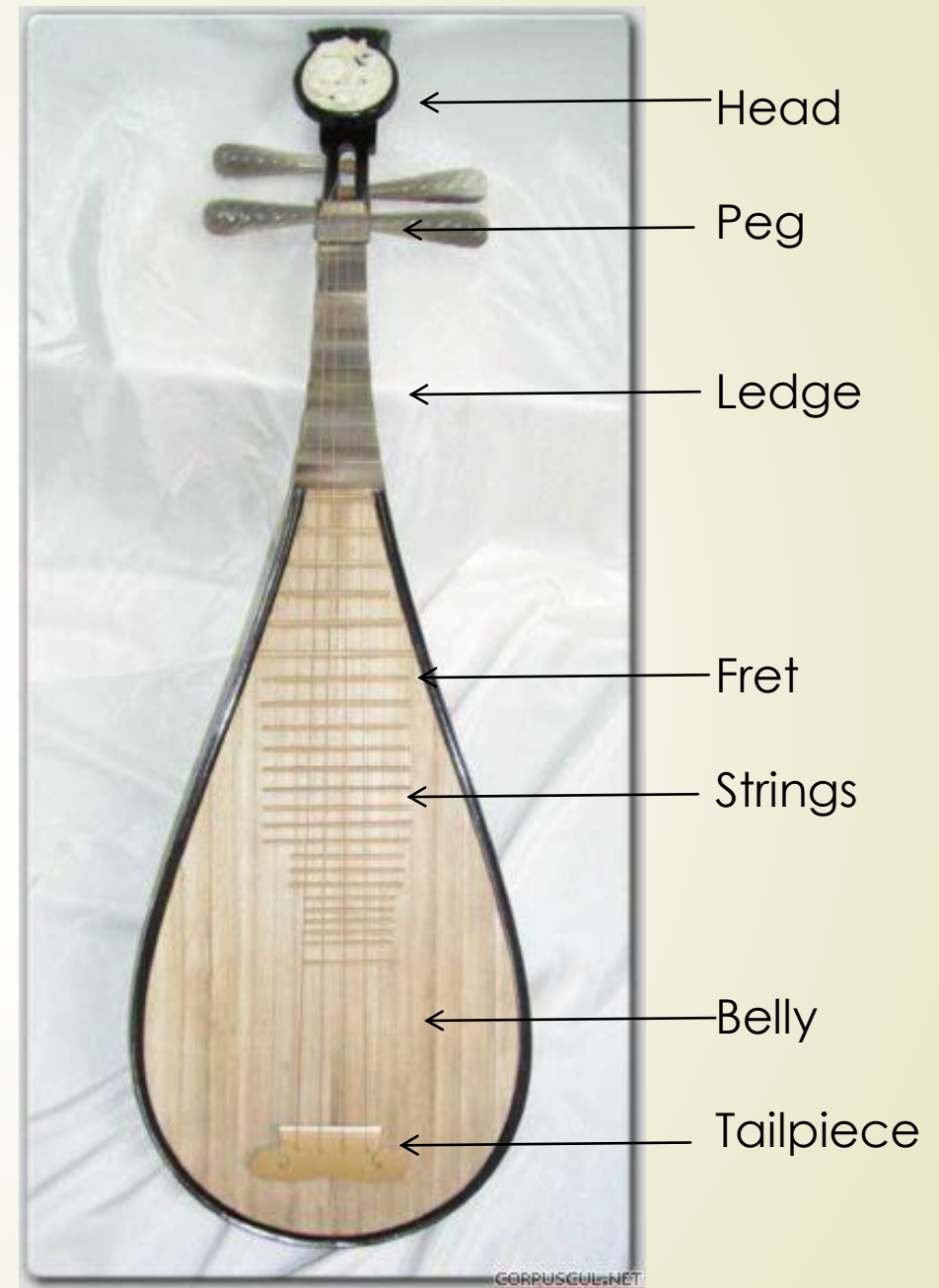
The earlier versions of the pipa were tuned with a pentatonic scale.

la do re mi sol la

The strings at that point were silk, and players plucked them with their fingernails.

Current day pipas include steel strings and more frets, which increased the scale for tuning to a chromatic scale. In addition, five finger plectra (picks on each finger) are used.

do, di, re, mi, fa, fi, etc.

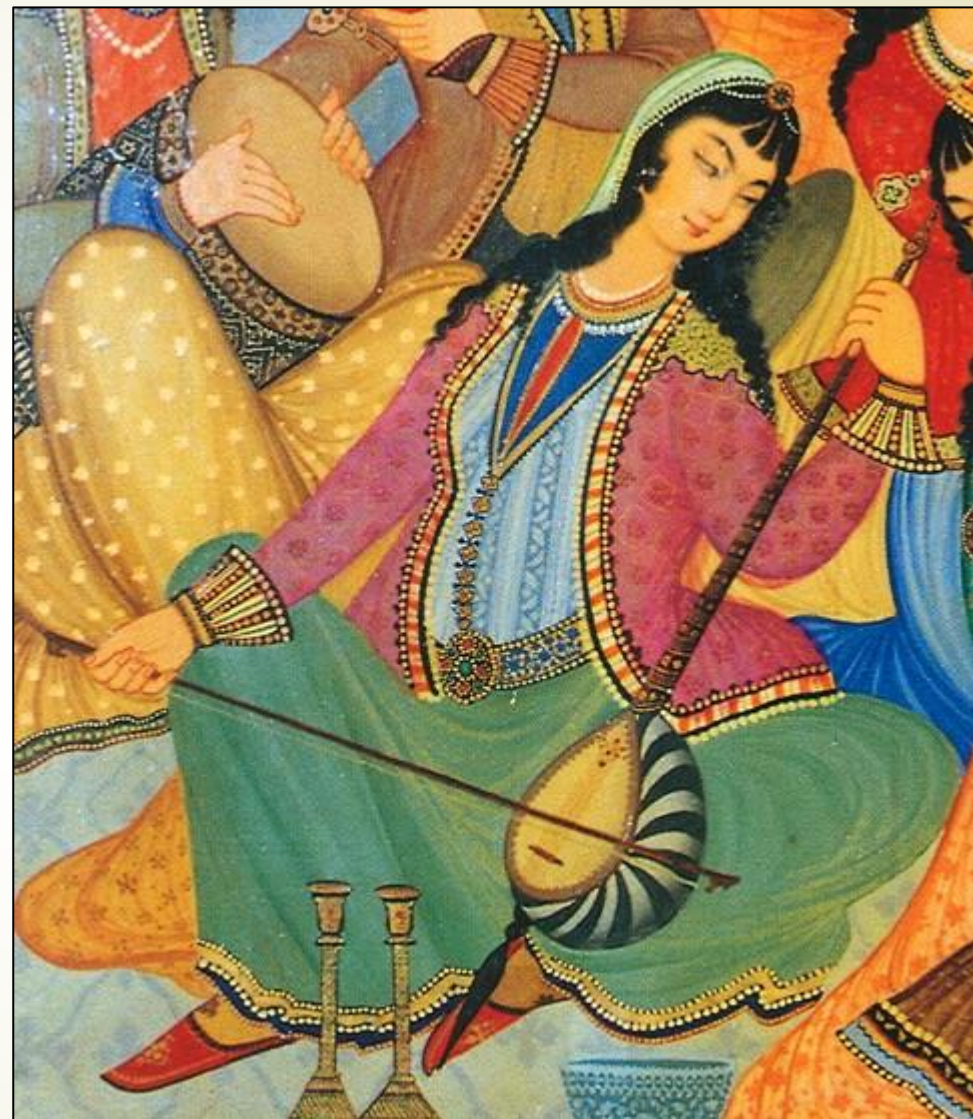


Now listen
to this
recording
of Wu Man
on the
pipa.



Kamancheh

History and practice





- The KAMANCHEH differs from the OUD and the PIPA in that the player uses a bow instead of plucking the strings.
- The KAMANCHEH has a round resonating cavity (soundbox) that is either made from steam-bent strips of wood or hollowed out from one piece of wood. The body is covered in an animal skin.
- The instrument is played by resting the spike, which extends from the base of the instrument, on a knee or on the ground.
- Both the strings and the bow play a part in the sound variations. The bow, attached with a leather strap, can be loosened or tightened to vary the tension and sound. The instrument is turned on the spike as it is bowed.

Gaita Gallega

History and practice



HISTORY

The Galician bagpipe or gaita gallega has been a part of many cultures since the Middle Ages.

Early Galician bagpipes were first used in polyphonic music (two or more simultaneous lines of melody).

CONSTRUCTION

- Conical chanter and a bass drone that plays a second octave
- Traditionally plays in D, C, and B flat
- Double reed and bore with seven finger holes
- Drone plays two octaves below chanter

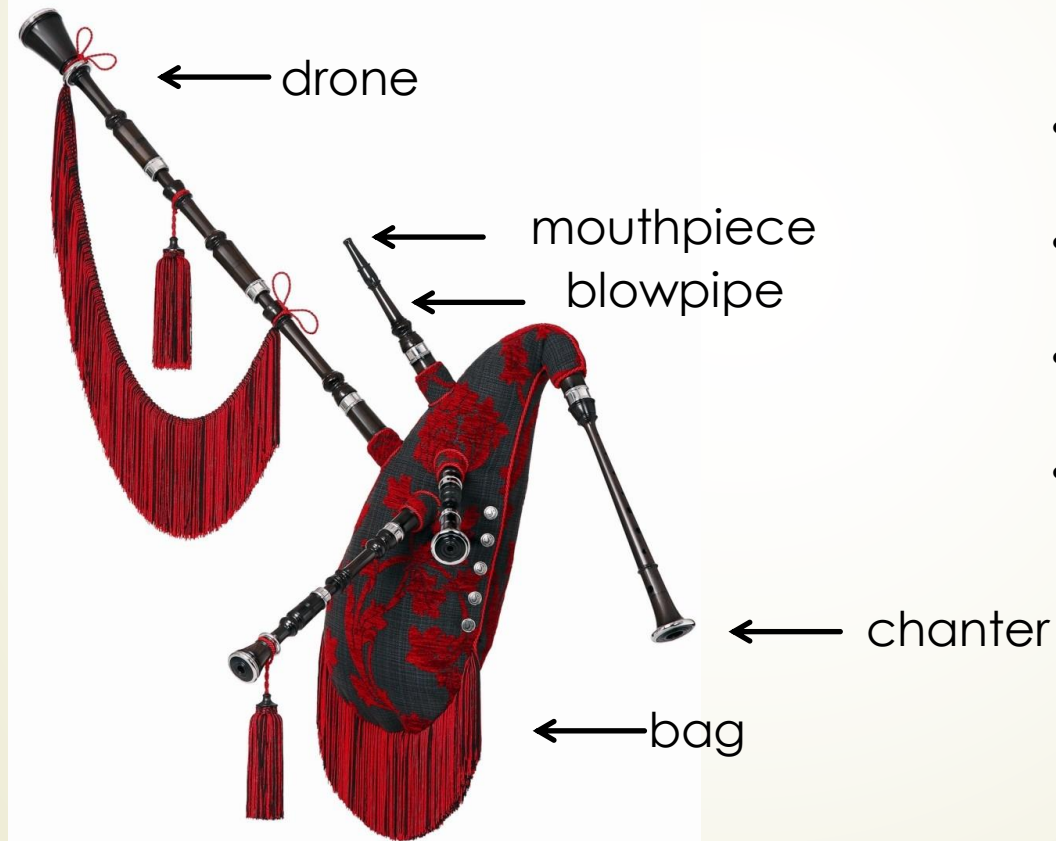




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Slide 2:

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Oud_%28plucked_lute%29,_Cairo,_Egypt,_2009_-_MIM_PHX.jpg

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Slide 6: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Playing_a_pipa.jpg

Slide 7: poeticonerism.blogspot.com

Slide 8: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pipa>

Slide 10: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kamancheh>

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Photos on slides 1, 4, 9, and 12 courtesy of the Silk Road Project.