

# CARAVAN ENSEMBLE

## Notes on Some of the Instruments:

### Flamenco Guitar (Gerard)

In the past, the Flamenco guitarist always had problems with the volume of his instrument, which was always too soft. The guitarreros (guitar-maker) solved this problem by building instruments with strong, brilliant, high notes, a high volume in the middle frequencies, almost no bass and a tone which had a very short *attack* time, but also a very short *decay*. The Flamenco guitar responds instantly because it is very lightweight. The walls of the soundboard, bottom and sides are much thinner than those of a concert guitar.

Everything else was up to the tocaor (guitarist). Over the years, the guitarists adapted a very loud, powerful toque which is still in use today, although electronic amplification is now quite common in Flamenco, as well. All techniques require playing close to the puente (bridge). Whether rasgueo (rasgueado), picado, arpeggio or trémolo, the sound is always brilliant and dry.

### Saz (Amir)

The Saz is a chordophone and is a member of the long necked Lute family. Such long necked Lutes have an ancestry that can be traced as far back as the ancient cultures of Babylon and Sumeria. The Saz of Anatolia, likely descended from the Kopuz. The term Kopuz is used to refer to any number of long necked stringed instruments used by Turkish tribes at the turn of the last millennium. The Saz has metal strings and wooden body and movable frets. The more common string arrangement is 3 courses of 2 strings.

In ancient times the Kopuz was believed to have had mystical powers strong enough to protect a warrior if carried into battle. In the 17th century the Alevi and Bektasi dervishes, religious practitioners, traveled the century country side of Anatolia. They commonly carried the smallest the Saz, the Cura to accompany them in their religious hymns. Today the Saz is the most important instrument of the Turkish folk.

### Frame Drums (Glen and Amir)

A frame drum is a drum that has a drumhead diameter greater than its depth. Usually the single drumhead is made of rawhide or man-made materials. Shells are traditionally constructed of bent wood (rosewood, oak, ash etc.) scarf jointed together; plywood and man-made materials are also used. Some frame drums have mechanical tuning and on many the drumhead is stretched and tacked in place. It is the earliest skin drum known to have existed. Examples are found in many places and cultures. It has been suggested that they were also used to winnow grain. They come in many different different sizes.

Frame drums originated in the ancient Middle East, India, and Rome, and reached medieval Europe through Islamic culture.

Bendir (Glen) The Bendir is a frame drum which originates in Morocco. Unlike the tambourine, it has no jingles but most often has a snare (usually made of gut) stretched across its head, which when the drum is struck with the fingers or palm gives the tone a buzzing quality.

Daf: (Amir) (Large frame drum) associated with Sufi Rituals, is used to create merriment and to stir the emotions. The thundering tones of the Daf are unsurpassed by any other hand drum.

## Oud (Ara)

Literally, *'ud* means 'twig', 'flexible rod' or 'aromatic stick', and by inference 'piece of wood'. In the 9th century, Miwardi, the jurist of Baghdad, extolled its use in treating illness. The symbolism lived on until the 19th century: 'the *'ud* invigorates the body. It places the temperament in equilibrium. It is a remedy... It calms and revives hearts' (Muhammad Shihab al-Din). There is also evidence that it was played on the battlefield. In any case it was predominantly in secular usage that the *'ud* made its mark, as the only kind of accompaniment to a form of responsorial song known as *sawt*.

The *'ud* consists of a large soundbox connected to a short neck, features that distinguish it from the long-necked lute family (*tanbur*, *saz*, *baglama*, *setar* etc). The body has evolved considerably from the original pear shape, taking on a swelling, rounded form. The neck rarely has frets. There is a nut of ivory or bone at the upper end of the neck before it bends sharply back to become the pegbox. The quality of material used in the making of the *'ud* is extremely varied; the more the diversity, the better it sounds. This explains the elaborate attention paid to decorative inlay work and the assembling of an impressive number of pieces of wood. The Baghdad lute maker Hanna Hajji al-'Awwad (1862-1942) used 18,325 pieces to make a single *'ud*.

The strings of the contemporary *'ud* are twisted, or spirally reinforced. They are plucked with a plectrum (*risba*, 'quill') made of an eagle's feather and held between thumb and index finger; a shell or plastic plectrum may be used instead.