

Information about the Qanun – for composers

by Bassem Alkhouri

The range is G2 – D6.

I will explain one octave; the rest is the same, and each pitch is in the same string:

Each string (always 3 strings together) has 4 tuning pegs: so called ‘mandals’.

Between each mandal the distance is 1/4 note.

C natural - C natural plus quarter ton - C sharp - C sharp plus quarter - C double sharp

D flat - D flat plus quarter - D natural – D natural plus quarter - D sharp E flat - E flat

plus quarter - E natural - E natural plus quarter - E sharp F natural - F natural plus

quarter ton - F sharp - F sharp plus quarter - F dbl sharp

G flat - G flat plus quarter - G natural - G natural plus quarter - G sharp A flat - A flat

plus quarter - A natural - A natural plus quarter - A sharp B flat - B flat plus quarter -

B natural - B natural plus quarter - B sharp

Exceptions:

A2 – B2 - C2 it is just flat - natural - sharp...

G2 it is just natural... (no mandal in the string)

And D6 it is just flat - natural... (only one mandal)

Changing of scale when you play quick is difficult because then I have to use both my hands and then I need time to change the scale. Because I have to use my right hand to make new pitches, (natural, sharp, B mol flat or quarter). To play large intervals I need time to change the scale if there is a change of course.

Sight reading is difficult as I have to make a plan because I have to look at the instrument en at the score.

The low range of the qanun is rather soft – please take into account when combining with other instruments.

Using octaves is a very traditional playing manner and gives richness in sound. Though if there are too many jumps too quick it will be unplayable. When you play octaves you cannot change the tuning of the scales at the same time as you are obviously using both hand at the same time.

Please take into account in general: I only can change mandals under the following conditions: - Give enough time for the left hand in phrases to change the mandals – it takes time – I have to change mandals whilst playing!

- Whilst playing and changing at the same time the mandals, I only can use the right hand

- If I have to change too often the tuning during a passage or even during the piece it causes problems. I always have to prepare a “mandals-plan” for each new composition (like harp players). It should be manageable and not disturb the musical line with too many changes.

- Usually I have to memorize the phrases in order to be able to change mandals, playing and following the conductor. - Big jumps in a high tempo are tricky.