

Ney

(aka Nay)



[picture of Ney]

The **Ney** - known as **Nay** (pronounced: na'-i) in the Arab world - is an end blown cane flute without mouthpiece or reed. A very significant instrument throughout the Arabic, Turkish, and Persian worlds, this instrument generally has 5 or 6 upper holes and one on the underside for the thumb. It is capable of a range of 2 to 3 octaves and has been used for performing all forms of music: art, folk, and religious. The Persian ney is distinct from its Turkish and Arabic counterparts in that it possesses a small brass cylinder at its upper end, which the performer anchors between his upper incisors, producing a unique timbre.

Musical Range

An accomplished musician can achieve a 3 octave range on one ney just by adjusting his fingering, head and lips and breathe control. Otherwise up to 3 neys can be used for a classical concert.

Types of Neys

It is very important at the outset to understand that the three schools of ney (nay) - Persian, Turkish, and Arabic - may be quite differentiated, both in styles of play and construction of instrument. In general, the ney does not render a natural scale or mode when simply uncovering its holes one by one. The notes rendered cover an interval of around a major 6th, and they are separated by semi or microtonal intervals. Septatonic scales are produced generally beginning in the 2nd octave, by sounding the upper partials of any given note, the 2nd 3rd 4th and even 5th partials are utilized to render the notes of the gamut.

The actual modes are rendered by a combination of half holing and angling one's head to the instrument, creating embouchure changes. The Persian ney has 5 holes in front and one in back, while the Turkish and Arabic instruments have 6 holes in front and one in the back.

As an example of the "non-naturalness" of the basic scale of the instrument, here are the basic notes rendered by a typical Persian ney (without half holing or embouchure changes):

C D Ep F F# G A

Legend:

'p' = 'koron' (60 cents flat)

So it is quite obvious that the composer must inquire of the performer what kind of instruments he possesses, and what modes and scales can be accomplished. The need for embouchure changes may make certain scales difficult to achieve on just any ney, and speed of execution may indeed be limited therefore. Most ney players will possess neys of different sizes, to play in different keys. In the Arabic system there are 7 neys, which render 7 distinct modes on the seven scale levels - modes that begin on C, D, E, F, G, A, and B. Again, to begin composing for the ney, one has to inquire of the performer what neys he has, and what modes and scales are performable.

ney instrumentation

Naming of the Ney

Neys are named after the pitch rendered by uncovering the lowest finger hole, i.e. - the second note of its fundamental scale.

Styles of Play

Arab style playing is generally more rhythmic, and reflective of the shepherd association, as the nay is commonly a pastoral instrument. The classical nay is usually longer, the folk models shorter. The Turkish style is more smooth and flowing, betraying the Dervish association.

The music of the Middle East contains many modes ("Maqams") - thus a Middle Eastern instrument should be capable of playing a wide range of notes. The ney was designed to be multi-modal. Study of the maqams is a good starting point for a composer wishing to write for the ney. Mind you, since the maqams include modes corresponding to the major and minor scales of western music, these can be called for as well.

For further information and charts on the ney, see these internet resources:

[For the Turkish and Persian Neys](http://www.oldflutes.com/world/rim.htm)

www.oldflutes.com/world/rim.htm

[For a Turkish ney fingering chart](http://www.bardoworks.it/Ney_Chart1.html)

www.bardoworks.it/Ney_Chart1.html

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