

General

Kannel is an Estonian, Finnish, Latvian and Lithuanian folk instrument, its age reaches probably a couple of thousands years. There is no information about the exact origins of the instrument.

Initially the *kannel* had 5...6 strings. Gradually the instrument grew bigger and in the 20th century it turned into a chromatic concert-instrument with a range covering approximately four octaves.

The concert-kannels from all of the four countries are different - having different range, construction principles and mechanism for producing the half-tones. The biggest peculiarity of the Estonian chromatic *kannel* is that for every note corresponds its own string (the other types of *kannel* have a bit harp-like mechanical system for retuning the strings). Thus it does not have any remarkable constrictions to use all the chromatical pitches on the Estonian *kannel*.

The strings are placed under a slight angle so that on the right side of the instrument the strings of the "white" notes are a little bit higher, on the left side vice versa. In the middle of the instrument the strings are approximately on the same level. The strings are made of metal.

Range

A - a³

Performance

The *kannel* is played in a horizontal position, the player is always sitting. In performance fingers of the both hands are equally important, the 5th fingers are almost not used because of their weakness. Therefore up to 8-voiced chords and *arpeggios* can be played on the *kannel*. Slower *arpeggios* can be also longer - the hands can be lifted over each other for several times. The biggest interval between the 1st and 4th finger is generally the 10th.

The playing technique of the *kannel* can be compared in many aspects with the harp - both instruments are plucked with the soft pad of the fingers, both use the same technical possibilities like *flageolettes*, *arpeggios*, *glissandos*. The *kannel* sounds more metallic, the harp softer. In the respect of sound, maybe the closest instruments to the *kannel* are the medieval *psalterium* and german-austrian *zither*.

Different articulations and dampening.

On the *kannel* similar articulations are used like on other musical instruments: *legato*, *staccato*, *lasciare vibrare etc.*

Peculiar to the *kannel* is its long sound. Therefore the dampening plays a crucial roll in the playing technique (especially in the classical music). The contemporary music is often making use of the long sound on purpose and the notes are let ring until their natural dying out. The *staccato* of the *kannel* is remarkably sharper than harp's.

Special playing techniques

- *glissando*

It is possible to be play *glissandi* in both directions (up or down) either diatonically or chromatically. *Glissandi* drawn with the fingernail produce sharper and more penetrating, with fingerpad - milder sounds.

- *slides*

It is possible to play slides or the "real" *glissandi* on one string moving some metal object along the string. Also sliding melodies, reminiscing a little bit the Hawaii guitar, can be played.

- *flageolettes*

The most used and loudest are the octave-*flageolettes*. Usually it is written, from which note the flageolet is played, not what actually sounds.

- *dampened sounds*

An interesting and gentle timbre is produced, when the string is lightly covered with the other hand. It is usually marked with a small cross (+) under or above the note. This kind of sound can be played only on separate long or slow notes.

- *plucking from the end of the strings*

Usually the sound is the most projecting and healthy when the instrument is plucked from the middle of the strings. If to pluck close to the rim of the string, it will produce a nasal, dry and faster fading colour, reminiscing a little bit the harpsichord.

- *fingernail sounds*

Strong accents can be given to single notes when plucked only with the fingernails.

- *tambora*

... means hitting the strings with the palm or the side of the hand. It results in a cluster with rather vague pitch.

- *sliding on a bass string*

Sliding a finger or fingernail along a low, wire-coated string produces a special swishing, hissing or whistling sound with an indefinite pitch.

- *knocks on the instrument ...*

... make all the strings sound.

- *using a bow ...*

... is possible only on the two lower and two upper strings.

- *“prepared” kannel*

The strings can be “prepared” placing wire, paper-clips, coins, paper etc. between the strings. It gives considerable timbral possibilities but the sound loses much of its projection.

Dynamic scale

The *kannel* is a relatively soft instrument. It is far not so powerful as most of the classical instruments. However, its *piano* is versatile and rich of nuances.

The different octaves of the kannel have slightly different dynamical possibilities. Since the 2nd octave upwards it is difficult to make the relatively shorter strings sound really *forte*. The best *forte* can be achieved around the 1st octave.