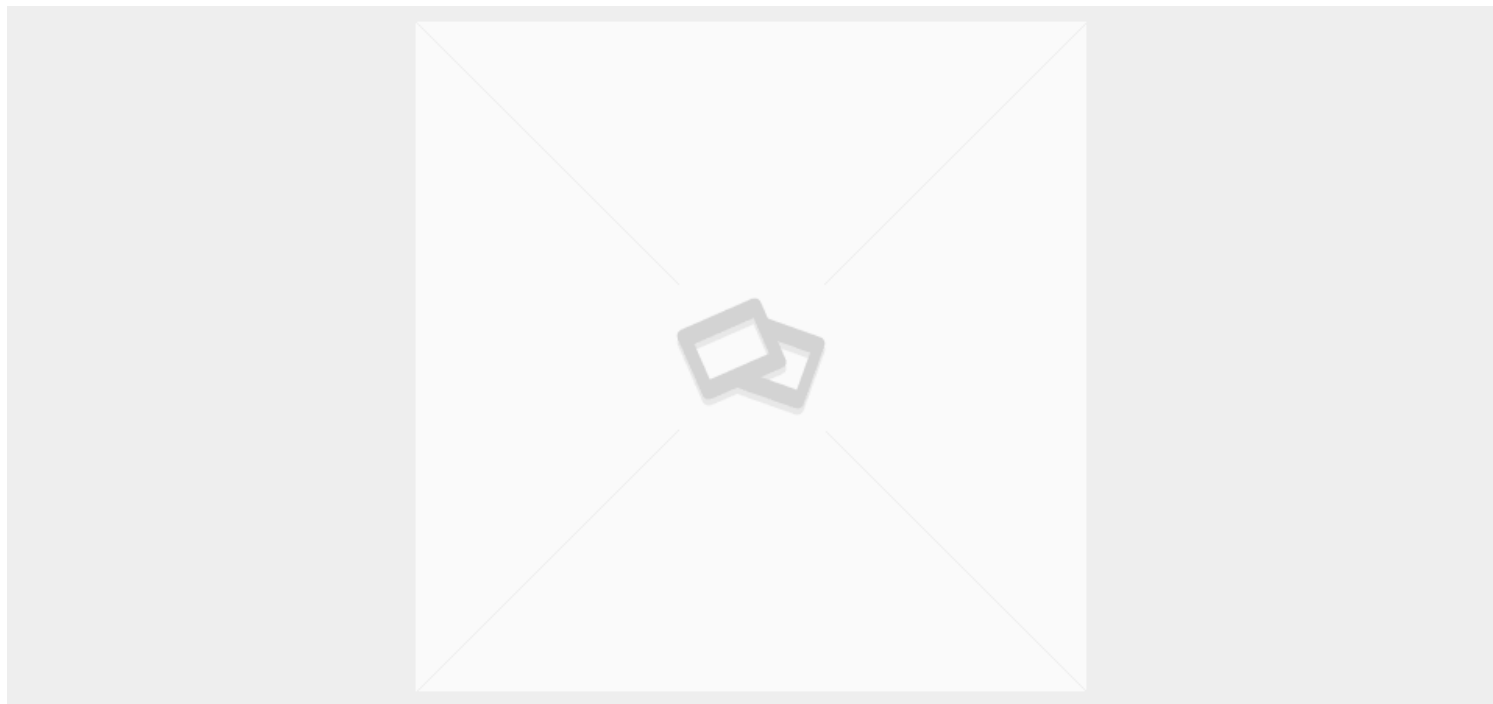


ISTANBUL'S HRANT KENKULIAN

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Istanbul's Hrant Kenkulian, or Udi Hrant, was the leading 'oud' player starting in the '20s and for several decades after. Blind from birth, he grew up in Istanbul where he introduced a surprising set of innovations that expanded the limits of the instrument. He could play double-stops, or two strings at the same time. He could pluck the strings with both his left and his right hands, and use both sides of the plectrum, sounding a note on the upstroke as well as the down stroke of his right hand. It's interesting that while the Arabs, Persians, and Turks claimed the instrument as their own, one of the leading 'oud' players was a blind Armenian. Hrant, who also composed songs in Armenian and in Turkish, was the master of improvisation, the spiraling and nearly out-of-control music called a taksim. A good taksim can never be repeated note for note.

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