



Tuning Method for the Cümbüş Instrument "Cümbüş Sazı"

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Submission Date: 22 Feb. 2026 **Published Date:** 28 April 2026

Citation: ELMAS, Emin Taner. (2026). Tuning Method for the Cümbüş Instrument "Cümbüş Sazı". In INSR Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies (Vol. 2, Number 4, pp. 1–17). <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20573216>

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Abstract

Tuning is a major problem for instrument players, especially those who perform the cümbüş, saz, and bağlama. Every instrument needs a proper tuning system to produce the correct sounds. Many cümbüş, saz, and bağlama students become disillusioned with music, or even give up playing altogether, because they cannot tune their instruments or learn how to tune them over time. This work aims to provide a guide for beginners, current players, students, and even artists who are just starting to play the cümbüş. It explains the tuning process in a clear and practical language.

This article is a "Cümbüş Tuning System Method" explaining the tuning system for the instrument we call the "Cümbüş Saz" or "Cümbüş Bağlama." This handbook was written by Dr. Assoc. Prof. Mechanical Engineering. This work is based on Emin Taner ELMAS's experiences, developed over the years through his own musical studies and his unique style of saz-baglama / cümbüş performance.

The work describes the tuning system for the cümbüş saz, showing the relevant devices and parts used for tuning, and indicating the musical notes and their corresponding letters on the tuning device. The cümbüş saz is introduced with photographs. First, the methods of tuning using a tuning whistle, an A whistle, and ear are explained; both with the strings free and by pulling the A note to a specific pitch, thus tightening the corresponding pitch. Then, the method of tuning using a tuning device is explained; both with the strings free and by pulling the A note to a specific pitch, thus tightening the corresponding pitch. These methods are explained separately for both long-necked and short-necked bağlama families. The steps for tuning each instrument are presented in a clear and easy-to-understand manner. For the "Abdal Tuning" (Bozuk Düzen, Kara Düzen) within the Cümbüş Sazı - long-necked bağlama family, the notes and corresponding pitches are shown in a table. The aim of this work is to be useful for beginners, practitioners, students, and even accomplished musicians who are just starting to play the "Cümbüş Saz".

Tuning of the “Cümbüş Instrument” - Cümbüş Saz (a type of Turkish stringed instrument) in the "Abdal Düzeni" style:

This tuning system for the cümbüş instrument is also called "Long-Neck Bağlama Tuning," "Broken Tuning," or "Black Tuning." The tuning sounds for this system are given in Table 1, the musical notes and their corresponding letters on the tuner are given in Table 2, and the letters on the tuner and their corresponding musical notes are given in Table 3. For the cümbüş instrument, a 0.20 mm string set, suitable for long-necked tambura instruments and bağlamas, is generally used, appropriate to the body size.

The plectrum should be firm, and size 8, 9, or 10 plectrums are preferred. Tuning by pulling the lower string “Sol”-“G” fret to the “La”- (A) note is recommended to ensure proper string tension and sound quality.

Table 1: Cümbüş Sazı - Abdal Tuning Chart

STRING GROUP		TUNING WHISTLE SOUND
I-	Lower String	La
II-	Medium String	Re
III-	Upper String	Sol

Table 2: Musical notes and corresponding letters on the tuner

MUSICAL NOTE	TUNING DEVICE LETTER EQUIVALENT
Do	C
Re	D
Mi	E
Fa	F
Sol	G
La	A
Si	B

Table 3: Letters on the tuner and their corresponding musical notes

TUNING DEVICE LETTERS	CORRESPONDING MUSICAL NOTE
A	La
B	Si
C	Do
D	Re
E	Mi
F	Fa
G	Sol

Tuner Settings:

Tuning Frequency: 440 Hz.

Chromatic Scale

Key C

To identify the devices and instruments used in this work; Figure 1 shows various tuners, Figure 2 shows a tuning whistle, Figure 3 shows different types of capos, Figure 4 shows the Cümbüş Saz (Cümbüş Bağlama), and Figures 5, 6, and 7 show the tuning peg arrangement of the Cümbüş Saz (Cümbüş Bağlama). Figure 8 shows the Cümbüş saz screw pegs and string groups, and the peg-string number matching, and Figure 9 shows the directions for loosening and tightening the screw pegs for tuning purposes.

CÜMBÜŞ SAZI – CÜMBÜŞ INSTRUMENT (LONG-NECKED, 6-STRINGED) TUNING ARRANGEMENT:

A- Long Neck Tuning System with the Tuning Whistle and Ear and the Strings Free:

I- Lower String Group:

Step 1: While blowing the sound of “La” on the tuning whistle, the peg of the first thin string at the bottom of the lower string group is turned and gradually tightened, while the sound is taken by hitting this string with the plectrum, when the sound of the whistle and the sound of the lower string are equal to each other, the whistle is released, now the lowest string is tuned to the sound of “La”.

Step 2: The peg of the second thin string of the lower string group is turned and gradually tightened, the sound is taken by hitting these two strings at the same time with the plectrum, and the sound of this string and the sound of the first lowest string that has just been tuned are equal to each other.

II-Middle String Group:

Step 3: While blowing the sound of “Re” on the tuning whistle, the peg of the first string at the bottom of the middle string group is turned and tightened gradually, while the sound is obtained by hitting this string with a plectrum, when the sound of the whistle and the sound of the middle lower string are equal to each other, the whistle is released, the middle lower string is tuned to the sound of “Re”.

Step 4: The peg of the second string at the top of the middle string group is turned and tightened gradually, the sound is obtained by hitting these two strings with a plectrum at the same time, and the sound of this string and the sound of the middle lower first string, which has just been tuned, are equalized to each other. After this stage, the middle string group of the bağlama becomes tuned within itself.

III- Upper String Group:

Step 5: While blowing the sound of “Sol” on the tuning whistle, the peg of the first thin string at the bottom of the upper string group is turned freely (idle-without pressing any pitch) and tightened gradually, while the sound is obtained by hitting this string with a plectrum, when the sound on the whistle and the sound of the lower string of the upper group are equal to each other, the whistle is released, now the lower string of the upper group is tuned to the sound of “Sol”.

Step 6: The peg of the bam string at the top of the upper string group is also turned and tightened gradually, and its sound is equalized to the sound of the other thin string. At this time, the sound is obtained by hitting these two strings with the plectrum at the same time. After this stage, the upper string group of the bağlama is tuned within itself.

Step 7: By hitting the lower string group, middle string group and upper string group with the plectrum at the same time, the sound is obtained and it is checked that the bağlama is fully tuned. The sound is obtained by pressing the "Re" pitch in the lower string group and the tuning control is confirmed by performing the choking operation on the long-neck bağlama arrangement for the "La" note.

Note: If more than one person will be playing the instrument at the same time, after the first instrument is tuned as above, the lower string “La” sound of the other instrument or instruments should be taken from the instrument that was tuned first.

B- Long Neck Tuning system made by tightening the relevant pitch by pulling the “La” sound to a specified note with the Tuning Whistle and Ear:

I- Lower String Group:

Step 1: The pitch related to the capo is tightened and while blowing the sound of “La” on the tuning whistle, the peg of the first thin string at the bottom of the lower string group is turned and tightened gradually, while the sound is obtained by hitting this string with the plectrum, when the sound on the whistle and the sound of the lower string are equal to each other, the whistle is released, now the lowest string is tuned to the sound of “La” pulled to the relevant pitch we want.

Step 2: The peg of the second thin string of the lower string group is turned and tightened gradually, the sound is obtained by hitting these two strings with the plectrum at the same time, and the sound of this string and the sound of the first lowest string that has just been tuned are equal to each other.

II-Middle String Group:

Step 3: The peg of the first string at the bottom of the middle string group is turned and gradually tightened, while the sound is taken by hitting this string and all the strings in the lower string group simultaneously with the plectrum, and when the sound of the lower string group and the sound of the lower string in the middle are equal to each other, the tuning is achieved.

Step 4: The peg of the second string at the top of the middle string group is turned and gradually tightened, the sound is taken by hitting these two strings at the same time with the plectrum, and the sound of this string and the sound of the first string in the middle, which has just been tuned, are equal to each other. After this stage, the middle string group of the bağlama becomes tuned within itself.

III- Upper String Group:

Step 5: The peg of the first thin string at the bottom of the upper string group is turned and gradually tightened, while the sound is taken by hitting this string and all the strings in the middle, which has just been tuned, when the sound of the middle string group and the sound of the lowest string on the top are equal to each other, the tuning is achieved.

Step 6: The top of the upper string group, the bam string, is gradually tightened by turning its peg, and its sound is equalized to the sound of the other thin string. At this time, the sound is obtained by hitting these two strings simultaneously with the plectrum. After this stage, the upper string group of the bağlama becomes tuned within itself.

Step 7: By simultaneously hitting the lower string group, middle string group and upper string group with a plectrum, the sound is taken and the bağlama is checked to see if it is fully tuned. The sound is taken by pressing the "Re" pitch on the lower string group and the tuning control is confirmed to provide harmony by performing the choking operation on the long-neck bağlama arrangement for the "La" note.

Note: If more than one person will be playing the instrument at the same time, after the first instrument is tuned as above, the lower string "La" sound of the other instrument or instruments should be taken from the instrument that was tuned first.

C- Long Neck Tuning System with the Tuner and the Strings Free:

I- Lower String Group:

Step 1: Turn on the tuner. Tuning Frequency: 440 Hz. Chromatic Scale and Key C settings should be visible on the device. The peg of the first thin string at the bottom of the lower string group is turned and gradually tightened while the sound is obtained by hitting this string with a plectrum, when the tuner shows the letter "A" the lowest string is now tuned to the sound of "La".

Step 2: The same process explained in Step 1 can be repeated for the second thin string of the lower string group. Or as another method; The peg of the second thin string in the middle of the lower string group is turned and gradually tightened, the sound is obtained by hitting these two strings with a plectrum at the same time, and the sound of this string and the sound of the first lowest string that has just been tuned are equalized.

II-Middle String Group:

Step 3: In the lower string group, the sound is taken from the saz with a plectrum by pressing the "Re" pitch and it is observed which letter is lit on the tuning device. (The letter D should be lit, which corresponds to the "Re" sound). The peg of the first string at the bottom of the middle string group is turned and gradually tightened, while the sound is taken by hitting this string with the plectrum. When the letter just read from the tuning device is seen, the sound of the lower string group and the sound of the middle lower string in the middle are equalized and tuning is achieved.

Step 4: What was done in Step 3 is repeated for the upper second string of the middle string group. Or the peg of the upper second string of the middle string group is turned and gradually tightened, the sound is taken by hitting these two strings with the plectrum at the same time and the sound of this string and the sound of the middle lower first string that was just tuned are equalized. After this stage, the middle string group of the bağlama becomes tuned within itself.

III- Upper String Group:

Step 5: In the middle string group, the sound is taken from the saz with a plectrum by pressing the "Re" pitch (the middle string group will be pressed) and the letter that lights up on the tuning device is observed. (The letter G should light up, which corresponds to the "Sol" sound). The peg of the first string at the bottom of the upper string group is turned and gradually tightened, while the sound is taken by hitting this string with the plectrum. When the letter just read from the tuning device is seen, the sound of the middle string group and the sound of the lowest string in the upper group are equalized and tuning is achieved.

Step 6: The same process explained in Step 5 can be repeated for the topmost bam string of the upper string group. Or as another method; The peg of the thick bam string at the top of the upper string group is also turned and gradually tightened, and its sound is equalized to the sound of the other thin string. At this time, the sound is taken by hitting these two strings with the plectrum at the same time. After this stage, the upper string group of the bağlama becomes tuned within itself.

Step 7: By simultaneously hitting the lower string group, middle string group and upper string group with a plectrum, the sound is taken and the bağlama is checked to see if it is fully tuned. The sound is taken by pressing the "Re" pitch on the

lower string group and the tuning control is confirmed to provide harmony by performing the choking operation on the long-neck baglama arrangement for the “La” note.

Note: If more than one person will be playing the instrument at the same time, after the first instrument is tuned as above, the lower string “La” sound of the other instrument or instruments should be taken from the instrument that was tuned first.

D- Long Neck Tuning System by tightening the relevant pitch with the Tuner and by pulling the “La” sound to a specified note:

I- Lower String Group:

Step 1: The tuner is turned on. Tuning Frequency: 440 Hz. Chromatic Scale and Key C settings should be visible on the device. The relevant pitch is tightened with the capo. The peg of the first thin string at the bottom of the lower string group is turned and gradually tightened, while the sound is obtained by hitting this string with the plectrum, when the tuner shows the letter “A”, the lowest string is now tuned to the relevant pitch and tuned to the sound of “La”.

Step 2: The same process explained in Step 1 can be repeated for the second thin string of the lower string group. Or as another method; The peg of the second thin string in the middle of the lower string group is turned and gradually tightened, the sound is obtained by hitting these two strings with the plectrum at the same time, and the sound of this string and the sound of the first lowest string that has just been tuned are equalized.

II-Middle String Group:

Step 3: In the lower string group, the sound is taken from the saz with a plectrum by pressing the “Re” pitch and it is observed which letter is lit on the tuning device. The peg of the first string at the bottom of the middle string group is turned and gradually tightened, while the sound is taken by hitting this string with the plectrum. When the letter just read from the tuning device is seen, the sound of the lower string group and the sound of the middle lower string in the middle are equalized and tuning is achieved.

Step 4: What was done in Step 3 is repeated for the second string at the top of the middle string group. Or the peg of the second string at the top of the middle string group is turned and gradually tightened, the sound is taken by hitting these two strings at the same time with the plectrum and the sound of this string and the sound of the middle lower first string that was just tuned are equalized. After this stage, the middle string group of the baglama becomes tuned within itself.

III- Upper String Group:

Step 5: In the middle string group, the sound is taken from the saz with a plectrum by pressing the “Re” pitch (to be pressed on the middle string group) and the letter that lights up on the tuning device is observed. The peg of the first string at the bottom of the upper string group is turned and gradually tightened, while the sound is taken by hitting this string with the plectrum. When the letter just read from the tuning device is seen, the sound of the middle string group and the sound of the lowest string in the upper group are equalized and tuning is achieved.

Step 6: The same process explained in Step 5 can be repeated for the topmost bam string of the upper string group. Or as another method; The peg of the thick bam string, which is the third string at the top of the upper string group, is also turned and gradually tightened to equalize its sound to the sound of the other thin string. At this time, the sound is taken by hitting these two strings with the plectrum at the same time. After this stage, the upper string group of the baglama becomes tuned within itself.

Step 7: By simultaneously hitting the lower string group, middle string group and upper string group with a plectrum, the sound is taken and the baglama is checked to see if it is fully tuned. The sound is taken by pressing the “Re” pitch on the lower string group and the “La” note is checked by choking on the long-neck baglama setup to ensure harmony.

Note: If more than one person will be playing the instrument at the same time, after the first instrument is tuned as above, the lower string “La” sound of the other instrument or instruments should be taken from the instrument that was tuned first. Table 4 shows the notes and corresponding pitches for the "Abdal Düzen" (Bozuk Düzen, Kara Düzen) style of music played on the Cümbüş instrument.

Upper String Group	Middle String Group	Lower String Group	Pitch No
Do	Sol	Re	23
Si	Fa [#]	Do [#]	22
Si ^b	Fa	Do	21
La	Mi	Si	20
La _{b2}	Mi _{b2}	Si ^b ₂	19
La _b	Mi _b	Si ^b	18
Sol	Re	La	17
Fa [#]	Do [#]	La _{b2}	16
Fa ^{#3}	Do ^{#3}	La _b	15
Fa	Do	Sol	14
Mi	Si	Fa [#]	13
Mi _{b2}	Si ^b ₂	Fa ^{#3}	12
Mi _b	Si ^b	Fa	11
Re	La	Mi	10
Do [#]	La _{b2}	Mi _{b2}	9
Do ^{#3}	La _b	Mi _b	8
Do	Sol	Re	7
Si	Fa [#]	Do [#]	6
Si ^b ₂	Fa ^{#3}	Do ^{#3}	5
Si ^b	Fa	Do	4
La	Mi	Si	3
La _{b2}	Mi _{b2}	Si ^b ₂	2
La _b	Mi _b	Si ^b	1
SOL (Upper String Free)	RE (Middle String Free)	LA (Lower String Free)	

Table 4: Notes and corresponding pitches for the "Abdal Düzen" (Bozuk Düzen, Kara Düzen) style of the Cümbüş instrument (Cümbüş Sazı)



Figure 1: Tuners.



Figure 2: Tuning Whistle.



Figure 3: Types of capos



Figure 4: “Cümbüş Sazı”, “Cümbüşü Bağlama” instrument



Figure 5: Tuning of the tuning pegs for the "Cümbüş Sazı" and "Cümbüşü Bağlama"



Figure 6: Tuning of the tuning pegs for the "Cümbüş Sazı" and "Cümbüşü Bağlama"



Figure 7: Tuning of the tuning pegs for the "Cümbüş Sazı" and "Cümbüşü Bağlama"

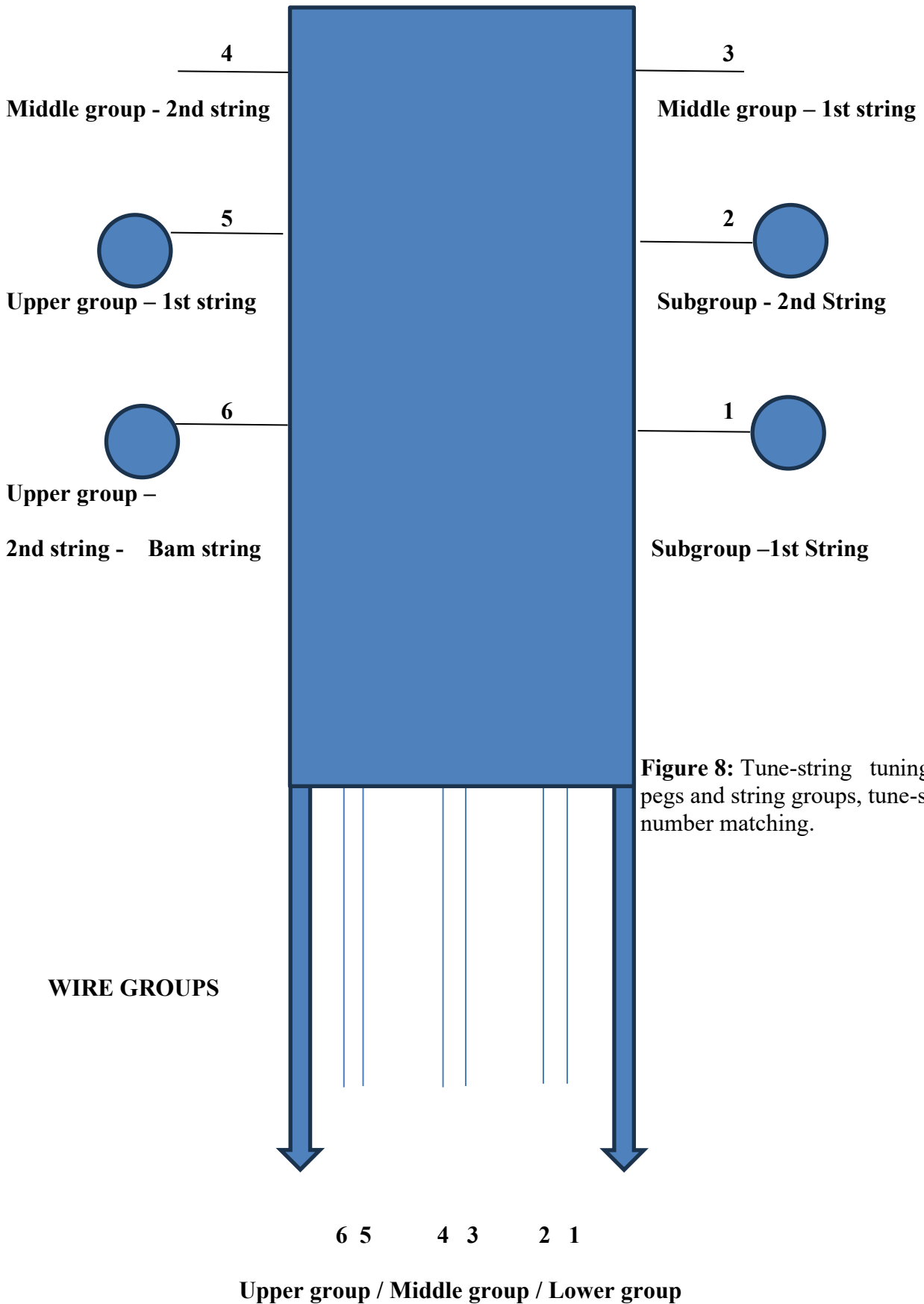


Figure 8: Tune-string tuning pegs and string groups, tune-string number matching.

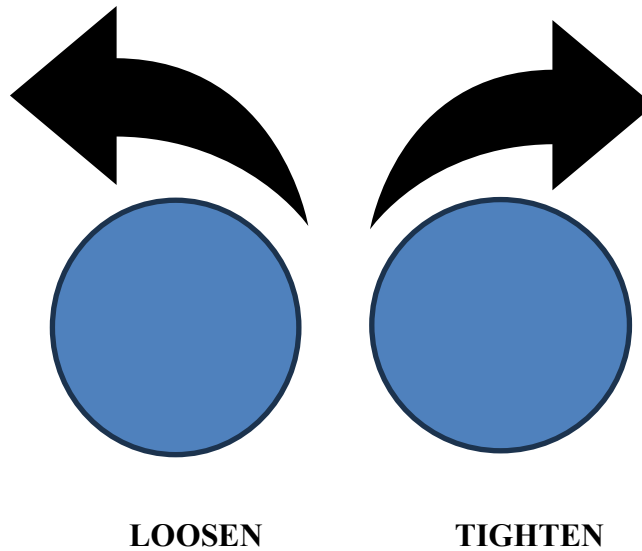


Figure 9: Directions for loosening or tightening the tuning pegs for tuning purposes.

BIOGRAPHY OF AUTHOR:

Asst. Prof. Dr. Dipl.-Ing. Emin Taner ELMAS



Asst. Prof. Dr. Emin Taner ELMAS is a Mechanical Engineer having degrees of B.Sc., M.Sc., Ph.D., and was born in Sivas in 1974. He completed his doctorate at Ege University, Graduate School of Natural and Applied Sciences, Mechanical Engineering Department, Thermodynamics Science Branch, and his master's degree at Dokuz Eylül University, Mechanical Engineering Department, Energy Science Branch. He also completed his undergraduate education at Hacettepe University, ZEF, Mechanical Engineering Department and graduated from the faculty with honors in 1995 and became a mechanical engineer. He was awarded a non-refundable scholarship by the Turkish Chamber of Mechanical Engineers in his 4th year because he was the most successful student during his first 3 classes study at the faculty. He graduated from İzmir Atatürk High School in 1991.

Asst. Prof. Dr. ELMAS has completed his military service as a NATO Officer in Bosnia and Herzegovina. He was a "Reserved Officer" as a "2nd Lieutenant" as an "English-Turkish Interpreter". He was also a "Guard Commander" and served in Sarajevo, Camp Butmir within the SFOR task force of NATO. He has been awarded with 2 (two) NATO Medals and Turkish Armed Forces Service Certificate of Pride (Bosnia & Herzegovina).

In addition to his academic duties at universities, he has worked as an engineer and manager in various industrial institutions, organizations and companies; He has served as Construction Site Manager, Project Manager, Management Representative, Quality Manager, Production Manager, Energy Manager, CSO-CTO, CBDO, Factory Manager, Deputy General Manager and General Manager.

Asst. Prof. Dr. Elmas is Department Head and is an Assistant Professor of Automotive Technology at the Department of Motor Vehicles and Transportation Technologies at Vocational School of Higher Education for Technical Sciences at IGDİR UNIVERSITY, Turkey. He is also an Assistant Professor of Bioengineering & BioSciences at the same university. He has nearly 30 years of total experience in academia and in industry.

He has served as a scientific referee and panelist for ASME, TUBITAK and many scientific institutions, organizations and universities, including NASA.

He has published numerous international and national academic scientific articles, books, and book chapters, and serves as an editor for international academic journals. He also serves on the scientific committees of many international conferences, publishing conference and congress proceedings and giving presentations.

“Mechanical Engineering, Energy Transfer, Thermodynamics, Fluid Mechanics, Heat Transfer, Higher Mathematics, Evaporation, Heat Pipes, Space Sciences, Automotive, Bioengineering, Medical Engineering Applications, Neuroengineering, Medical Technique” are his academic and scientific fields of study; “Heating-Ventilation Air Conditioning Applications, Pressure Vessels, Heat Exchangers, Energy Efficiency, Steam Boilers, Power Plants, Cogeneration, Water Purification, Water Treatment, Industrial Equipment and Machinery, Welding Manufacturing, Sheet Metal Forming, Machining” are his industrial experience fields.

As of 2026, he has been awarded the Nobel Scientist Award by the international platform organization Scientific Laurels.

Asst. Prof. Dr. Emin Taner ELMAS is also a musician, saz (baglama) virtuoso player and ney (Nay, Turkish Reed Flute) performer. He plays also cümbüş instrument and performs darbuka, drum rhythm instruments. He has a YouTube Music Channel (Emin Taner ELMAS) which includes some of his sound recordings of him playing the saz-baglame and blowing the ney. He composed the poem written by the great poet Âşık Veysel ŞATIROĞLU under the name of “Raşit Bey” in memory of his father Judge (Hâkim) Raşit ELMAS as “Raşit Bey Türküsü”, wrote it down, notated and published it as an academic article and broadcasted this song on his own music channel. He wrote the poems entitled “Canım Babam” and “Geldim Babam” which he wrote also in memory of his father and published in an academic literature journal, and composed instrumental musics for these poems. He also composed an instrumental song called “Annem Annem Türküsü” and gave it to his mother, Lawyer Tuna ELMAS, as a gift on Mother’s Day, 11.05.2025. He also has a poem titled "Ney and Neyzen." He also wrote and presented a poem titled "Esra Kardeşim" to his sister, Esra ELMAS, an archaeologist and English teacher. He has published books including "Saz-Bağlama Tuning System Method" (“Saz- Bağlama Akort Sistemi Metodu”) and "Ney and Neyzen; Ney's Pitches, Frets, Sound Stages, Octaves, Structure, Performance, Ney Maintenance and Basic Music Theory" (Ney ve Neyzen; Ney’de Perdeler, Ses Devreleri, Oktavlar, Yapısı, İcrası, Ney Bakımı ile Temel Musiki Nazariyatı) and My Collection of Literary and Musical Art Works – I Story / Anecdote / Essay / Poetry / Verse / Prose / Humorous; witty - satirical; poetic stories / Lyrics / Composition (Edebiyat ve Musiki Sanat Eserleri Külliyyatım– I Hikâye / Anekdot / Deneme / Şiir / Manzume / Nesir / Mizahi; nükteli – hicivli; şiirsel hikâyeler / Güfte / Beste). He continues his artistic studies by writing various articles, books, poetry, lyrics and also realizing musical composition and repertoire works.

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