

## Thumb Plucking



I developed my own method of plucking kantele strings because it was hard for me to pluck them the "normal" way, due to arthritis and inflamed nerve sheaths. Some people who've seen me play like my style of plucking, and have adopted -- and adapted -- it to suit themselves. Remembering the melody isn't any harder when you pluck with your thumbs instead of using the standard positions. Instead of cuing off your finger positions and the movement of the song from one finger to the next, you learn to cue off the motions your hands make, and the distances they move from string to string.

I use my thumbs for plucking; resting the pads on the strings and pushing away. I don't have specific strings assigned to each thumb. Instead, they each play whatever string's the easiest for them to reach in any given song.

By resting the third, fourth and fifth fingers of each hand on the far edge of the kantele, I can support it in my lap and feel the vibrations of the instrument while I'm playing. The "vibes" give valuable feedback.

You may find that your thumb sometimes touches a string, causing an unpleasant buzz. Don't worry about it! With practice, your thumbs will move exactly where you want them to...and you'll stop buzzing.

This method of plucking also gives a clear attack. I like the way the notes ring. If you have smooth finger pads that slip off the strings, you will find this style of playing much easier.

When Erkki Okkonen made my kantele, he told me that the sound would improve the more I played, and my kantele would learn to respond and reflect all my thoughts and moods.

He was right, but since then I've learned that my kantele does much more than reflect my thoughts and moods. It's a teacher and, if I listen, it can teach me how to become a better player.

Discovering my own way of plucking the strings was one of the first lessons my kantele taught me.