

Welcome to Dulcimer 101

The Basics

What You'll Need

- Dulcimer
- Stand
- Hammers
- Tuning Wrench
- (Electronic) Tuner – chromatic
- Tuner pickup (optional)

Instrument layout

- Strings
- Courses
- Bridges
- Pin blocks
- Soundboard
- Bridge markers

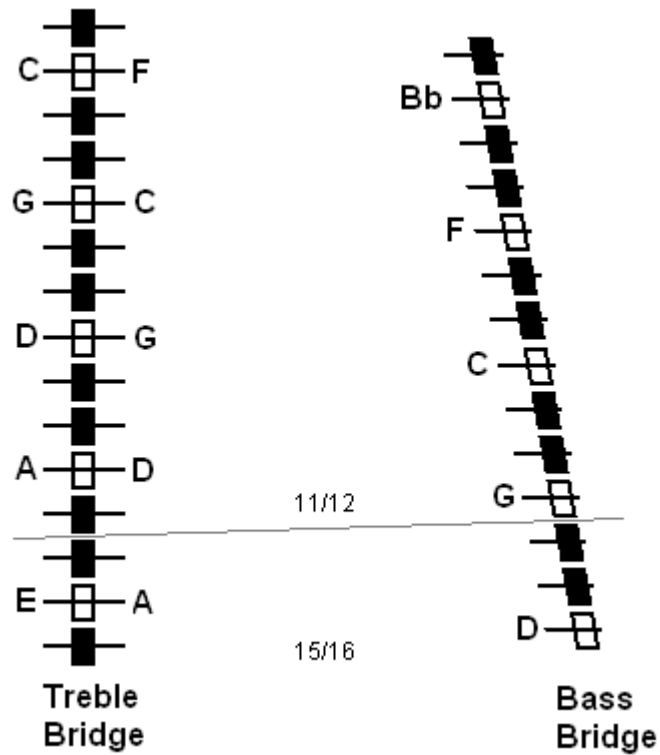
How to play the darn thing...

- Holding your hammers
- Positioning yourself relative to the instrument
- Sitting or standing?
- Shoulders relaxed, arms at your side
- Where to strike the strings (bass and treble bridges)
- How to strike the strings
 - Loosely hold the hammers so they float
 - Use your arms, not your wrists
- Look at the dulcimer
- Which hand to use
- General “rules”:
 - Avoid hand crosses
 - Play horizontally instead of vertically when you can

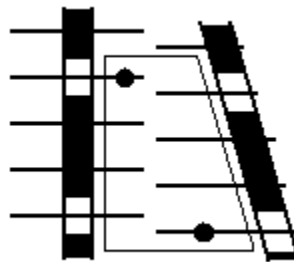
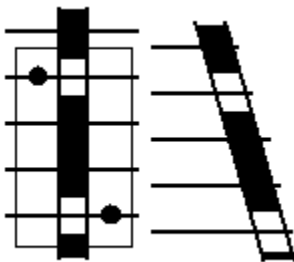
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Notes & Scales

- Bass bridge – note is on left side
- Treble bridge – notes on each side
- Identifying each strings pitch
 - Memorize the bridge key position markers 1st
 - Don't worry about sharps and flats in string notes for now

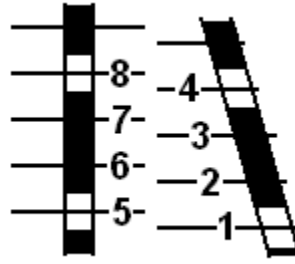
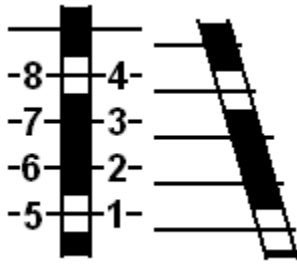


- Major scale “boxes”, octaves

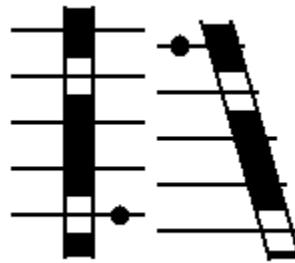
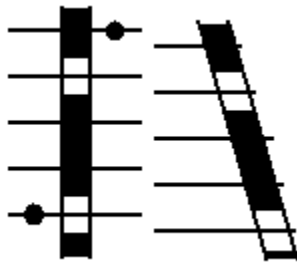


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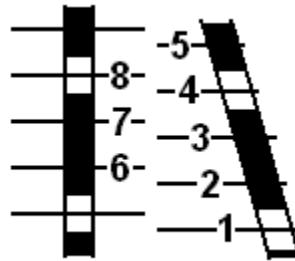
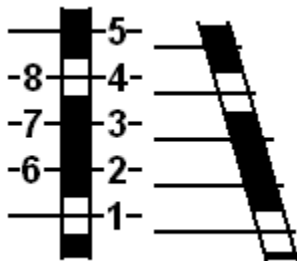
- Playing a major scale – ascending and descending



- Same pattern in different position plays a different scale
- Unisons – same note repeats in different scale



- Ascending scale - up 5 and over 3 avoids hand cross



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Learning tunes

Learning tips

- use music to find notes on the dulcimer, then memorize visual / hammering patterns - look at the dulcimer
- look for repeating / similar phrases
- recognize patterns from other songs you know
- work slowly, increase speed only after you can play it well slowly
- if too many mistakes, slow down until you've "got it"
- the more you learn the faster learning will become

Memorization hints

- memorize visual patterns
- small parts at a time
- tackle a phrase at a time, then play it with the phrases already learned
- **repetition - over time** (10 minutes/day...)
- use muscle memory - relax!

Use written music to






- determine where to begin playing
- rhythm (timing of each note and groups of notes)
- find the melody notes on the dulcimer (which courses to hit)
- which hand to use for each note (hint: use rhythm)

Music Notation

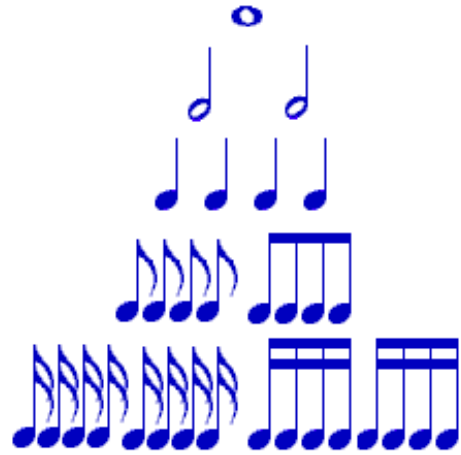
Key signature
Time signature
bar
repeat
first ending
second ending (1st repeat)
1.
2.
measure
start repeat here
start repeat here
A part
B part

- music staff lines = E G B D F (Every Good Boy Deserves a Favor)

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Name	Note	4/4 Count
Whole note		4 beats
Half note		2 beats
Quarter note		1 beat
Eighth note		1/2 beat
Sixteenth note		1/4 beat

Equal Time Pyramid:


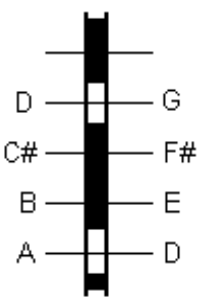


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Key Signature

- determines where on the dulcimer the notes will be found

Key of D

Popular keys for the Hammered Dulcimer (in order of popularity):

Key Signature	Major Key	Minor Key	Comments
	D	Bm	
	G	Em	
	A	F#m	usually not playable on 11/12 instruments
	C	Am	
	F	Dm	bass bridge only




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Time Signature

4 = Beats per measure

4 = Note value that receives 1 beat

Popular time signatures for traditional music:

Time Signature	Music Pulse (accented beat(s) underlined)	Beats per Measure	Used for:
4 / 4		4	Reels , Marches, Hornpipes, Set Dances
3 / 4		3	Waltzes
6 / 8		6	Jigs

Rhythm

- play the rhythm on your legs
- determines which hand to use for which notes
- accent 1st beat of each measure - use/lead with your strong hand

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Reels

R=right, L=left hand

Tr = Treble bridge, right side

TI = Treble bridge, left side

B = Bass bridge

Cincinnati Hornpipe (D)

Musical notation for Cincinnati Hornpipe (D) in 4/4 time, key of D major. The melody is written on a treble clef staff. The rhythm is indicated by the notes: quarter, quarter, quarter, quarter, quarter, quarter, quarter, quarter, quarter, quarter, quarter, quarter, quarter, quarter, quarter, quarter. The fingering below the staff is: R L R L R L R L.

Swinging on a Gate (G)

Musical notation for Swinging on a Gate (G) in 4/4 time, key of G major. The melody is written on a treble clef staff. The rhythm is indicated by the notes: quarter, quarter, quarter, quarter, quarter, quarter, quarter, quarter, quarter, quarter, quarter, quarter, quarter, quarter, quarter, quarter. The fingering below the staff is: R L (R R) L (R R). Above the staff, bridge indicators are: TI Tr B B Tr TI.

Far From Home (G)

Musical notation for Far From Home (G) in 4/4 time, key of G major. The melody is written on a treble clef staff. The rhythm is indicated by the notes: quarter, quarter, quarter, quarter, quarter, quarter, quarter, quarter, quarter, quarter, quarter, quarter, quarter, quarter, quarter, quarter. The fingering below the staff is: R (L) R R L R R L R L. Above the staff, bridge indicators are: Tr B Tr Tr B Tr.

Petronella (D)

Musical notation for Petronella (D) in 4/4 time, key of D major. The melody is written on a treble clef staff. The rhythm is indicated by the notes: quarter, quarter, quarter, quarter, quarter, quarter, quarter, quarter, quarter, quarter, quarter, quarter, quarter, quarter, quarter, quarter. The fingering below the staff is: R R L R R L (R R R) R L R R L R R R R.

Figuring out which bridge and courses/notes to play

- 1) ignore the octave - use the key signature!
- 2) avoid hand crosses
- 3) the easiest transition to the next note or hand
- 4) play horizontally if easier

Recap: Use written music to

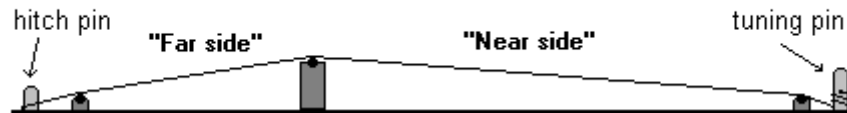
- determine where to begin playing
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- find the melody notes on the dulcimer (which courses to hit)
- which hand to use for each note (hint: use rhythm)

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Tuning

Tuning Dynamics

- Friction
 - Across bridge(s)
 - Turning tuning pin



- Perfect tuning (hah!)

General Tuning Recommendations

1. Tune your instrument at least once weekly – don't let it get way out of tune
2. Always carry your tuning wrench and tuner with your Dulcimer!
3. Use a guitar pick
4. Turn wrench with your **arm, not your wrist**
 - lower string a little first
 - loosens pin friction
 - gives you more room to tune up without overshooting pitch
 - **start low, turn slowly while continuously plucking, then stop turning when proper pitch reached**
 - use momentum to reduce effects of pin friction
5. Always tune up!
6. Tune Consistently – I recommend:
 - Tune Bass, then Treble bridges
 - Tune each bridge from top to bottom
 - In each course: tune one string first while damping other string(s) with your finger
 - Treble bridge, for each course:
 - 1st tune **both "far" side notes** (one string at a time)
 - then tune **both "near" side notes** (one string at a time) – usually will just need a little lowering (due to friction over the bridge)
 - don't tune all one side of the bridge and then the other!

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Electronic Tuners

- make sure it's **chromatic** (even if your dulcimer is not)
- sensitivity - try before you buy!
- meter vs. lights – easy to see, read
- look for **fast note recognition**
- slop
- pickups? – microphone vs. transducers
 - attach to tuning pins, bridge, etc. – experiment!
 - will probably need to move around several times as you tune
- use a guitar pick - pluck/pick **gently**
- use your ears too!

All the Notes

