

BEGINNING HAMMER DULCIMER

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EXERCISES

Hammer Control

Individual hammer strikes

L – R hammer strikes across the treble bridge

No bouncing

Play as rapidly as you can while keeping control of each hammer blow

Change the dynamic level from very soft to very loud – maintain speed while playing softly

Hammer Alternation

1. With the right hammer only, play this sequence of tones on the right side of the treble bridge:

D E D F# D G D A D B D C D D' D

The pattern is just a linear run up the right side of the treble bridge. But between each tone of the scale you return to the original tone of D. The entire pattern is played with the right hand.

2. Now with the left hand strike the A on the left side of the treble bridge located directly across from the D on which the scale begins. Continue to insert A in between each of the scale tones. Now the pattern looks like this:

D A E A D A F# A D A G A D A (left side) A (right side) D A B A D A C A D A D' A D

3. Next take this same hammering pattern across the bridge. Use a left-hand lead beginning on A on the left side of the treble bridge right across from the D where we had previously started. The pattern is EXACTLY the same. What is different about this is the left-hand lead and the drone tone is in the right hand on D. Now the pattern becomes:

A D B D A D C# D A D (right side) D' (left side) and so forth.

4. The ultimate integration merges steps two and three. Here the hands alternate to produce two droning scales in different keys.

None of this will sound musical. In fact, step 4 sounds just awful. However, the exercise is not about music. It's about mechanical skill. This drill helps to build vertical accuracy over distance and strengthens your hand alternation.

Scales

Diatonic Scales

Play a diatonic scale over two octaves from low G on the bass bridge to the highest tone in the G scale on the left side of the treble bridge – that's probably a D. Begin with a right-hand lead and then practice a



left hand lead. Note that no matter which hand you lead with, the second octave will be played with a different lead hand. Play the scale up and play it down, too. Play SLOWLY. Concentrate on Accuracy.

Rolling Scales

Rolling scales fold back upon themselves but still cover the octave. Play this in the key of G on the treble bridge. The pattern begins on the right side of the bridge. The pattern is:

G A B G A B C A B C D B C D E * C D E F# ♠ D E F# G E F# G A F# G A G

* (With a right-hand lead, this E and the rest of the pattern is on the left side of the bridge)

♠ (With a left hand lead, this F# and the rest of the pattern is on the left side of the bridge)

Practice this so that a listener cannot tell whether you lead with the left or right hand. Practice for fluidity, and, ultimately, practice for speed. Try to make the playing expressive and not machine-like.

Once you have mastered the rolling scales in ascending and descending patterns, change the key. Try this exercise in the keys of D, C, F and if you have a 15/16 instrument try it in A.

Triplet Scales

A triplet is three notes played on a single beat. A triplet scale simply takes the scale we expect – G A B C D F# G – and adds triplets. The pattern is

G A B A B C B C D C D E D E F# E F# G F# G A G

Practice with both left and right hand leads. Practice ascending and descending. Practice in the keys of G, D and C. If you have a 15/16 instrument try it in A.

Octave Stutter Scale

The octave stutter scale is meant to expand your peripheral mastery of the instrument. The scale is played in three octaves on the instrument. Begin with a right hand lead on G on the bass bridge then play G on the right side of the treble bridge with the left hammer. Strike the same tone a second time with the right hammer. Finish the pattern by striking G an octave higher on the left side of the treble bridge. Follow that pattern up the scale as high as your instrument will allow. That's probably only as high as a D. Practice for accuracy. The pattern is

G- G G G' A- A A A' B- B B B' and so forth

The name describes the scale. The pattern is based on two octaves and the center tone is played twice, hence the "stutter."



Scale with Shifted Lead

This exercise is to help build the ability to shift leads in the middle of a phrase. It also helps build separate hands dexterity. The pattern will be a scale in G on the treble bridge with a right hand lead.

G G'(left side octave higher) A F# G E C D'

The pattern should end with the D played by the left hammer. Continue the pattern with a left hand lead:

D' C E B F# A G' G

This leaves you at the top of the octave scale. Now comes back down the scale to where you started using the same pattern. This time the lead begins in the left-hand and the lead shifts from left to right at C.

Rolls and Arpeggios

Arpeggiated G Chord

Right-hand lead. Play the lowest G on the bass bridge and then B and D on the bass bridge.

G- B- D

Now, with a left-hand lead, play G on the right side of the treble bridge, B above that, and with the left hammer, strike D' on the left side of the treble bridge.

Finish the arpeggio by playing **G' B' D''**

This provides a multi-octave arpeggio of the G chord. It's a great way to begin or end a tune in the key of G.

Try the same exercise using a left-hand lead to start the arpeggio in the bass bridge. The hammer patterns will be different and you will have to cross the bridge at different spots.

Repeat this exercise for D chords and C chords.

Vertical Rolls

Vertical accuracy is always more difficult than horizontal accuracy on the dulcimer. We tend to do better moving sideways than up and down. This exercise is meant to help develop vertical accuracy.

With a right hand lead on the right side of the treble bridge, play this:

D F# A

Repeat this pattern but now with a left hand lead. Put the two together to get:

(right lead) D F# A (left lead) D F# A



Play this alternating lead pattern four times:

(right lead) D F# A (left lead) D F# A (right lead) D F# A (left lead) D F# A

Play through the pattern twice:

**(right lead) D F# A (left lead) D F# A (right lead) D F# A (left lead) D F# A
(right lead) D F# A (left lead) D F# A (right lead) D F# A (left lead) D F# A**

You'll find that the movement of the hammers looks sort of like a conveyor belt. Each hand moves sequentially upward and takes its turn as the lead hammer. It's a great drill and it can be a tune too.

Move the pattern to begin on G on the right side of the treble bridge.

(right lead) G B D (left lead) G B D (right lead) G B D (left lead) G B D

Now try the pattern on the left side of the treble bridge beginning on A directly across from the D where the exercise began.

(right lead) A C# E (left lead) A C# E (right lead) A C# E (left lead) A C# E

Put all these pattern together and you'll play something that sounds like Glenn Miller's famous tune *In The Mood*.

(right lead) D F# A (left lead) D F# A (right lead) D F# A (left lead) D F# A

(right lead) D F# A (left lead) D F# A (right lead) D F# A (left lead) D F# A

(right lead) G B D (left lead) G B D (right lead) G B D (left lead) G B D

(right lead) D F# A (left lead) D F# A (right lead) D F# A (left lead) D F# A

(right lead) A C# E (left lead) A C# E (right lead) A C# E (left lead) A C# E

(right lead) D F# A (left lead) D F# A (right lead) D F# A (left lead) D F# A

Drones

Drones are very useful on the hammer dulcimer. They are used a great deal in old time music. But for the purposes of this exercise, we'll turn to symphonic music and borrow a little tune from Beethoven. You are probably familiar with the melody of *Ode to Joy* from Beethoven's 9th Symphony.



Using the right hand ONLY, play the melody on the left side of the treble bridge. I'll simplify the notation because these melody tones are all in the octave above middle C.

F# F# G A A G F# E D D E F# F# E E

F# F# G A A G F# E D D E F# E D D

That's the first part of the tune. All of this is played with the right hammer on the left side of the treble bridge.

Now let's add a drone using A on the right side of the treble bridge. Play the pattern once again, but insert an A between each tone. Use ONLY the right hammer. The pattern becomes:

F#' A F#' A G' A A'(left) A A' (left) G' A F#' A E' A D' A D' A E' A F#' A F#' A E' A E'

F#' A F# A 'G' A A' A A' A G' A F#' A E' A D' A D' A E' A F#' A E' A D' A D'

The notion of A' indicates that you must play the A an octave above the A that appears in the middle C octave. That's the A on the left side of the treble bridge. This is important to note because you'll play As an octave apart as you drone. The As played on the right side of the bridge are in a smaller font.

Now let's play the tune using a D drone. This time play the D with the left hammer. So we'll return to alternating hammers. Find the D' on the left side of the treble bridge.

F#' D' F#' D' G' D' A' D' A' G' D' F#' D' E' D' D' D' D' D' E' D' F#' D' F#' E' E' E' E'

F#' D' F# ' D' G' D' A' D' A' D' G' D' F#' D' E' D' D' D' D' D' E' D' F#' D' E' D' D' D' D'

In the first line, the drone changes to E' at the end to accommodate a chord change.

These two drones can be combined into a single arpeggiated melody. This is much harder to write and to read than it is to play. So I'll give you just part of the first phrase. Remember, we return to alternating hammers and begin with a right hand lead.

F#' D'A D' F#' D'A D' G' D'A D' A' D'A D' A' D'A D' G' D'A D' F#' D'A D' E' D'A D' D' D'A D'

Work out the B part on your own.