

The Musical Alphabet

The western Musical Alphabet uses 7 different note names for the different pitches:

....A B C D E F G A....



The string names continue in both directions:

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

So we only have to worry about 7 different note names (rather than the 26 letters in the English alphabet!) But, in good 21st century fashion the 7 names are re-used and recycled.

If you are familiar with a piano, the note names correspond to the names of the white keys. (more on the black keys later)

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

Each time the note name repeats a new octave is beginning with a higher version of that same note. (See Lesson 1) This is what that song from “The Sound of Music”: Do, Re, Mi, Fa, Sol, La, Ti, Do is teaching singers to understand about the musical alphabet.

(*Note: Scandanavian and German alphabets are slightly different,

H replaces B:

....A H C D E F G A....)

The strings on the mountain dulcimer relate to these names and in the most common tunings today are called (from lowest, or thickest to highest, or thinnest): **D A A** or **D A d**. (The smaller case d is a way to indicate that the melody string(s) when tuned in the 1-5-8 tuning are an octave higher than the note with the same name on the bass string.

The courses of strings on the hammered dulcimer relate to these names.

Unlike the piano one characteristic of stringed instruments is that several of the notes appear in more than one place on the instruments.