

Workshop Instructed by: Katie Moritz

Online Support: (coming soon) www.katiemoritz.com/notereading

This workshop introduces note-reading to HD players who either have no experience reading music, OR who are just not any good at it on the hammered dulcimer. I played exclusively by ear for years and the thought of reading sheet music was terrifying, but it's skill you can develop! I will show the basics of note reading and introduce some drills and cognitive tricks that will help bridge the gap between sheet music and hammered dulcimer.

First thing's first!

If you haven't ever read a note on paper, this is a quick crash course. You will need to do so studying on your own to get all the ins and outs. There just isn't enough time in 1 hour to cover it all, but this is a start! There are 5 lines in a single music staff. Notes can fall either on a line or in a space between lines. Note names range from "A" through "G" before they start back at "A" again. This means there are 8 letter names, and these names correspond with a standard 8 note scale in Western music. Standard notation uses sharps and flats to complete 12 chromatic tones while only utilizing 8 letters in the alphabet.

Would it be easier to have 12 note names? ...Perhaps in some cases. For most of the music we play, 8 notes is enough and this system of sharps and flats helps to simplify and utilize the real estate of a smaller musical staff.

We are going to focus only on treble clef in this workshop.

The Basics

Below you'll see notation for a C major scale. I know it's major because there are no flats or sharps in the key signature (which we will talk about more in our workshop). Notice how as the notes ascend up the staff, the names progress forward alphabetically. This is how it will always be. The vertical lines on the staff denote "measures". There are two measures shown. If we were to

add a fourth measure and continue up the staff, we'd see the scale start to repeat with D-E-F-G.

C D E F G A B C
Do Re Mi Fa Sol La Ti Do

When I began learning music as a child, I just learned one note at a time, starting with C and working my way up the scale.

The notes that fall in spaces are F, A, C, and E. The notes that fall on lines are E, G, B, D, and F. Many people find that mnemonic devices help them to remember these sequences. "Every Good Boy Does Fine" is a classic example for E-G-B-D-F.

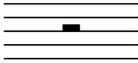
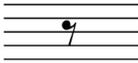
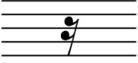
F A C E Every Good Boy Does Fine

Note Duration

We all know what a “beat” in music is. It’s that thing we tap our foot to when the musicians playing can keep time. Music notation has a very clever way of telling the reader how long each note is supposed to be, or how how many beats the note will last. If you understand simple fractions, you can understand this.

A whole note = 4 beats. A half note = 2 beats. A quarter note = 1 beat. And so on...

Notes with a small dot to the right of them are held for 1.5 times the notes duration. Ex: A dotted half note contains 3 beats.

Name	Note	Rest	Equivalents
Whole Note			Two Half Notes 
Half Note			Two Quarter Notes 
Quarter Note			Two Eighth Notes 
Eighth Note			Two Sixteenth Notes 
Sixteenth Note			Two Thirty-second Notes 

We will talk about how to count out these beats in the workshop. But for now, this is enough information to get started learning how to translate this to the hammered dulcimer.

Example

I won’t tell you the name of the tune below because I want you to exercise your note-reading. You will probably recognize it after a few notes, but try to continue acknowledging the written music even after you recognize what you’re playing.

Notice there are some pound signs (or hashtags for the kids!) on the staff towards the left side. That shows the key signature. These are neither pound signs nor are they hashtags. They symbolize that the note they represent (F and C) should be sharp. This means the example should be played in the key of D, which has 2 sharps.



Learning Notes on the Hammered Dulcimer

In our workshop, I'll cover more than this hand-out can, but I won't be able to cover it all. The internet is filled with good information on the technical ins and outs of note reading. You can learn as much or as little as you want.

For me, however, taking my knowledge of written music and translating it to the hammered dulcimer was not easy. I learned to read sheet music as a child, but played the hammered dulcimer by ear for years before I finally decided to get serious about reading music on this instrument. It's worth doing...but isn't without it's struggles.

As I polish up support material for this workshop (which you'll eventually find at the URL listed in this handout), I may expand on the following ideas. Here are some tips (in no particular order) that helped me learn to approach sheet music on the hammered dulcimer without having a melt-down.

- **Playing music by ear is OK!** In fact, I think it's a more valuable than *only* being able to play with sheet music. But sometimes our ears mislead us. And sometimes we need to be able to play in ensembles where each member has a structured part. Whatever the case, being able to handle written notation is a skill worth learning.
- **Don't freak out** about having to learn every single note on your dulcimer and what it looks like as a dot on a piece of paper. Seriously. You can work toward learning them all, but doing it all at once is daunting.
- **LEARNING NOTE NAMES:** If you haven't learned the note names on your dulcimer, it's never to late to start. I started by JUST focusing on the marked notes. The sequence of mark notes progresses through the circle of fifths, so understanding the circle of fifths may help you with this. My secret is that I know all of my marked notes like the back of my hand. Everything else is just filling in blanks. If somebody asks me to play a B, I just do a quick calculation. B comes right after A, and since A is a marked note, I know I can quickly find a B right above A.

Learning chord notes was the next step in my proces. I started with 1-3-5 major chord triads. For me, it was just a matter of memorization with a few mnemonic devices. A-C#-E , D-F#-A, G-B-D, C-E-G. It takes time to get these ingrained, but now I have two pieces of information to work with.

If someone asks me to play a B, not only do I know it should be right above A, but I also know it's the third degree in the key of G. So I can find it above my marked A's, OR I can find it two notes up from marked G. With these pieces of information, I can quickly name any string on the dulcimer...not because I have memorized that string, but because I have memorized the marked notes and I understand the relationship between the marked notes and the strings nearest to them.

Here are some actual examples of how I look at notes on the dulcimer. I have them listed in the order of how i prioritize finding them on the instrument. You may prioritize things differently and you will definately find that every note has many more relationships than what I have listed. These are just devices I use.:

A= 5th degree of D scale
Marked note (duh!)
1 up from marked G
3rd degree of F scale

B= 1 up from marked A
3rd degree of G scale
directly to the left of any E
(which is up 1 from D).

E= 1 up from marked D
3rd degree of C scale
5th degree of A scale

F#= 3rd degree of D scale

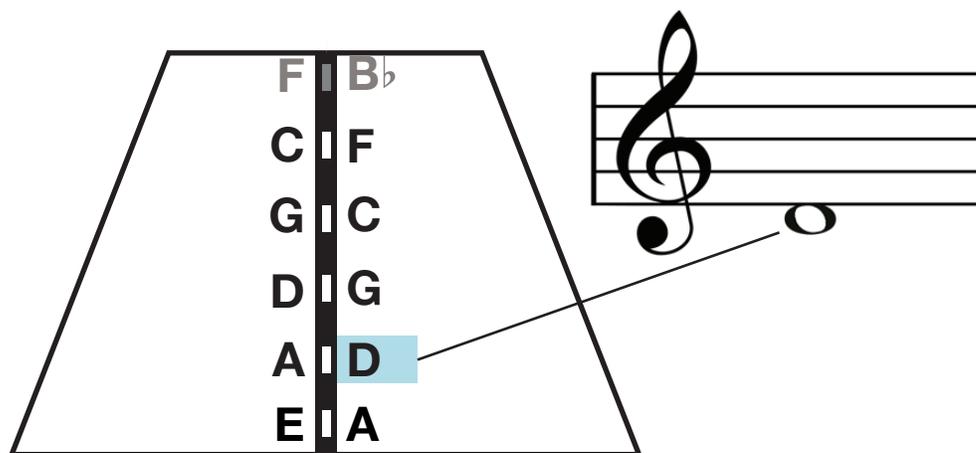
Getting the notes off the paper and onto the hammered dulcimer

Again, you don't have to learn every single note on your dulcimer before you can start reading sheet music. In fact, you probably shouldn't. Start small! The example on page 2 only contains 6 different notes, all in the key of D. You could start out even smaller with something like *Boil em' Cabbage*.

I believe it's best to start with music that you already kind of know by ear. That way you have a base knowledge to check your work. One thing you should be careful of is letting your previous knowledge of the tune skew your note reading. We've all seen how children learning to read will sometimes "fake it" by looking at the pictures and drawing from their previous knowledge of the story. This is a part of the process, but don't get so in the habit of it that you ignore discrepancies between the sheet music and your rendition of the tune. The point is to learn to read music. You want to eventually take the training wheels off and be able to read tunes that you don't already know.

I like to start in the key of D. It fits nicely on the instrument *and* the treble clef staff.

Focus on the D. It's right there at the bottom of the staff, and it's probably one of the most played notes on your hammered dulcimer. If you can only retain one thing from your first stab at note-reading, it may as well be this:



That one note has been the pillar of my ability to read music. One of my first steps when I see any note written in sheet music is to ask this question: How does it relate to that one D that I know. On the previous page, you can see that one of my first steps in locating a note is relating it to D. That's because if all else fails and my brain goes on hiatus, I can still find this one note.

Once I know this, finding E is a no-brainer because it's the next note up. A is one that I used to have trouble with. Generally, the further I get away from my anchor points (D in this case), the more effort it takes. With notes like that, I have found it just takes a little more focus and conscious acknowledgment. When I'm in the key of D, A is going to keep showing up constantly, so I should get used to seeing it after a while

The general idea is to start small, establish a couple anchor notes that you can find no matter what, and then work your way outwards from there. The more you do it, the easier it will become. It takes time and patience, but it's not a skill you'll ever regret learning!