



PIANISTIC SEPARATED-HAND TECHNIQUE FOR HAMMERED DULCIMER PLAYERS

The following pages consist of **four tunes with diagrams** to help you develop a method of arranging a solo piece in such a way that your **left hand carries the melody** on the left side of the treble bridge while your **right hand does a steady accompaniment** on the bass bridge and the right side of the treble bridge.

This is a method that is indeed doable, once **your hands learn that they are essentially two different instruments playing a *duet***. Practice can prove that your hands are able to adapt to this concept, especially with certain simple and fairly slow tunes such as these.

More detailed discussion (written a few years ago) follows the two introductory tunes, “Mary Had a Little Lamb” and “When the Saints Come Marching In,” but let’s get started with these first! The **first page** of each shows only **one note repeating on the right**, on the lower unmarked course for the I chord (D major in this key), then to other lower unmarked courses for the V chord (A) and the IV chord (G, at one point in “When the Saints”).

Perhaps it’s best to practice with each hand separately for a while at first, to get each accustomed to what its part is meant to do in this new mode of operation, then actually consciously **tell your hands to be separate instruments** as you begin to have them do both of these parts at the same time. (This idea of telling your neuromuscular system to do things is borne out in scientific studies, by the way!) Other dulcimer techniques have the hands working together as if they’re only one part, so this is a new neuromuscular concept to train them to carry out. The right hand never stops doing that steady repetition on the downbeats, even when the left hand is pausing for a long note. But again, I say from many players’ experience that this is indeed doable!

On the **second page** of each tune is a **two-note version**, exactly the same as the one-note version, except that the **right hand is jumping back and forth between that same lower unmarked course on the bass bridge and the lower unmarked course on the right side of the treble bridge**. This version will sound the best of the three on “When the Saints,” I think --- a ragtime-like rhythm.

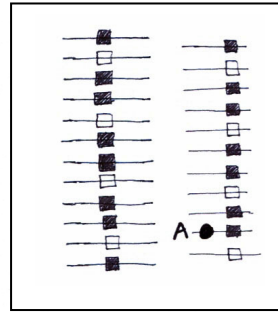
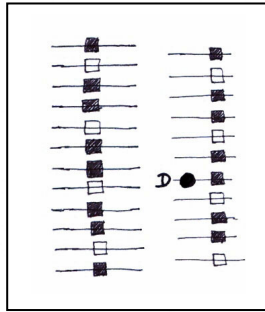
The **third page** of each tune extends the pattern beyond the previous one to **include a third chord note between the two, the upper unmarked course below the one you’ve been playing on the right side of the treble bridge, forming a triangular shape** with its vertices the places where you strike the strings. In “Mary Had a Little Lamb” the fourth beat of each measure is not actively played by the right hand but often is sounded by the left hand --- a technique that will help develop the sense of “duet” between your hands and will give the pleasing effect of an **exchange back and forth** between the two parts. In “When the Saints” this three-note version doesn’t sound quite as nice as the two-note version, but it introduces the concept of triangular chords that will be used to great effect on the following two tunes. See how stylized and understandable this can be?

If you have trouble, as many players (especially advanced ones) do when they first try this technique, give it some time! There hopefully will be a time when you **“cross the threshold into the room”** and find that your hands understand the duet idea. Then you’ll have it for the rest of your life and can reapply it to many other simple melodies!

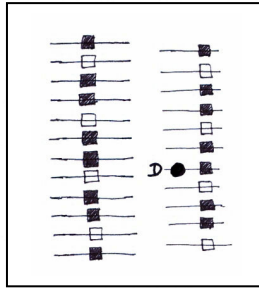
Timothy Seaman, January 2013

Mary Had a Little Lamb with I-note right hand part

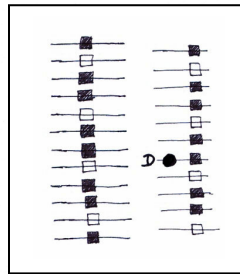
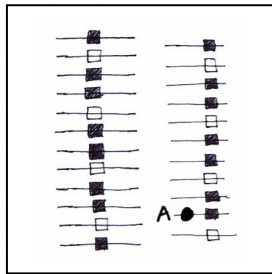
trad.



Musical notation for the first two measures. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#) and the time signature is common time (C). The first measure contains a D chord (quarter note), followed by quarter notes on G4, A4, B4, and C5. The second measure contains an A chord (quarter note), followed by quarter notes on G4, F#4, and E4. The bass line consists of quarter notes: D3, D3, D3, D3, D3, D3, D3, D3.



Musical notation for measures 3 and 4. Measure 3 contains a D chord (quarter note), followed by quarter notes on E4, F#4, G4, and A4. Measure 4 contains a D chord (quarter note), followed by quarter notes on B4, C5, B4, and A4. The bass line consists of quarter notes: D3, D3, D3, D3, D3, D3, D3, D3.



Musical notation for the final two measures. Measure 5 contains an A chord (quarter note), followed by quarter notes on G4, F#4, G4, and A4. Measure 6 contains a D chord (quarter note), followed by a whole note D3. The bass line consists of quarter notes: D3, D3, D3, D3, D3, D3, D3, D3.