

The Learning Curve: Hammered Dulcimer Style

By: Jennifer Ranger

Daily Practice is the Key

"Am I ever going to really learn to play this thing?!" Most everybody experiences low points in their practicing where they start to wonder. You know how it goes: you practice the same song over and over, day after day, concentrating on the difficult licks again and again, but can't see any great progress. Especially with hammered dulcimer...trying soooo hard to be accurate and yet expressive...oh brother, this is for the birds. You start to sincerely hope that your neighbors can't hear you!

Then one day you play that song perfectly - just once. You discount it as a fluke, but a couple of days later it happens again - twice. Hmmm. In-between times, of course, you kinda slaughter it, but you begin to see a pattern forming. The following day you notice a real jump in ability as you play that pesky song, and now you're starting to see the fruit of your labor! Practice may not make perfect right away, but it really does work!

Older Students Worry More!

I find that older adults actually get discouraged faster than children in learning the hammered dulcimer. Sometimes because of discouraging musical experiences from youth, or sometimes just the worry that their age is what's making progress slower than they think it should be. Anyway, often the only drawback to being an older student is their own personal worries about it. Kids know all things are possible, and that really helps with the learning process, besides being just plain true!

Patience, Practice and Time

Consistent practice, combined with a good dose of patience with yourself, is the absolute only way to go from point A to point B. Even if you are so dedicated that you practice every single day for an hour or two, there are still many things that only time can give you. After a few years of putting in lots of daily practice a player begins to really appreciate how hard an excellent player has worked to be good at what he or she does.

So the next time the practicing blues start to take hold of you, just stop and think about how much progress you've already made. Practice really works, so whatever you do, don't stop. You're no different than the next guy, so keep on hammering!



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