

A Sugar Plum for Christmas

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For many players of the Appalachian Mountain dulcimer, their basic interest lies in the simplicity of its seven-note scale, modal tunings, and easy drone accompaniment. Literally hundreds of folk tunes can be played and enjoyed with the traditional dulcimer, as we all have discovered.

Some folks, however, eventually feel a hunger for the sound of chord accompaniment and the ability to play more contemporary music as well. This often leads to additions of more frets and strings, usually with use of a capo. Even these changes have been only partially effective, until recently. Thanks to the efforts of inquisitive players as far back as Howie Mitchell, the dulcimer community has finally begun to discover and use “open tuning” systems such as that called the 1-3-5 tuning,

This concept has already been described in two previous articles published in ED, describing how to get more music from the ordinary dulcimer with such a tuning. Those seeking further details and free tablature can log on to www.mountaindulcimer-1-3-5.com



While dozens of music/tab arrangements of many kinds (all in public domain) are already available, this article is written to show ED readers the versatility of a 1-3-5 tuning in handling even certain kinds of classical music. In this case, we have selected a composition from the *Nutcracker Suite*, by Tchaikovsky, entitled *Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy*. The selection was chosen in view of the coming Holiday Season, as a favorite of both children and adults.

About the Music:

Tchaikovsky is said to have composed this music for the “celeste”, a keyboard instrument employing small metal plates as tonal elements, rather than strings. The chime-like tones can be heard in orchestral recordings of the music. This dulcimer arrangement, played by flat picking and strumming gives the impression of a simple music-box tune. Players will notice that both the melody and chord accompaniment, in the key of Dm, have numerous chromatic “accidentals”... notes which do not appear on keyboards tuned modally (D-A-d or D-A-A).

Players at the intermediate level or beyond should have little difficulty with this arrangement. Notice how the stacking of chords by the open tuning simplifies fingering.

Get this tablature and a sample audio file at:

<http://www.everythingdulcimer.com/tab/#443>