

rough-and-tumble, lively, hand-clapping, foot-stomping, knee-slapping “Sattidy Nite,” the dulcimer had to be rugged. From the extensive collection of Ann Grimes of Granville, Ohio, there is one dulcimer that immediately comes to mind because it has a 2 by 4 for a fretboard and bent-over spikes for frets. But this was more the exception than the rule, for the common dulcimer was a lap-sized instrument. Unable to compete adequately in volume and versatility with guitars, banjos, and fiddles, it slowly faded back into the hills and was considered all but a dead end by the 1930’s.

Since then, people like John Jacob Niles and Jean Ritchie have done much to repopularize the dulcimer, but primarily as a soft-spoken, lyrical solo instrument. Following the folk revival of the sixties and the post-’67 search for ethnic roots and Americana, however, the dulcimer has received greater attention as an instrument to be reckoned with. Central to this increasing interest have been Richard Fariña, Paul Clayton, and Howie Mitchell, to name just a few. Each in his own way, with songs new and old, has infused new vitality into the near-forgotten dulcimer.

Our basic concern is teaching people to play the dulcimer in a contemporary manner. But even though we don’t come from Appalachia, there is much we have learned from its musical traditions and techniques. And to those of you who are in the process of discovering the dulcimer for yourselves, take a good long look at the word “folk” because, really, it means you and what you do.

Your instrument...what does it look like? (If you don’t own one yet, consider this section “What to look for when you buy one.”)

Generally, you’ll find the Appalachian Mountain Dulcimer in five basic shapes, with a variety of stringing patterns, and practically any number of strings. Most commonly, dulcimers appear in three-, four-, five-, or six-string arrangements. Only one type is truly “multi-stringed.”