

elongate—and the sound of the instrument slowly becomes richer.

You want to get as well-constructed an instrument as you can. Pick the dulcimer up and check to see if there are any cracks in the wood or along the seams where the parts have been glued together. If there are cracks, push gently on one side and see if the wood depresses. If it does, it will mean a repair. If the crack does not depress, chances are that it cracked during construction and was repaired at that time.

Tap on it. Shake it. Does anything rattle? Maybe a brace or gluing block is loose. Check the overall gluing job.

Take a look down the fretboard's length, end to end. Does it have any curves or dips in it? Is it lopsided? If it is not straight and flat, your strings will be at odd distances from the frets, and this can create problems in playing and sound quality.

Depress the strings individually and strum...no matter what the sound. Do any of the frets "buzz"? Check each string at each fret along the entire length of the fretboard. If there are buzzes, they can be eliminated either by raising the bridge, which means making a new one, or by carefully filing the offending frets down a trifle with a very fine surfaced flat mill file. If nothing works to solve your problems with the dulcimer in question, get rid of it, don't buy it, or be prepared for a major overhaul before you've even started.

Do the tuning pegs turn easily? If they are wooden "friction pegs" as on a violin or viola, look to see if they are tapered to fit the peg holes. If they are mechanical (untapered) pegs as on a guitar, twist them to see if there is enough play in the gearing for them to move smoothly—you'll be doing a great deal of this, so you might as well start now.

Does the instrument have an adjustable bridge? Not always, but most often, you'll have problems with chording if it doesn't. For instance, your bass