

Now we're getting into what all this has been building up to—chording.

Playing chords on the dulcimer opens your musical horizons and makes it possible for you to play a more harmonically complete melody line. Making chords usually involves depressing at least two of the strings at different frets and keeping one string open as a drone. Sometimes, however, all three strings are depressed on different frets—it depends on just what it is you want to do. Chording allows you to create a progression or series of related harmonic situations that serve to complement or enrich the melody, intensifying its natural expression and clarifying its direction.

You can play chords in most of the modes; however, once again, the Mixolydian is the most accessible. In this section our goal is not simply to spell out all the different chords, but rather to acquaint you with various fingerings you will need to effectively play melodic chords.

Usually the use of chords relates to the concept of harmony and, in turn, harmony relates to the modern twelve-tone chromatic scale. The use of chromatic notes really is not anything incredibly new, even though the consolidation and utilization of the full chromatic scale are relatively recent, having begun in the seventeenth century. In the fourth century B.C., the Greeks were using at least one “chromatic” note in their music. “Chroma,” meaning color, is the word they applied to the series of tones consisting of A, F-sharp, F, and E. They called this series the Chromatic Tetrachord because of the F-sharp. Their other tetrachordal (four-note) scales did not have “colored” notes.

Once the monk Odo of Cluny systematized and labeled the modal scales in the tenth century, composers of religious music slowly began to juxtapose chant melodies and ranges of notes to achieve greater musical effects. Instead of having a choir sing the same note in unison, as in very basic Gregorian