

But, meanwhile, the people were also making music.

Think of a chord as a simultaneous voicing of several musical tones that create either concordant or dissonant harmony. The common chord is called a triad because it consists of three notes. Three elements make up every major triad—a tonic, or root tone, a major third, and a perfect fifth. A minor triad consists of a tonic, a minor third, and a perfect fifth—so the second element of any chord is very important to the overall sound of the chord. If the third tone is three whole intervals away from the root, the chord is major. But if the third is only two and a half intervals away, it is minor—just as in the scheme of the Aeolian mode in which the second interval is a half-step. When you lower a note a half-step you diminish the chord; if you raise a note a half-step, you augment it.

When the dulcimer is tuned to the Mixolydian mode, there are a limited number of possible complete triads with a root, a third, and a perfect fifth. You just can't play a full range of chords on the dulcimer—we only have an eight-tone scale. We can, however, play inversions (different note arrangements) of a few of these chords. Most often we rearrange two notes on either the unisons and middle string or middle and bass strings. So here's a new word for describing these two-note arrangements—diad.

This term isn't in music books because it really isn't legitimate, but it occurs to us that the majority of "chords" we play hardly ever consists of anything more than the bass drone (the octave of the tonic), and two notes a third or a fifth apart. (Sometimes we're daring and use a tonal relationship based on a fourth or sixth tone.) We call these chord inversions, these fragments, these elements of melodic harmonies, diads, because they really only have two tones when you get right down to it.

Keep in mind that you can use diads melodically to enhance a melody line, giving a song a fuller sound