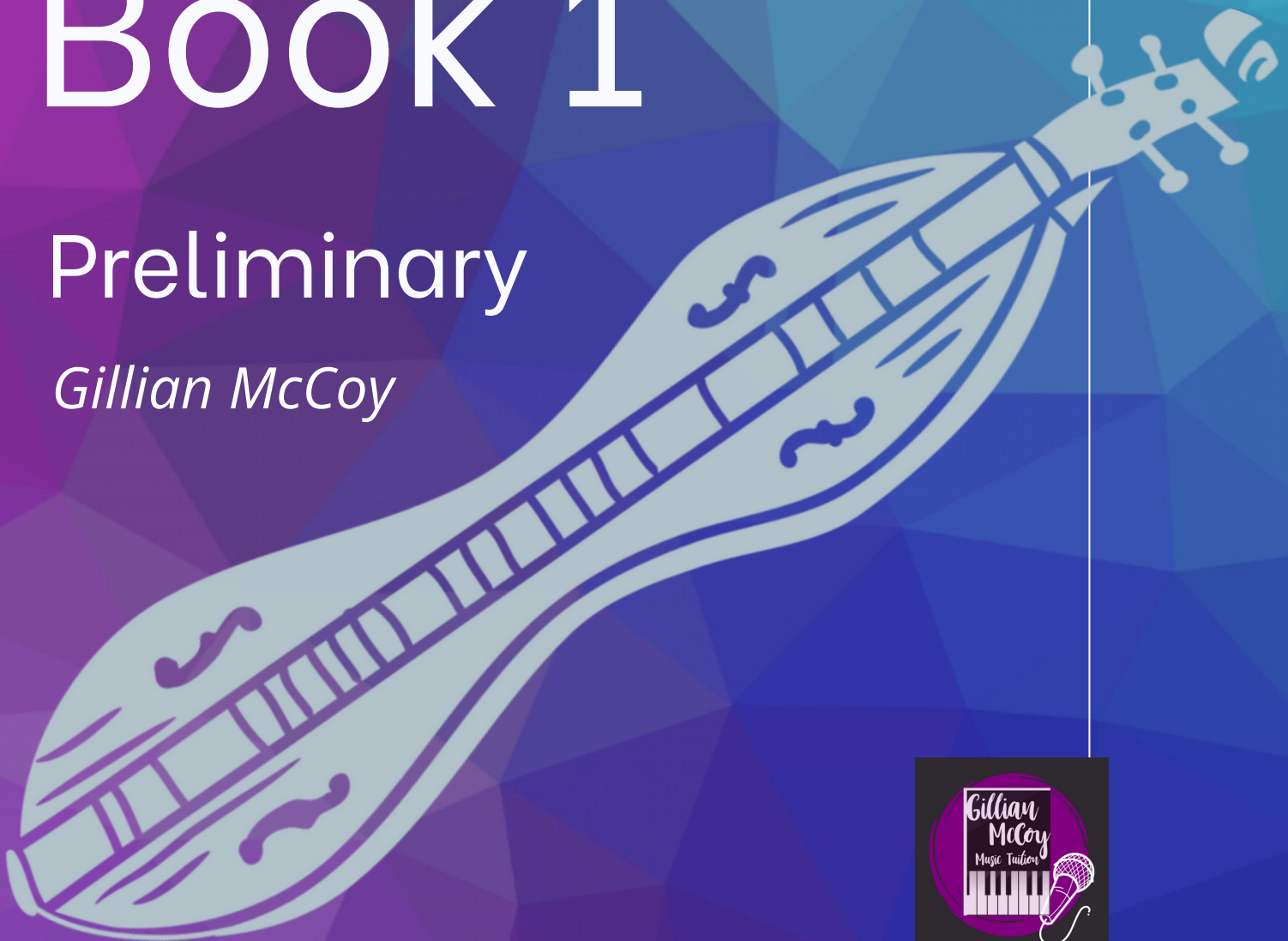


# Music Toolkit for Dulcimer

## Book 1

Preliminary

*Gillian McCoy*



# Contents

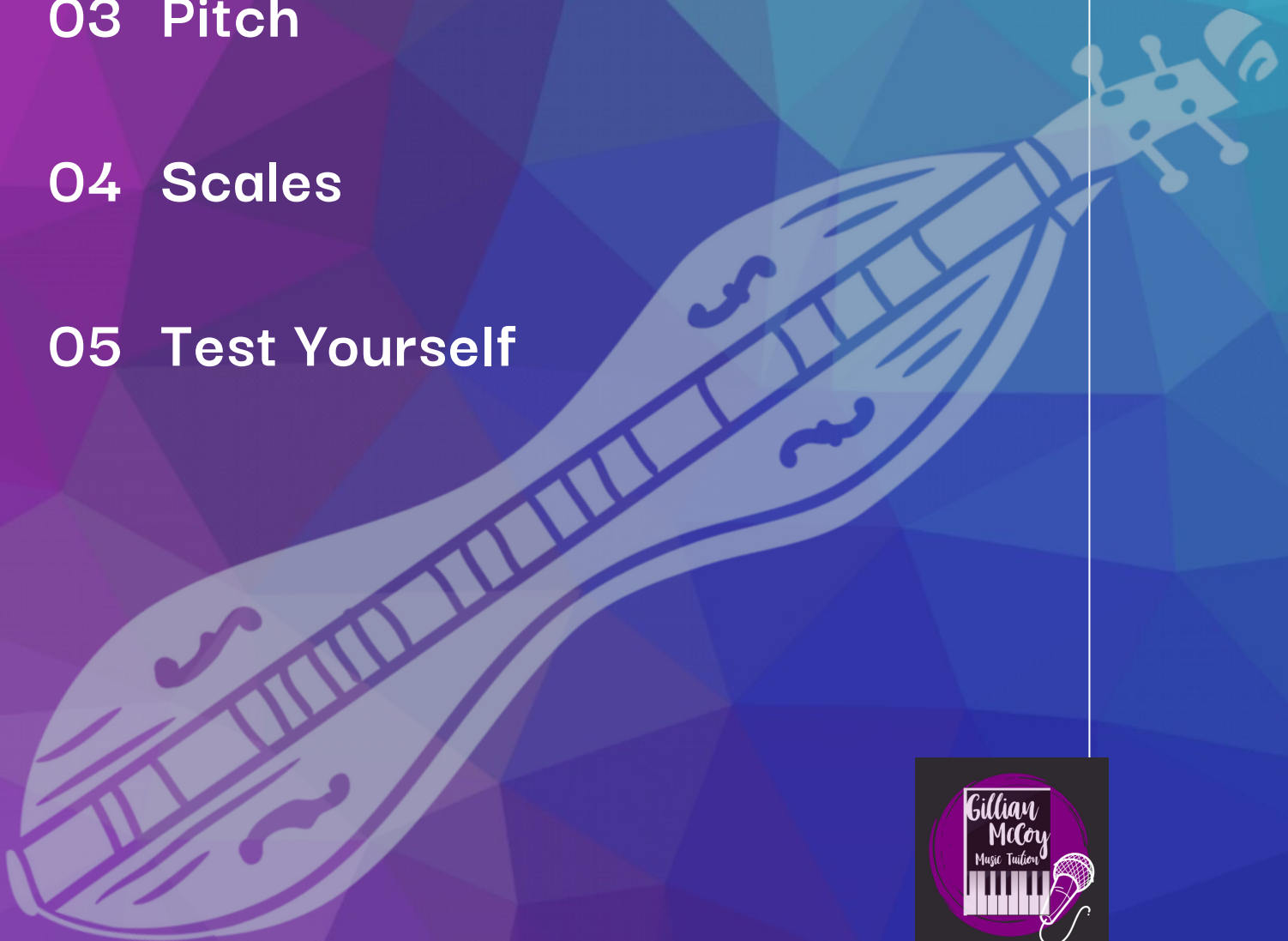
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# INTRODUCTION



You'll get so much more from playing dulcimer if you understand a bit about the nuts and bolts of how music is put together. I promise I won't go into talking about Mixolydian modes and the circle of fifths in this first book! You'll get the information that you need to know at this point, in a way which is easy to understand with plenty of examples to listen to so you can put it in context. You'll see how it relates to your dulcimer learning and to music in general.

This book doesn't require you to read standard staff notation but it is useful to be able to read dulcimer tab. I'd like to thank my dulcimer students for asking the right kind of questions so I knew what knowledge you are looking for, and my husband for proof reading the book to make sure it explains everything clearly. Oh and by the way it is for dulcimer with an extra fret such as McSpadden.

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# NOTES



There are 12 notes in Western music, they are named after letters of the alphabet, from A to G.

**A A# B C C# D D# E F F# G G#**

Listen to the example in the link below where the above music alphabet is played on a piano.

<https://youtu.be/h56fkmXuu8s>

The distance from a note to the next note in the above sequence is called a half step. So, C# (C sharp) is a half step away from C, and E is a half step away from F.

A whole step is two notes away from the first note, for example D is a whole step away from C.

When we get to the end it starts again from A, but higher this time. Listen to this example of the music alphabet repeated on a piano.

<https://youtu.be/V7fRyTV87EI>



# PITCH



Pitch is the frequency which a note resonates, measured in hertz, htz for short. We also know pitch as how 'high' or 'low' a note sounds. The thickest D string on the dulcimer has the lowest pitch and it resonates at the frequency of 147htz and the 2 thinnest D strings are the highest and resonate at the highest frequency of 294htz.

The higher the pitch, the faster the string vibrates and the higher the number of htz.

Let's listen to what 220htz and 440htz sounds like:

[Sine 220Hz Audio Only - YouTube](#)

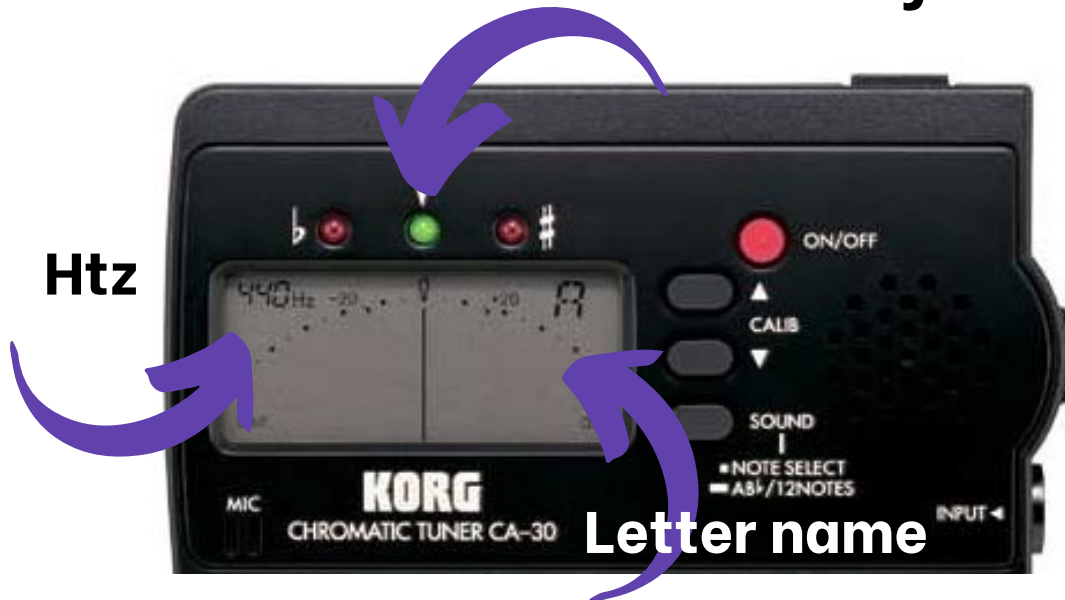
[Sine Wave A 440 Hz Concert Pitch](#)

If you have an electronic tuner with numbers like the one in the picture on the next page, it will tell you the frequency that your string is vibrating as well as the letter name. For example the low D string will be 147htz when it is in tune. It is very useful to know the htz number of the strings because you will know for sure *which* D or which A you are aiming for as remember, there are lots of D's and A's to chose from.

# PITCH



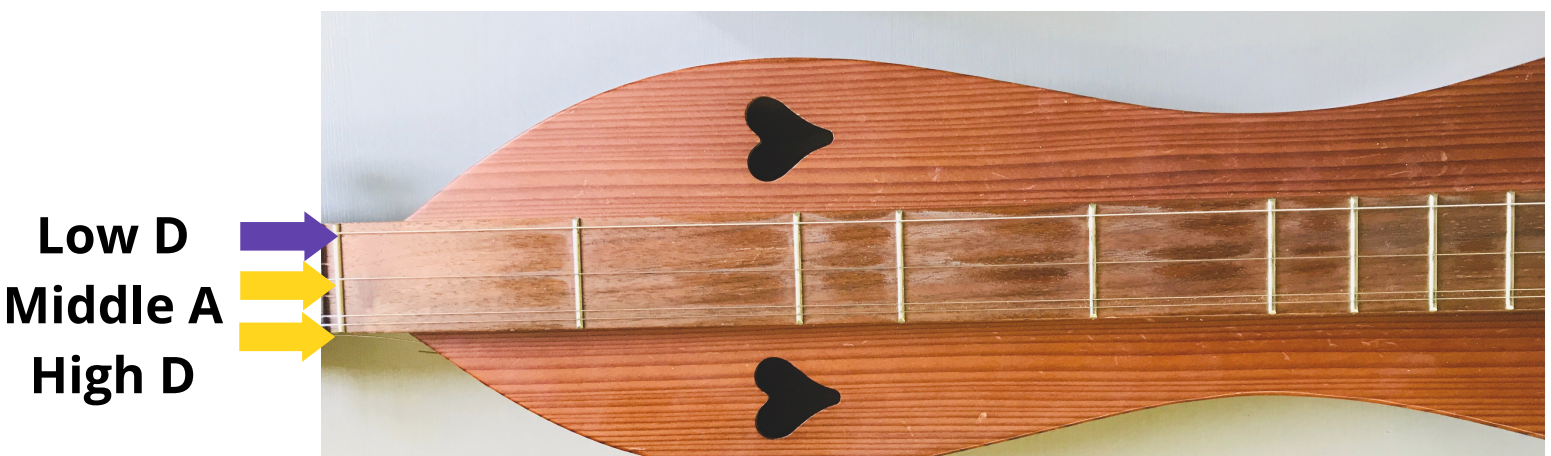
Arrow in the centre when string is in tune



**Low D string** should be 147htz

**Middle A** string should be 220htz

**High D** strings should be 294htz



# SCALES



Now, just like you would not have ketchup, mustard, relish, onions, cheese, chilli, mayonnaise and salsa on a hotdog, (or maybe you would, in which case you need to be reading a recipe book) we rarely use ALL 12 notes in a tune. If we do it is called atonal music.... (which we not going to play on dulcimer).

Listen to the following atonal tune, what do you think?- spooky, yeah? Would you listen to it for fun?

The BEAUTY of ATONAL MUSIC (performance).

Schoenberg) - YouTube

So...notes are grouped into gangs which sound good together and these used to make tunes. These gangs are called **scales**. Think of scales like flavours, there are scales for a sad (minor scales) sound, scales for a chilled sound, and scales for a Blues sound (blues scales). But all scales play the notes in order from the lowest pitch to the highest and back down again.

The first we will learn about is a major scale. Tunes played from notes of a **major** scale sound happy and upbeat. The following tunes are made from major scales major- Twinkle twinkle, Michael row the boat ashore, Whiskey in the jar, Old Joe Clark, Yellow Submarine. Hopefully you know some of those?

# SCALES



A scale is a pattern of the steps and half steps that we learned about in the first chapter. Major scales are made from the below pattern. Listen to how it sounds in this example:

D Major Scale - YouTube

**W** stands for whole step **H** stand for half step. So, between the D and E there is a whole step, between #C and D there is just a half step.

**D E #F G A B #C D**  
**W W H W W W H**

You can start a major scale from any note, but you'll notice that your dulcimer has two D strings. So, the easiest scale to play is D major scale on the dulcimer. The notes you need are as above, but here are the positions on your dulcimer. The D is the open D string:





# SCALES



The blank fret is C, which is not in the D major scale. More about that later. Let's take another look at the dulcimer fret board. Can you see that some frets are wide and others are narrow?

That's because the wide ones move you up a whole step the narrow ones half a step. So the scale is already done for you. For example, on the low D string, you move from D to E, there is no #D.



The dulcimer is different from a piano, or a guitar where you have all the notes available to use. Instruments where you have all the notes are called chromatic instruments, ones where not all the notes are available are called diatonic instruments. Another example is the tin whistle or the harmonica. This makes the dulcimer easier to play, but also limits in in comparison to a guitar. More about that later on.

# Test Yourself



Notes:

- 1) What comes after B in the music alphabet?
- 2) What is a half step after the note G
- 3) What note is a whole step before D?

Pitch:

- 1) What is pitch measured in?
- 2) Are there many A's in the music alphabet?
- 3) Which A is higher, 220 or 440htz?

Scales:

- 1) What are groups of notes that sound good together called?
- 2) Is the pattern of whole and half steps the same for a D Major and G major scale?
- 3) What sound does a major scale have?
- 4) Is the dulcimer a chromatic or a diatonic instrument?

# Test Yourself



## Answers

Notes:

1) C

2) #G

3) C

Pitch:

1) Hertz

2) Yes, going from low to high pitch

3) 440htz

Scales:

1) Scales

2) Yes

3) Happy and Upbeat

4) Diatonic