

Kids Benefit from a Hands-On Approach to Dulcimers

By Gail Knapp, Vinita, OK

Editorial Note: Gail has taken a brave, direct approach to introducing kids to dulcimers. Her experience is that dulcimers and kids are a HUGE HIT!



Gail Knapp and a curious student

I took the idea from a store in Mo. where they had hands-on dulcimer displays. It worked for me and I bought my first dulcimer there. It was a cardboard soundbox and I still have it too. One of the things that I wanted to do was to show people that THEY CAN play the dulcimer.

I set up the cardboard model on a table in front of me. I placed neon colored sticky dots below each fret and numbered them. I have a wooden easel and made enlarged copies of the simple songs that are known by anyone: London Bridges, Jesus Loves Me, Twinkle Twinkle and Mary had a little lamb.

I was at an all day home show and I had never done this type of thing before, so now I can improve after the day's event. I was monopolized by the children which is great, but I had no time to play solo dulcimer to do some entertaining and there were other children's activities going on and all the little girls were at my table all the time and not going to the other events. I felt bad about that...so, when I finally got a slow time, I was able to grab me some lunch and put the model away. I think that the next time I do this I will set a selected time like 2 hours as a hands on display and then play for the people in between times.

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Kids today are sooo busy with all their activities. There was one little girl that took to the dulcimer like crazy. She played it for her Mom, she played it for her Dad, she played in front of strangers, and she was good!! She'd never ever seen or heard of a dulcimer. She said she'd like to take lessons. Her Mom said

she'd call me. But hasn't. they are local business owners and I know they are really busy. The Mom won't push the daughter into learning, she basically told me that. I know that 10 yr. olds are wishy washy. but I sure wish I could give that little girl lessons. They even found a family friend that is a Dr. that has a cardboard model that she could learn on. So, I wait.

I think that I am a one-on-one teacher. I don't think I could handle the confusion of a classroom of students all wanting to learn dulcimer. I will be starting with my 4th student this week. My first 3 with free lessons. This next one is a paying customer. I charge only \$5.00 an hour that way anyone can afford lessons. I love playing duets and rounds. My daughter is a missionary home on furlough and I am teaching her to play. We are getting into some really neat duets. She is going back to the Philippines in May and in turn will teach dulcimer over there too. Exciting days ahead.

Gail is active in the [EverythingDulcimer.com Discussion Group](#). Feel free to reach here there!



Gail Knapp playing at the home of Carolee Bundy, Vinita, OK (Sept 2001)