

## Skype Hammered Dulcimer Lessons with Jon Weinberg

For students who live a distance away from me I offer private lessons online via Skype. These are the same lessons I offer in-person except I am unable to accompany students during the lesson on my guitar. Instead I send students .MP3 files of me on guitar that they can play along with while they are practicing and/or during the lesson.

The rates I charge for Skype lessons are listed on the Lessons page of my website:

[www.jonweinberg.com](http://www.jonweinberg.com)

Since we will be video calling computer-to-computer you will not incur any Skype charges.

Perhaps the largest challenge will be how and where you will need to mount your camera so I can see and hear you play. Your camera needs to be positioned either above your dulcimer or off to the side while you are playing – you will not be able to hold it and play at the same time. For this reason I don't know if a tablet will work for this as you would have to position it so you can both see the screen while sitting at the dulcimer (so you can see me and my dulcimer) and the tablet camera is pointed at your dulcimer (so I can see what you are playing). Finding or making something to hold a tablet securely and in the right position might be tricky...

### Step 1: Equipment and Preparation

You will need these 3 or 4 things for Skype lessons:

1. A **computer near your dulcimer with a good internet connection** – laptops are probably easiest but desktops will work. A strong wifi connection will work, but if your wifi is iffy it's best to have a wired network connection (to your router, cable modem, etc.).
2. An external (probably USB) **video camera with a microphone** preferably positioned above your dulcimer so I can see and hear you playing. If you have a built-in camera on your laptop or tablet it will probably not work for this, plus you will need to see the screen so you can see what I am demonstrating. Positioning the camera off to one side of the dulcimer may work as long as I can see what you are doing with your hammers.

I use a Logitech HD Pro Webcam C920 which is an excellent HD camera with stereo microphones at a reasonable price (it's recent predecessor, the C910, was three times the price). There are less expensive ones available as well and ones that work on Macs and PCs: on Amazon search for "usb video camera" in Computers & Accessories. One example is the Logitech HD Webcam C310 for about \$30.

When you buy a camera pay attention to how it can be mounted. One of the things I like about the C920 is that it has a standard camera mounting receptacle that allows it to be mounted on a camera tripod. With adapters you can then mount it on mic stands and other things, which provides a lot of flexibility on how to get it mounted over your dulcimer. Alternatively with some ingenuity you could build a rod or bar out of wood or aluminum that attaches to a wall or

## Skype Hammered Dulcimer Lessons with Jon Weinberg

stand and reaches out over your dulcimer - any camera with a built-in clip (designed so it can sit on top of a monitor or laptop screen) could be clipped to this.

A related issue is **lighting**. If you have a single light shining directly down on the dulcimer you're likely to get reflections and/or shadows that make it difficult (for the camera and me) to see your hammers, the strings, and bridge markers. It's best to either have lighting from the side with one or two lights (one on either side), or matte/surface lighting from the top by either a) shining a light through a diffuser or b) bouncing a spot light off a photo umbrella.

You can make a simple diffuser by stretching and stapling a piece of white sheet or white nylon across a wooden frame and shining a light through it from the top. Aluminum reflector clamp lights sold by hardware stores, Home Depot, and Walmart is a good light source for this (Google "clamp light" to see what these look like). As a reference, my homemade diffuser box is about 24in. wide and 14in. long.

3. Optional: a VOIP/Skype **headset** with a microphone – *only if you don't have good speakers in or connected to your computer –or- your camera or laptop does not have a built-in microphone.*

These run around \$10 and up. You want the kind with two ear cups, not a Bluetooth-like single ear unit. On Amazon search for "skype headset" in Computers & Accessories.

These headsets have two mini-stereo plugs that plug into your laptop or sound card. One is for the microphone and the other for the headphones. We may not use the microphone portion of this if you have a good mic in your video camera that can pick up your voice when talking, but the headset is important for hearing me if you don't have good speakers in or connected to your computer.

4. A **Skype account**. It's free at [www.skype.com](http://www.skype.com). Press the Join button on their home page. You will then need to download the Skype application and install it on your computer.

Once you have a Skype account and your equipment in place, installed, and connected you need to test that it all works locally. Start Skype and go select **Tools > Options** to check that you can see your dulcimer through the video camera (and your lighting is good), the microphone is working, and you can hear through your headset or speakers.

The next step is to call the **Skype Echo/Sound Test Service** (it's free) and test the quality of your connection, computer speed, and that your microphone and speakers/headset are working.

# Skype Hammered Dulcimer Lessons with Jon Weinberg

## Step 2: Test Video Call with Jon

Before your first lesson we need to make a video call to each other to insure we can connect with each other, see and hear each other, and see each other's dulcimers. There is no charge for this.

Send me an email from my website or directly to **jon (at) jonweinberg (dot) com** and let me know:

- Your name and your Skype username
- a phone number I can reach you at if we are having problems connecting via Skype
- what are good times in the next several days to have a 15-30 minute call

I will reply and send you my Skype username and let you know a time we can have a video call. You will want to enter my Skype username in your Skype Contacts (**Contacts > Add Contact**) so you can place and accept calls from me.

5-10 minutes before our test video call make sure:

- your computer is turned on and you are logged in and running Skype
- the video camera and headset are plugged in and working
- the video camera can easily be positioned above the dulcimer

**I will call you.** You will want to accept the call. I'll then guide us through testing that we can see and hear each other play our instruments and talk to each other. We can also talk about what you are looking for in lessons, what type of music you would like to play on the dulcimer, etc.

Before we end the call we'll schedule a tentative day and time for your first lesson. You may want to have some convenient times figured out ahead of time. Whatever we schedule will be tentative until I receive payment for it – see the next step...

## Step 3: Lesson Payment and Scheduling

All lessons are pre-paid and can be purchased via my online store from my website <http://www.jonweinberg.com>. You can purchase a single lesson or a pack of three at a discount. When you make a purchase you will automatically receive a payment confirmation email.

If this is not your first lesson (which we would have already scheduled during our test call), after making a lesson purchase you need to send me an email with some possible dates and times that you would like to have your lesson, and I will reply with a confirmation for one of them. If none are available we'll email back and forth until we find a time convenient for both of us.

If you want to tentatively determine a lesson time in advance of purchasing it we can do that via email, but the time it will not be reserved for you until payment for it has been received. Upon receipt of payment if that time is still available I will email you final confirmation of your lesson time.

Note that most lessons are scheduled to start on the hour but on busy days I schedule some to start on quarter or half hour times to leave me some personal time between lessons. This also insures your lesson will start on time if the one before you runs a little over.

## Skype Hammered Dulcimer Lessons with Jon Weinberg

If you purchased a 3-pack of lessons you can schedule your next lesson at the end of the one you are taking, or you can just later email me in advance of when you'd like it as in the paragraph above. I will know that you have already paid for the lesson. If you ever have any questions about how many lesson-pack lessons you have left feel free to send me an email.

**You should always receive a confirmation email from me after scheduling a paid-for lesson.** If you've scheduled a lesson and have NOT received a confirmation email from me within a day, something is wrong (sometimes email does not get delivered). Send me another email and we'll make sure we're both in agreement about your next lesson.

### Important Payment, Cancellation, and Re-Schedule Policies:

- Lesson payments are **non-refundable**
- If you miss a scheduled lesson its fee will be forfeited. I will try calling you via Skype for 10 minutes before giving up and marking it as being missed. If you are sitting at your computer logged into Skype waiting for me to call you for 5 minutes, please call my cell phone and if there is a technical problem you won't forfeit your lesson fee.
- If you need to cancel or re-schedule a lesson you can do so without losing your lesson payment as long as you send me an email about it **no later than 12 hours** before the scheduled lesson. Even if you don't yet know when you want to reschedule it, you must send me a cancellation email earlier than 12 hours in advance of the lesson. The date and time of your cancellation email will be used to determine this.

## Having Your Lesson

Before the lesson, if there is any supporting material you need for it I will email it to you when I confirm the lesson, or via a separate email before we have the lesson. This might include having you download and print out a file from my website.

**I will always call you** when it is time for our lesson. Unless I am finishing up a lesson with another student I will try to call you a minute or two before our lesson time.

5-10 minutes before our lesson make sure

- your computer is turned on and you are logged into it
- your Skype application is started and you are signed into Skype
- the video camera and headset are plugged in and working
- the video camera is on and can easily be positioned above the dulcimer

Most of the time our cameras will be pointed at our dulcimers. If it is easy for you to reposition your camera so I can see your face while we're talking that's fine, but it's more important for us to be able to see what each other is doing on the instrument

The first part of each lesson will be review of what you are working on, which you will play for me. If I've sent you a guitar accompaniment you can choose to play along with it or just play solo. At some point in

## Skype Hammered Dulcimer Lessons with Jon Weinberg

later lessons I will have you accompany the guitar so I can see how you are keeping up and recovering from mistakes.

Often I'll have you play the last few tunes or pieces you've worked on so I can see how you are progressing.

Then we will review the next lesson assignment which I will play for you so you can hear what it sounds like and where on the dulcimer I am playing it. If you know how to have Skype record this you are free to do so for later reference. I think this capability may only come with a Skype premium account...

After you have a number of tunes under your belt (if you are a beginner) some lessons will be me teaching a topic about the dulcimer that will often have an accompanying handout.

A few minutes before the end of the lesson we'll schedule the next lesson if you know when you'd like it. Alternatively you can just later send me an email a few days in advance of when you want your next lesson and we can then figure out a time. Just remember that lessons must be paid for in advance before I will confirm a scheduled time.

After the lesson I'll send you the guitar accompaniment for the next tune you'll be working on, plus any supporting material if there is any.

If you have any questions please email me at **jon (at) jonweinberg (dot) com**.

Thanks...