

# HYBRIDS



by Gwen Caeli

## What is a dulcimer 'hybrid'?

Dulcimers are folk instruments creatively imagined and built by ingenious and inspired crafters. And, as such, the kind of dulcimers created are only limited by one's imagination and intuitive creativity. Dulcimer players would be well-advised to learn the specifics and best applications of each kind of hybrid before purchase. Not all of them are easily adapted into all playing situations, so research and being well informed is wise to make sure your purchase has value to you and your playing situations.

### Examples of American-made Hybrids:

#### Soprano Dulcimer

One octave higher than regular dulcimers, can be played with regular dulcimers as it is tuned to DAD or DAA .

#### Baritone Dulcimer

Baritones are in the Key of A - four steps (notes) lower than regular dulcimers. They are built in a longer length with special bracing to accommodate the heavier strings required to tune it down to AEA. Not easy to make it fit in with regular dulcimers playing in Key of D, unless capo'ed at fret 3. A beautiful, rich tone because of the lower pitch. but know the strings are thicker, so build those callouses\*!

#### Bass Dulcimer

One octave (eight notes) lower than regular dulcimers, with even heavier strings than the baritone. Again body design is different to accommodate the extra tension placed on the instrument by the heavier strings. (\*note 'callouses' above) Works nicely in ensemble playing , where a bass can add vertical dimension and texture, proving a lower pitch to the horizontal linear pitch of the other instruments.

#### Strumsticks

A skinny 'backpack' instrument with neck, but no soundboard body. Held like a guitar with strings strung opposite from a regular dulcimer in order to hold it upright like a guitar.

#### Electric Solid Body Dulcimers

A non-acoustic hard body hybrid built on the principles of an electric guitar. And, as with an electric guitar, you will need an amplifier to hear it.

### More Examples of American-made Hybrids:

#### Banjo Dulcimers

Dulcimers built with a small resonator head and a different bridge assembly. When David Schnauffer and I were both teaching at a dulcimer festival years ago, we had a long conversation during a break regarding the best way to utilize one of these then new-to-the-market instruments. David's thoughts, and I agree, were to play them out of a DGD tuning. The pitch range is much more pleasing. I fingerpick mine, like I did my 5-string bluegrass banjo. Caution, they might not fit in all music situations! I think the original **Banjo-Mer** was designed and crafted by Doug Thomson. Other builders then followed including the **Dulci-Jo** (Don Gardner), the **Dulci-Banjo** (McSpadden Instruments), **Ban-Jammer** (Mike Klemmer), **Banjimer** (Blaine Horlocker), and others.

#### "Ginger" Dulcimer Model by McSpadden

Attractive to players due to its smaller VSL (vibrating string length), making the instrument smaller all around. **It is important to note that it is set up to play in the Key of G.** (I understand that McSpadden is now offering a "Ginger" set up for playing in D tunings.) They are good for situations where there are a lot of G tunes, as in bluegrass circles. I play a lot of bluegrass, so owning one would be beneficial to me, maybe some day!