

What is a Dulcimer?

There is more than one type of dulcimer in the UK.

The Hammered Dulcimer



The Hammered Dulcimer has a sounding board or box, typically trapezoid in shape, over which strings of increasing length are stretched, played by plucking or especially by being struck with hand-held beaters, commonly known as hammers.

The Appalachian Dulcimer



The Appalachian, or Mountain Dulcimer consists of three or more strings stretched over a long-fretted sound box, held on the lap and played by plucking or strumming.

A trapezoid is a four-sided shape (quadrilateral) which has two sides parallel. In the UK this is also called a trapezium.

Both are members of the Zither family of stringed instruments, in which the strings do not extend beyond the sound box (unlike a guitar).

Both forms of dulcimer have sounds that are unique, 'different' and flexible.

The **mountain dulcimer** can be soft & sweet or firm & strident.

The **hammered dulcimer** is capable of a range of tones from a sort of music-box sound to powerful and percussive piano-like effects which can stand out in any band.

The Sound of the Dulcimer

DULCIMER literally means
'sweet song'

(Latin: dulce + melos)





The hammered dulcimer's 'heavenly' sound meant that the instrument was often shown in paintings and carvings being played by angels (and even death, represented by a skeleton)...



16th century ceiling paintings of an Angel Orchestra in **Rynkeby Church, Denmark**



'Totentanz' (Dance of Death) by Hans Holbein (c.1526)



One of the "*Angel Musicians*" in the decorated 15th C windows at **Great Malvern Priory**



15th century carving in **Manchester Cathedral**



From '**The Fountain of Life**' by Jan van Eyck (c.1432)

