BIG NEWS!

WCU’s Mountain Dulcimer Programs now have a new name!

“Dulcimer U” will continue the legacy established by Mountain Dulcimer Week and Winter Weekend. Students will continue to get the absolute best educational experience available for the mountain dulcimer. Unlike many festivals around the country, Dulcimer U is not about the performers, it’s about you...

Through our expanding offerings, we will continue to utilize a first class instructional staff, many of which have earned advance degrees in their various educational fields. Their experience as both classroom instructors as well as nationally sought after performers make them the very best at what they do.

Skill building will continue to be at the core of our programs, but we’ll also be focusing on music theory, techniques, history and even technology applications for the dulcimer. Universities are known for advancing the body of knowledge in a particular field, so we’ll also be focusing on innovation and what the future holds for this versatile instrument.

New university certificate programs in “Teaching the Mountain Dulcimer” and “Sacred Music for the Mountain Dulcimer” will begin next year. We’ll be providing more information about these soon.

Our next offering will be our 7th Annual Winter Weekend at Lake Junaluska’s Terrace Hotel January 5-8, 2012.

Dulcimer U will publish a quarterly e-zine called the Dulcimer U Journal. The journal is designed to tell the stories of those who teach or play the dulcimer and to increase knowledge about the instrument. It will feature a learning corner in each issue designed to share historical information or tips for learning dulcimer techniques.

You may submit an article for the learning corner to Bobby Hensley by emailing hensley@wcu.edu. We cannot publish all articles but will try to publish as many as space allows. We look forward to providing resource for those who love the mountain dulcimer.

The folks in the Continuing Education Office at Western Carolina look forward to seeing you at a Dulicmer U class in the near future. Be sure to check our website often and keep your address updated to find out what new opportunities are coming your way. — Bobby Hensley, WCU’s Associate Director of Continuing Education
Sarah Elizabeth Musgrave gives the gift of music

Behind the bright and warm smile of Sarah Elizabeth Musgrave is a young lady who has figured out a way to use her talents to bring music into the lives of individuals who would not normally be given the opportunity. Sarah Elizabeth started playing the mountain dulcimer at the age of six after hearing a concert at the Blair School of Music in Nashville, TN. Her mother was the Concert Manager there so she had been exposed to music at a young age. Sarah Elizabeth did not want just anyone instructing her on the dulcimer. She wanted Davi Schnaufer, Professor of Dulcimer at Blair, to teach her how to play. Schnaufer was hesitant in the beginning due to her young age, but he finally gave into Sarah’s enthusiasm. She is now an honor student expecting to graduate in May 2012 from Belmont University with a major in song writing. In Sarah Elizabeth’s spare time she brings music into the lives of Children with Autism. In the last few years she donates six hours a week to teaching approximately 20 Children with Autism how to play the mountain dulcimer. Sarah has even held concerts to raise money to buy the students their own dulcimers. At a recent concert she raised over $6,000 to benefit her cause. She considers music a therapy for Children with Autism. Sarah Elizabeth says, “My reward is seeing the students’ faces when they begin to understand the music and how to create music.” — Allison S. Boone, Marketing & Communications Manager for The Division of Educational Outreach
All hail the NEW King and Queen of Dulcimer Week

Fred and Elsa Hester, of Independence, KA, have been crowned the new king and queen of the 2011 Dulcimer Week! Even though this was their second year of attendance, their enthusiastic participation in this annual event has won them this honor. They will have big shoes to fill with the outgoing reign of Janice and Dwight Wuertz, but they are certain to carry on with gusto. Their passion for the mountain dulcimer has taken them cross-country many times to various dulcimer events, including the 15 plus hour drive from Kansas to Cullowhee, NC to attend WCU’s Mountain Dulcimer Week this year.

Both Fred and Elsa were involved in education before retiring. Fred spent 25 years as a middle school counselor while Elsa totaled 28 in the special education field. Their first experience with the dulcimer was in 2003 at a Road Scholar Elderhostel in Jabez, KY. Anne Lough, WCU alumnae, was a featured instructor at the event and had encouraged them to attend. Elsa enrolled in the beginner’s class taught by Merwin Jackson. Fred didn't want to be left out so he borrowed a dulcimer and took the class with her.

The couple loves playing duets at their church and for other organizations in their hometown. They have played at a Farmer's Market, a touring Smithsonian exhibit entitled "The Roots of American Music," and most memorably for a Christmas Eve service at their church during a blizzard. The 92-year-old organist could not make it to the service, so they searched through the Episcopal hymnal for songs they could play. The original plan was for them to play only a prelude song and again during communion. But instead, it became a concert where they played an arrangement of "Go Tell It on the Mountain" by Larry Conger, and other arrangements by Tull Glazener and Maureen Sellers.

We hope the Hesters will be able to join us next July to preside over the summer week and share their enthusiasm and wit. Elsa knows the punch line to all Fred’s jokes and will correct him if he sets it up wrong. When they play together, it is sometimes comical when there is a mistake and one looks at the other with that, "What are you doing?" expression or with a, "We didn't rehearse it that way," remark. They are well loved by all their dulcimer friends and have become ambassadors for the mountain dulcimer. They just celebrated 46 years of marriage at the end of August. May they have many more years of wedded dulcimer bliss. — Elaine Conger

Learning Corner

History of the Mountain Dulcimer

The word “dulcimer” comes from the Latin word “dulce” which means sweet and the Greek word “melos” which means music; so together you have “sweet music”. Until the 1950’s, the dulcimer was only known throughout the southern Appalachian mountains of the eastern United States. Since then the mountain dulcimer has become a fascination around the globe. Dulcimers are one of few musical instruments that Americans can claim as their own. When Europeans arrived in the United States, most of them came with very few possessions so bringing an instrument across the Atlantic was nearly impossible. What they did bring were the memories of the instruments they had left behind like fiddles, guitars, pianofortes, horns, accordians and bagpipes.

There is still a mystery as to who invented the modern day dulcimer, but we do know that it was developed in the Shenandoah River Valley region of southwestern Pennsylvania and western Virginia.

The dulcimer combines the features of the fretted zither, the German scheitholt, the Norwegian langeleik and the Swedish hummel. The settlers of western NC and eastern TN were of English and Scotch-Irish descent so the songs played on the dulcimer are rooted in the English and Celtic tradition. The droning strings make a sound like bagpipes. Missionaries who visited the region in the 1800s wrote about the instrument. Several thought it was a fad that would soon be extinct. The dulcimer should be named one of the longest fads in history because it has been around for over two centuries and is still growing in popularity.
WCU Mountain Dulcimer Week 2011
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