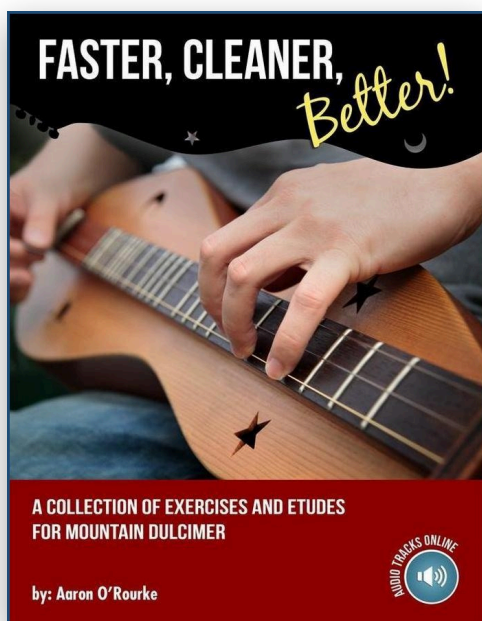


FINGERS OF STEEL® PUBLICATIONS

Faster, Cleaner, Better!

by Aaron O'Rourke



Aaron O'Rourke's *Faster, Cleaner, Better!* is a mountain dulcimer technique book for players who want more speed and cleaner playing. Its practice drills and exercises build speed and fluidity without strain.

Beyond the drills, Aaron goes into: Fingering choices, analyzed in depth; Ergonomics, for playing comfortably; Tips for getting around the fretboard easily.

51 pages

Free demo audio

INSIDE THE BOOK

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It's often said in the dulcimer community, "There is no wrong way to play a dulcimer." While I agree that there is no single "right" way to play the dulcimer and there are many approaches that work great for different styles, I think the common saying in the dulcimer community should be added onto to include, "...except a way that's going to hurt you in the long term and prevent you from playing. That's probably not the right way to play a dulcimer." I understand it makes the saying a little long and sound not quite as nice-but seriously, don't do anything that's going to cause damage. The most common mistake people make when attempting to bar with the pinky is to twist their wrist and force it straight down on the fretboard. DON'T DO THAT!! Instead, turn your hand slightly so that the outer edge of your pinky is contacting the strings and hold the bar down that way. You'll have more strength, and you shouldn't feel any strain running from your wrist to your elbow to your shoulder like you probably would the other way.

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One last thing that may or may not apply to you. 99.9% of the dulcimers that exist in the world have a flat fretboard. This works especially well for traditional style playing where the melody is played entirely on the high treble string and the bass and middle strings are used to drone. However, for many techniques used for contemporary playing, a radiused fretboard makes some difference—especially when it comes to barring with a single finger. A radiused fretboard allows you to bar with your pinky and have it maintain a pretty natural curve instead of forcing it into an uncomfortable and unnatural straight plank-like shape.

10

Written out in dulcimer tab, playing the D slant arpeggio is going to look like this...



This is important!

Start the arpeggio by using your pinky on the 2nd fret of the bass string and use your index finger on the 4th fret of the bass string. This will be consistent for every slant arpeggio in that you will start each arpeggio by using your pinky and then your index finger for the next note on the bass string. You'll use those same fingers on the melody string.

But wait! There's the middle string... Lay your hand on the dulcimer fretboard with your pinky right on the 2nd fret and your index directly over the 4th fret. What finger lays most naturally next to the 3rd fret? For most people, it's the ring finger. However, everyone's hands are a little different. Notice whatever finger lays most naturally next to that fret and use that finger whenever you play the 3rd fret on the middle string. Do this for every arpeggio and see what finger falls most naturally on the middle string note. As you play other slant arpeggios you'll probably find the middle finger works better on the middle string for certain ones.

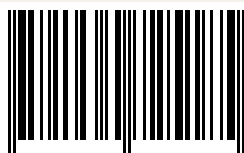
What to watch for in this exercise

This exercise yields several benefits. As I said before, it reinforces, what I consider to be, the most ideal playing position in that your hand should look and feel very relaxed when you play these arpeggios. That's not to say it will feel relaxed immediately! It takes a little practice. One thing that keeps most people from being relaxed doing this exercise at first is the fact that it makes great use of your pinky. However, this is another benefit of this exercise.

The pinky is an incredibly rebellious digit so don't be surprised if it doesn't take too kindly to doing this exercise at first. That's okay. I do think it's important to slowly show it who's really in charge—but not too fast. Just like any kind of exercise, you don't want to jump in from the start doing more reps than you can handle. Your first day of training for a marathon, you're probably not going to start off by running 26.2 miles! That would be insane. It would be just as crazy to go from not using your pinky at all to doing this slant arpeggio exercise for two hours every day.

If you're pinky is feeling tired, that's okay. If you detect any signs of pain, stop immediately. Come back to it the next day or the day after. When you do, try and be aware that you're pinky is nice and curved and not straight and rigid when you do these exercises. Remember, the best point of reference is to hold up your hand at its most relaxed and try to maintain that relaxed look when you're doing these exercises. Trust me... it works!

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