



Harp

Something New Has Been Added...

by Frances G. Miller

The first question to be asked by any teachers blessed enough to have a *harp* in their school is, "What kind is it?" The manufacturer's name is moot; the *kind* is not. You need to know whether the instrument is a non-pedal or a pedal harp because their capabilities are a little different.

Non-pedal (variously called Celtic, Folk or Lap) harps and Pedal (sometimes called Double Action or Concert) harps are strung alike. C's are red and F's are black. Bass clef, first line G is the highest wire string. All harps are C instruments, but depending on the kind (non-pedal or pedal) are tuned differently.

The basic parts of any harp are shown in the diagram.

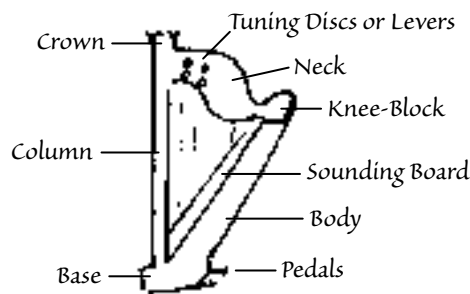
On a non-pedal harp, the levers can modify the pitch by only a 1/2 step. With all of the levers *down*, tune strings to the key of F for grade school orchestras or bands. The B \flat can be raised by the lever to B \natural making a C scale. Then raise the F \sharp lever to F \sharp for the key of G etc. Raising or lowering a lever changes pitch on only that string. The "natural" key for lever harps is E \flat : raising all the A \flat levers to A \natural gives you the key of B \flat . Raising all the E \flat levers to E \natural gives you the key of F etc. Since most beginning orchestra music is in C, F, G, or D, it makes mechanical good sense to tune in F so a minimum number of levers must be changed — easier on the strings and on the students.

On a pedal harp, the pedals can modify pitch by one whole step: 3 notches for each of 7 pedals. Having one pedal for each tone in a scale gives you, with 47 strings, the same range as an 88 key piano. Raising or lowering a pedal changes *all* the strings governed by the pedal moved. The "natural" key for pedal harps is C \flat . Accidentals and key changes are easier on pedal than on non-pedal harps, but program the music to allow time for accidentals or key changes for *both* instruments.

Harpists use only their thumbs, index, 3rd and 4th fingers. Therefore, chords of 3 to eight notes are common. It is easiest to start by using thirds and building them into triads. Arpeggios can be in 3- or 4-note patterns (but not 5, please!)

Repeated notes (like sixteenths on the same string) are clumsy and do not "sound out." You'll do better to use eighths or quarters on the beat for young players, or an arpeggiated pattern for more advanced players.

Since most music is not scored for harp, please help your young harpist by giving them violin or cello parts. At first,



these can be played with one hand in the clef where written, but very soon have the students play one-line music with two hands an octave apart. When available, please give them a piano conductor or just a piano part. And do not forget to ask help from any private teacher to arrange a part. Harpists sorely need ensemble playing skills as early as other instrumental players. Teachers — we need your help. *Thank you.*

The above "basics of the harp" is by no means a complete catalog of the physical or technical characteristics of the instrument. It is only a skeleton outline to help out any teacher who is fortunate enough to have a harpist sign up for orchestra or band.

The flip side of the coin is the responsibilities of the student who is lucky and is accepted into an ensemble organization. Because the instrument is

awkward to handle, doesn't fit into an ordinary car, is expensive and has little music written for it or arranged for it at an early ensemble level, it takes extra attention, coordination and cooperation between student, teachers and parents to make this experience a good learning one for everyone.

From the beginning, students must: be dependable (early to rehearsals and concerts); be tuned; have music learned and out on the music stand; watch the conductor—don't talk—listen; count non-stop; be patient—mark places that need practice; be alert; concentrate; listen and learn. Students must: have on their stand the assigned music, two (2) sharp pencils with good erasers and the tuning key; have in their bag a tuner (if they have one) and a quartz metronome (with a flashing light so they can check the conductor's tempos without the sound being on); and have under their chair a skeleton set of strings. After rehearsals, students should ask for help if needed.

This looks like a formidable list of instructions. Hopefully it will prove useful and will smooth the way for the entrance of a colorful and interesting new musical sound. Experiment, use imagination and have fun with this very ancient instrument that is enjoying a real renaissance in our modern world.

Frances Miller has maintained a busy schedule of teaching and performing since 1946. She currently teaches at the University of Minnesota and the University of Wisconsin, Eau Claire. She has taught at St. Olaf College, Carleton College and a number of other colleges and schools throughout the Upper Midwest. Frances is a charter member of the American Harp Society and began chapters of the AHS in Minneapolis, Eau Claire and Sioux Falls. ♪