

INTRODUCTION TO THE 30TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION

30 years ago, in 1978, when I wrote this book, the harp world was a far different place than it is today. There were only a handful of craftspeople making harps, and they often had waiting lists of a year or more. Because of this, harps were not as easy to purchase as they are today. There were also only a few recordings (LPs) of music performed on lever or folk harps.

When I began teaching, I realized that there was also a lack of music for the folk harp. Most of the music available was for the pedal harp, or for young children whose legs weren't long enough to reach the pedals. I couldn't find books that were suitable for the people who were becoming interested in the resurgence of the folk harp. That is why I wrote this book.

Folk harp teachers were also hard to find at that time. There were lots of pedal harp teachers, but a vast majority of them were not interested in teaching anything that didn't have pedals. This is why I entitled the book "Teach Yourself," because in those days, that was the only option for most players. And thousands of players have done just that . . . they have taught themselves to play just using this book, and also perhaps the video or the DVD.

Luckily, today you don't have to do it on your own. There are thousands of teachers throughout the US (and other parts of the world!) who are ready and willing to help you learn to play the harp. I highly recommend that you start lessons with a teacher as soon as possible. No matter how good a "teach yourself" book may be, the guidance and feedback you get from a teacher is invaluable. It is easy to get into bad habits without someone "looking over your shoulder" and showing you the correct way. Bad habits are harder to fix later than if you learn correctly from the beginning.

The "Thanks To" section on page 2 of this book is from the original edition. On the first line you'll see that I thank "Katharine, Shawna, and Heidi for being great guinea pigs." These were three of my first students, and were the first people to learn the harp by using this book. I'd like to give you an update on them. Katharine has been "taking some time off" from the harp, but has recently begun to play again on both lever and pedal harp. Shawna was 11 years old when she started lessons with me. She's now a professional harp player named Shawna Selline, and we sell her CDs on our website. And Heidi is Heidi Spiegel, a harpist who has been working for me since 1988 and who is an invaluable asset to the Sylvia Woods Harp Center. She is also a fine artist who has illustrated the covers of over a dozen of my books and pieces of sheet music.

In this 30th Anniversary Edition, I have kept all of the music pages exactly as they were in the first edition. Only the introduction and appendix pages have been revised.

There are no sharps or flats in any of the pieces in this book. At the time I wrote this book, sharpening levers were not nearly as good, or as accurate, as they are today. They generally did not give an accurate pitch when engaged, and often wore away the strings. Many harps sold at that time didn't have any levers at all. That's why you don't need any sharpening levers to play the pieces in this book. (See pages 73 and 74 for more information on how to use sharpening levers.)

THE “TYPESETTING” OF THIS BOOK

I created this book long before the advent of home computers, desktop publishing, or music software. In those days, if you wanted a fancy typeface for a flier, you could buy transparent sheets of dry transferable letters in your chosen font and size and then rub off the letters you needed, one by one, onto a sheet of paper. This was a tedious and laborious task, and if you made a mistake it was hard to correct. Artwork, symbols, and musical notes were also available in this format.

Now, here’s an amazing little-known fact. Every note in this book was rubbed off in this manner, one at a time, from a transfer sheet! Here’s how I did this arduous task. I started with a sheet of music staff paper, with the 5-line staves. I rubbed off the appropriate clefs for each line, and the time signature. Then, one by one, I rubbed off the notes with the correct time value. I rubbed off the fingerings from another transfer sheet in the same way. Then, using a pen and a ruler, I drew in the bar lines, beams, brackets, ties, endings, and other symbols.

I typed the small text throughout the book on an IBM Selectric typewriter. The larger text in the titles and chapter headings was rubbed off, one letter at a time, from a transfer sheet.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

The range of notes used in this book goes from the G that is 10 strings below middle C, up to the C that is 2 octaves above middle C. If you have a small harp that doesn't have some of the low strings, you have several choices when playing pieces that have notes lower than your harp. On many of the pieces, you can play all the notes with both hands an octave higher than written, and this will keep the music in the range for your harp. Or, if there are only a few notes that your harp is missing, you can just play those individual notes an octave higher, keeping the rest of the notes in the range as written in the music.



You do not need any sharpening levers on your harp to play the music in this book because there are no sharps or flats in any of the pieces. See pages 73 and 74 for more information on sharps, flats, and the use of sharpening levers in other harp music.

I highly recommend that you take lessons from a qualified harp teacher while you are learning to play the harp. Although you can “teach yourself,” the feedback and guidance from a teacher will make you a much better harp player and give you greater enjoyment and success.

This book is designed to be studied consecutively from beginning to end. Each chapter introduces a new technique or concept. Don't be tempted to skip around. Be sure you understand the material and can play the pieces in each lesson before going on.

I have created two companion products that you'll find useful while learning from this book. On the companion CD I play all of the pieces in the book, so you can hear how the music is supposed to sound. The informative companion DVD is extremely helpful, particularly if you are teaching yourself without the aid of a teacher. I give more detailed instruction about the concepts and techniques presented in the book, and point out places in the music where you need to pay particular attention. You can also see my hand position and playing technique as you watch me play all of the pieces. You should be able to purchase either of these companion products from the store where you purchased this book. Or, you can order them directly from me at www.harpcenter.com.

If you'd like a copy of the lyrics for the songs in this book, they are available for purchase in a booklet that also contains the lyrics from my [Hymns and Wedding Music for All Harps](#) book. However, you may also download the lyrics for free at www.harpcenter.com/lyrics.

A SPECIAL NOTE FOR PIANISTS AND OTHER MUSICIANS

Having taught hundreds of people how to play the harp, I have observed that beginners who are already accomplished musicians, particularly pianists, tend to try to progress too fast, without taking the time to create a good foundation of basic technique. You may be able to sight-read the music in this book immediately. However, if you do this, you're probably not playing it correctly with proper hand position and placing. I can't emphasize enough how vital it is for you to spend time with the first few lessons playing the pieces very slowly, conscientiously following the placing brackets, watching to be sure your hand position is correct and your fingers are moving all the way into your palm. Taking the time to stop and place your fingers in the brackets, even if that means that there are pauses in the music, is much more important at the beginning than playing the piece in the correct time. Don't be in a hurry. The time you spend to be sure your basics are solid at the beginning will pay off for years to come.

TYPES AND PARTS OF HARPS

FOLK HARPS or LEVER HARPS

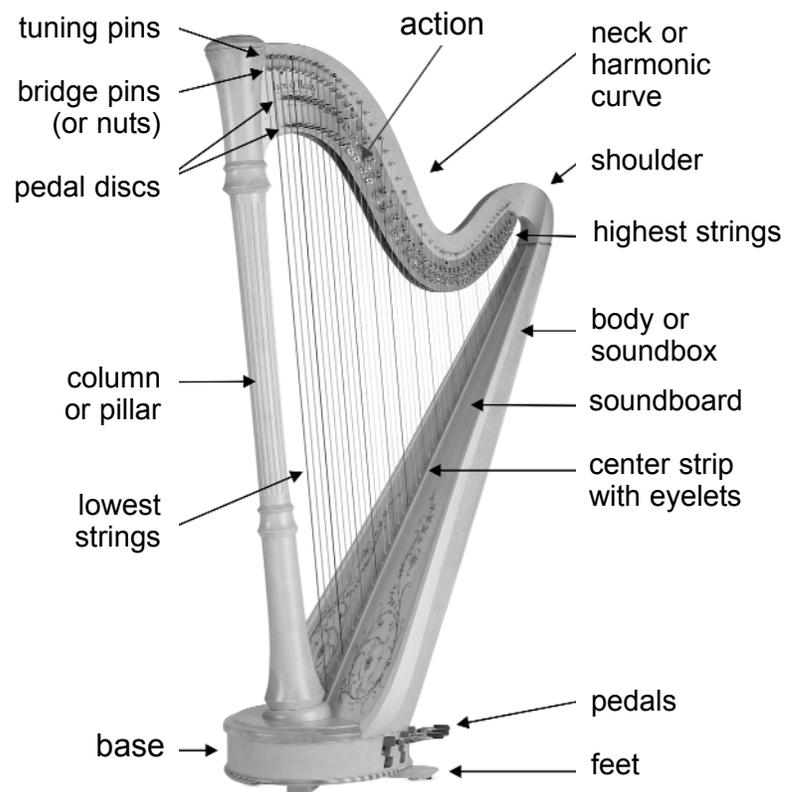
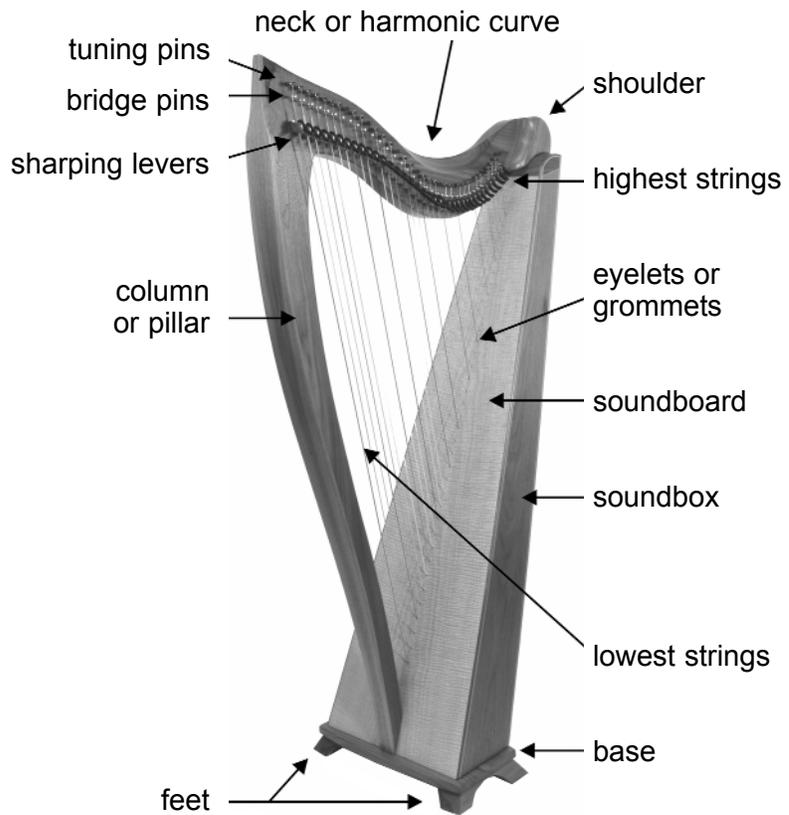
Folk harps can also be called **lever harps**, **Celtic harps**, **Irish harps**, or **non-pedal harps**. They range in size from small 20 string lap harps to larger floor harps with up to 40 strings. No matter what name your harp goes by, you can use this book to learn to play your harp.

South American or **Mexican-style harps** are usually played with a slightly different technique than what is presented in this book, and often the string colors are different. However, if you have that type of harp, you can still use this book to learn to play.

Wire-strung or **metal-strung harps** also have their own special playing technique. If you have one of these harps, I suggest that you supplement this book with an additional method book specifically designed for that type of harp.

PEDAL HARPS

Pedal harps are the harps that are played in an orchestra. They are also called **concert harps**, **orchestral harps**, or **grand harps**. They have between 40 and 47 strings. There are seven pedals which are moved by the harpist's feet, one pedal for each of the seven notes in the scale. The pedals move discs on the neck of the harp which shorten or lengthen the sounding length of the strings, providing sharps, naturals, and flats. Although the title of this book mentions a "Folk Harp," you can also use it to learn to play a pedal harp.



HOLDING THE HARP

It is important to sit properly when playing the harp. Sit in an armless chair or harp bench, with your feet flat on the floor. Don't lean against the back of the chair. Sit behind the soundbox with the harp between your knees and angled a bit towards your right shoulder. Lean the top of the harp towards you until the soundbox rests lightly against your right shoulder. The front of the base of the harp will lift up from the floor. Don't place the harp too close to your neck. You should have enough room to comfortably turn your head to look at the upper strings. When the harp is tilted back properly, the strings should be approximately vertical, and the harp should be lightly balanced against your



shoulder. You should neither sit too close nor too far away from the harp. Experiment with different stool heights and how close you are sitting to the harp until you find a comfortable position.

If your harp is not tall enough to reach your shoulder, sit on a lower bench, or raise the harp by placing it on a small stool or table, as shown on the left.



SMALL HARPS

To play a lap harp, put it on your lap and lean it back so that the top of the soundbox rests lightly against your right shoulder, as shown in the photo on the right. Experiment with the angle of the harp by moving the base closer to your knees, or closer to your body, until you find a position that feels comfortable and secure.



Many people find it easier to play a lap harp by setting it on a chair or stool in front of them, instead of balancing it on their lap.

Some small harps are designed to be worn with a shoulder strap (like a guitar strap) supporting the harp, and the harp hanging between the harpist's knees, as shown on the left. A lap bar can help support this type of harp, making it more stable.



MUSIC STAND

Place your music stand to the left of your harp, as close to the harp as possible, so you don't need to turn your head too much to view both the strings and the music.