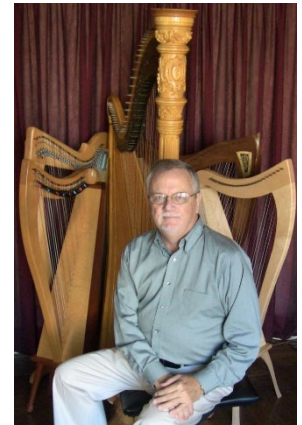


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You can find Ray's PDFs at www.harpcenter.com/Pool

I grew up in Tulsa, OK. When I was four years old, my mother took me to my first choir rehearsal. We learned to raise our hands in the air as we made a big "whooooo" sound to find our head tone. "I can light a candle. God can light a star. Both of them are helpful — shining where they are." And so began my career in church music. Choirs, handbells, piano, guitar, voice, and organ lessons culminating with a Bachelor of Music degree from Westminster Choir College made church music the foundation of my musical education. And it still comes up all the time.



I encountered the harp through my brief career in church music. At a professional conference, I met Clara Walker from Detroit. She was a church musician and a harpist. Clara gave a workshop on the instrument in which she said "If you can play a keyboard instrument, you are ready to play the harp." And so I did.

A wild ride began as I discovered how much I liked to have my hands directly on the strings. A year later, while teaching in a private boys' school in Connecticut, I bought my first Lyon & Healy Style 15 pedal harp. I was soon playing in the Yale Symphony. I went to Vienna with them for the European premiere of "Mass" by Leonard Bernstein. That gave me the taste for serious performing.



The following year found me living in New York City and studying the harp full time — privately. It was with Dewey Owens at first, then with Lucile Lawrence. Miss Lawrence lived in a very large house and had a cat that needed tending for the summer while she was away teaching at The Tanglewood Institute. I stayed in her house for eight weeks during her absence. Those eight weeks turned into two and a half years. It was an amazing situation that provided me with the instruction I needed and also with numerous professional contacts.

Five years after I bought my first harp, I was asked to substitute for others on Broadway. One thing led to another and I soon had my own contracted chair in *Pacific Overtures* at The Winter Garden theater (where Hugh Jackman is tearing it up right now in *The Music Man*).

I was the contracted harpist for the following shows on Broadway: ***Pacific Overtures***, ***On the Twentieth Century***, ***Evita***, ***La Tragedie de Carmen***, (Lincoln Center), ***Mame*** (1983 revival), and the ill-fated ***Grind***.

Over the years from 1976 to 2008, I was a sub for other harpists for the original Broadway productions of ***Shenandoah***, ***Pippin***, ***La Cage aux Folles***, ***A Chorus Line***, ***Sweeney Todd***, and ***Sunday in the Park with George***. I was also a sub for the Broadway revivals of ***Carousel***, ***How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying***, ***Gypsy***, ***The Music Man***, ***Oklahoma***, and ***South Pacific***.

My proud parents came to visit, as you see here.

Because I felt so fortunate to be involved with such big-name shows and performers, I had to ask myself "Why am I here?" And then I remembered that both Kelli O'Hara and Kristen Chenoweth are from Tulsa, Oklahoma. So, why not? I have always been amazed to meet or hear of others from the midwest and southwest who are living their dreams. My advice: *Keep the faith! Practice. Be ready for that special day.*



I went from show to show, took two tours on the road, subbed at New York City Ballet during the annual "Nutcracker" seasons, and then . . . someone invented an electronic keyboard with a bunch of red buttons on it. Pushing this one or that could produce the sounds of a piccolo or a tuba — or a harp! Doomsday for the harp on Broadway for a few years! That was in 1985.

After a year of chronic unemployment, I decided to take a word processing course to begin to ease my way into "the real world" of making a living. I went to work for a temp agency on a day-to-day basis. I was placed at an ad agency on Madison Avenue. On the first day there, I was given a task that the boss thought would take me all afternoon. I finished it in about thirty minutes. I was going to have a future there — whether I wanted it or not.

At the end of the second day of advertising work, I arrived home to see a flashing light on my answering machine. I couldn't believe what I heard: "We are having an audition for a harpist to play for afternoon tea at The Waldorf-Astoria Hotel, and you have been recommended. If you're interested, please give us a call. But we're not sure that we want a man." This was not the first time gender discrimination had come my way but it was certainly the most blatant. I had to learn to live with it.

I played at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel for the greatest part of seventeen years, ending in 2003. During the later years of that employment, I had begun to travel the country on what I called "The Workshop Trail." I had written a series of harmony studies including [3's a Chord](#), [Clever Levers](#), and [Blazing Pedals Volume 1](#) and [Volume 2](#). I used them for workshops intended to increase the harpist's ability to better understand harmony on the harp. They were well received. I also started to write arrangements of pop music as I played it on the job.



Through the years, I was delighted to be invited to teach and perform at many festivals and conferences. They included the American Harp Society, International Society of Folk Harpers and Craftsmen, Lyon & Healy Jazz and Pop HarpFest, The Somerset Folk Harp Festival, and The Edinburgh International Harp Festival, as well as local and regional events sponsored by schools and teachers with large studios.

I also encountered the burgeoning field of "Harp Therapy" through my acquaintance with Edie Elkan and the [Bedside Harp](#) program. I taught group lessons and also did the rounds of patients' rooms. It was a career in itself. I produced the [Anthology](#) collection to provide appropriate repertoire for a broad range of situations. The elements of this study are a great part of my private teaching these days: harmony, lead sheet reading, and improvisation. These are all very important skills that I use daily.

I retired from The Workshop Trail and any further public performance in 2013 when my partner John Kubiniec and I left Manhattan for a quieter life. We live in Rochester, NY. I teach lessons via ZOOM to adult learners on lever harp throughout the country. One fun event here in Rochester was playing for the Kindergarten class of an elementary school. It was the "Peter Rabbit Springtime Tea." I got right in the spirit, as you see in this photo.

Life is good.

Now, remember: "Thumbs up — fingers down!"

-- Ray Pool



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