

## BEGINNING AUTOHARP WITH DR. JILL TRINKA

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### A Brief History

Invented in 1881, patented in 1882, by German immigrant, Charles Zimmerman in Philadelphia.

Want more? Blackley, Becky. *The Autoharp Book*. Brisbane, CA: i.a.d. Publications. 1983.

Seek out *The Autoharpaholic Magazine* on E-bay.

### Types of Harps

Chromatic – strings are tuned to include all half steps, as in a chromatic scale. (Standard)

These are usually either 15-shord or 21-chord.

Diatonic – strings are tuned up or down a half step to a pitch included in a particular scale. Number of keys available is less, but volume is increased because several strings are doubled.

The Autoharp is a folk instrument and, as such, there are myriad types. Lindsay Haisley has altered harps to play jazz, for example. My Diatonic harps are principally C-G and D-A. Evo Bluestein designed a Hymnal Harp, which allows for E-flat and B-flat playing, for example.

### Playing Style: Table Top/Lap vs. Upright (Appalachian)

Table Top – left hand plays chord bards; right hand crosses over left and plays strings.

Upright – This is Appalachian Style. Hold the harp flat up to the chest with small end of harp by your shoulder. Rest the bottom corner on your left leg. Wrap the left arm around harp below the bend in the harp to press the chord bars. Press chord bards firmly.

The right hand strums strings and wears picks. Lightly “anchor” right elbow at the corner of the harp. Bend the wrist as you move your right arm freely over all strings in an arc, close to the sound hole.

### Tuners and Tuning

Use an electronic chromatic tuner as the sound reference. Best are those with lighted visual of the pitch and chromatic pitches with octave change indicators. I use a Zen-On Chromatina Tuner.

Compare the T-bar (octagonal ) and L-bar (square) tuners: more points of contact with octagonal. There is greater stress on the wrist when tuning using the L-bar tuner.

### Thumb and Fingerpicks

Get a firm thumb pick that fits snugly on the right thumb. I like Golden Gate picks. They are plastic.

Metal finger picks (index and middle, for sure; sometimes ring finger). The Dunlop .025 weight picks are a good weight for all playing intensity types. The finger pad nestles into the curved metal. Do not wear them as fingernails!

A newer type of finger pick, which I am enjoying, is the Pro-Pik® Fingertone® Fingerpick which features an open space for the fingerpad. They're pricey at \$9.00 per pick and come in Large, Medium, and Small sizes. ([pro-pick.com](http://pro-pick.com))

### Straps

These are great if you are standing; I like them when sitting, too, for the extra security. Check out d'Aigle Autoharps Marketplace.com

### PLAYING THE AUTOHARP

1. Thumb – strum across all strings in an arc **away** from you
2. Fingers – brush all strings in an arc **toward** you
3. Pinch – thumb and fingers strike strings at the same time in a pinching motion towards each other. Strike in a light fashion, but produce a crisp tone. Pluck out the melody.
4. Combinations of pinch, thumb, and fingers – Playing Melody with rhythmic “filler”

### DEMONSTRATION

“Jesu, Joy of Man’s Desiring” Example of Melody Playing

### CLASSROOM USE

- Teacher sings a song to students and accompanies self. (Listening)
- Teacher accompanies students singing well-known songs. Play the melody as an Introduction and Interludes or as an Instrumental Verse. When children are singing, play only a simple accompaniment.
- In the study of I, V/V7 chords, (IV, iii, etc.) students can strum table-top style to accompany singing. (Practically speaking, it is inconvenient, at best, to tune 20-30 autoharps so that everyone can play!)

### LISTENING

Mother Maybelle Carter  
Mike Seeger  
Kilby Snow  
Bryan Bowers  
Lindsay Haisley  
Jo Ann Smith

## BASIC PATTERNS, SONG TEXTS, AND CHORDS

### I. THUMB

#### GO, TELL AUNT RHODY

**Strum Pattern: Thumb strum beat – arc across all strings, lowest to highest**

I                      V7              I  
Go, tell Aunt Rhody, Go tell Aunt Rhody,

I                      V7              I  
Go, tell Aunt Rhody, that the old grey goose is dead.

#### ROCK-A MY SOUL

**Strum Pattern: Thumb strum across bass strings, then thumb strum across all other strings low to high**

/              /              /              /              /              /              /  
I                                              V7  
Rock-a my soul in the bosom of Abraham, Rock-a my soul in the Bosom of Abraham,

/              /              /              /              /              /              /  
I                                              V7                                              I  
Rock-a my soul in the bosom of Abraham,              Oh, rock-a my soul.

### II. FINGERS

#### TWINKLE, TWINKLE, LITTLE STAR

**Finger Pattern: Brush fingers from top (high) strings to bottom (low) strings, being sure to dig fingers into the strings a bit. Do not glide over the top of the strings. Keep hand and wrist relaxed.**

I              I              IV      I      IV      I              V7              I  
Twinkle, twinkle, little star, how I wonder what you are.

I              IV              I                      V7      I              IV              I              V7  
Up above the world so high, like a diamond in the sky.

I              I              IV      I      IV      I              V7              I  
Twinkle, twinkle, little star, how I wonder what you are.

### III. THUMB AND FINGERS

**CLEMENTINE**

**Strum Pattern:** Beat 1: Thumb strum away from self; Beats 2 and 3: Finger brush toward self.

CHO.                    I                    I                    I                    V7  
Oh my darling, Oh, my darling, Oh my darling Clementine,  
  
                         V7                    I                    V7                    I  
You are lost and gone forever, dreadful sorry, Clementine.

1. In a cavern in a canyon, excavating for a mine.

V7            I            V7            I

Dwelt a miner, forty-niner, and his daughter, Clementine.

2. Light she was and like a fairy, and her shoes were number nine. Herring boxes without topses, sandals were for Clementine.

MARY HAD A LITTLE LAMB

### Strum Pattern 1: Alternating Thumb Strum and Finger Brush in Low-Middle and Middle-high positions

I                      V7                      I  
Mary had a little lamb, little lamb, little lamb.

I V7 I  
Mary had a little lamb, whose fleece was white as snow.

**Strum Pattern 2: Beat 1 – Thumb Strum (lower)  
Beat 2 – Thumb Strum (higher) + Finger Brush**

I                      V7                      I  
Mary had a little lamb, little lamb, little lamb.

I V7 I  
Mary had a little lamb, whose fleece was white as snow

**TOM DOOLEY (1868)**

**Strum Pattern:** Both beats are Thumb strum and Finger brush using a dotted eighth-sixteenth rhythm for each beat.

**CHO.**

**I** **V7**  
Hang down your head Tom Dooley, Hang down your head and cry,

**V7** **I**  
Hang down your head Tom Dooley, Poor boy you're bound to die.

I V7  
1. I met her on the mountain, and there I took her life,

V7 I  
I met her on the mountain, killed her with my knife.

2. This time tomorrow, reckon where I'll be,  
Down in some lonesome valley, hangin' from the white oak tree.

#### IV. STRUMMING MELODIC RHYTHM (playing the melody)

##### Hot Cross Buns

Using Thumb to play melody: Strum across strings, stopping at each melodic pitch.

Chord:	I	V7	I	I	V7	I
Solfa:	m	r	d	m	r	d
	I		V7	I	V7	I
	d	d	d	d	r	r
			r	r	r	r
			m	r	d	

##### Hot Cross Buns

T = Thumb; F = Fingers

Chord:	I	V7	I	/	I	V7	I	/
Right hand	T	T	T		T	T	T	
Solfa Melody	m	r	d		m	r	d	
	I	I	I	I	V7	V7	V7	V7
	T	F	T	F	T	F	T	F
	d	d	d	d	r	r	r	r
					m	r	d	

##### Go, Tell Aunt Rhody

Chord:	I	I	V7	I	I	V7	V7	V7	I	V7	I
Right Hand	T	T	F	T	T	T	T	F	T	F	T
Solfa Melody	m	m	r	d	d	r	r	f	m	r	d

I	I	V7	I	I	I	V7	I	V7	V7	I
T	T	F	T	T	F	T	F	T	F	T
s	s	f	m	m	m	r	d	r	m	d

## V. THE PINCH

Thumb and fingers pinch strings simultaneously, as if plucking a grape from its stem.

### Go, Tell Aunt Rhody

Chord:	I	I	V7	I	I	V7	V7	V7	I	V7	I
Right Hand:	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P
Solfa Melody:	m	m	r	d	d	r	r	f	m	r	d
ABCs:	A	A	G	F	F	G	G	Bes	A	G	F

I	I	V7	I	I	I	V7	I	V7	I	I
P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P	P
s	s	f	m	m	m	m	r	d	r	m
C	C	Bess	A	A	A	A	G	F	G	A

## VI. PINCH (Melody) and STRUM ("Filler")

### Go, Tell Aunt Rhody

Chord:	I	I	V7	I	I	V7	V7	V7	I	V7	I
Right Hand:	P	S	P	P	P	S	P	S	P	P	P
Solfa Melody:	m	m	r	d	d	r	r	f	m	r	d
ABCs:	A	A	G	F	F	G	G	Bes	A	G	F

I	I	V7	I	I	I	V7	I	V7	I	I
P	S	P	P	P	S	P	P	P	P	S
s	s	f	m	m	m	m	r	d	r	m
C	C	Bess	A	A	A	A	G	F	G	A



# GO TELL AUNT RHODY

6.

## SIMPLE STRUM ACCOMPANIMENT

Two systems of musical notation for simple strum accompaniment. Each system consists of a guitar chord diagram and a corresponding musical staff. The first system shows a 4-measure phrase with chords D, D, A7, and D. The second system shows a 4-measure phrase with chords D, D, A7, and D. The musical staff for each system is in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time, with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a time signature of 4/4. The melody is written in a single line on a five-line staff.

## STRUMMING THE MELODY

Two systems of musical notation for strumming the melody. Each system consists of a guitar chord diagram and a corresponding musical staff. The first system shows a 4-measure phrase with chords D, A7, D, and D. The second system shows a 4-measure phrase with chords D, A7, D, and D. The musical staff for each system is in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time, with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a time signature of 4/4. The melody is written in a single line on a five-line staff.

## PICKING THE MELODY

Two systems of musical notation for picking the melody. Each system consists of a guitar chord diagram and a corresponding musical staff. The first system shows a 4-measure phrase with chords D, A7, D, and D. The second system shows a 4-measure phrase with chords D, A7, D, and D. The musical staff for each system is in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time, with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a time signature of 4/4. The melody is written in a single line on a five-line staff.

# ODE TO JOY

7.

## STRUMMING THE CHORDS

Four staves of musical notation for 'ODE TO JOY'. Each staff shows a sequence of chords (D, A7, D, A7, D, A7, D, A7, D, A7) and arrows indicating the strumming direction (up or down). The melody is written on the staff below the chords.

\* Try "pinching" the entire melody:

## MELODY PICKING

## DOWN IN THE VALLEY

Two staves of musical notation for 'DOWN IN THE VALLEY'. Each staff shows a sequence of chords (G, D7, G, D7, G, D7, G) and arrows indicating the picking direction (up or down). The melody is written on the staff below the chords.