# March 2, 2024 Webinar Sponsored by FAME

© J. Trinka 2024 iltrinka@me.com

#### 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 "anghor" right albow at the source of

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)

#### 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 I. THUMB

# BASIC PATTERNS, SONG TEXTS, AND CHORDS

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
Rock-a my soul in the bosom of Abraham, Rock-a my soul in the Bosom of Abraham,
/ / / / / / / / / / / / / 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. Oh my darling, Oh, my darling, Oh my darling Clementine, You are lost and gone forever, dreadful sorry, Clementine. 1. In a cavern in a canyon, excavating for a mine. 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 Mary had a little lamb, little lamb, little lamb. V7 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 V7 Mary had a little lamb, little lamb, little lamb. 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. Hang down your head Tom Dooley, Hang down your head and cry, V7

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

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

7

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** 

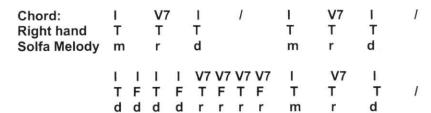
Using Thumb to play melody: Strum across strings, stopping at each melodic pitch.

V7

Chord:	1	V7	1	- 1	V7	1
Solfa:	m	r	d	m	r	d
	1		V7	1	V7	1
	d d	b b b	r $r$ $r$ $r$	m	r	d

**Hot Cross Buns** 

T = Thumb; F = Fingers



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

IIV7IIIV7IV7V7I TTFTTTFTFTFT ssfmmmrdrmd

#### V. THE PINCH

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

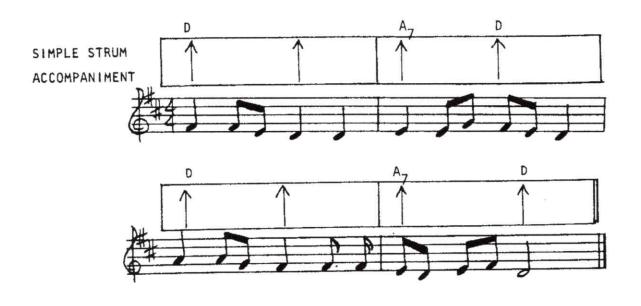
#### Go, Tell Aunt Rhody

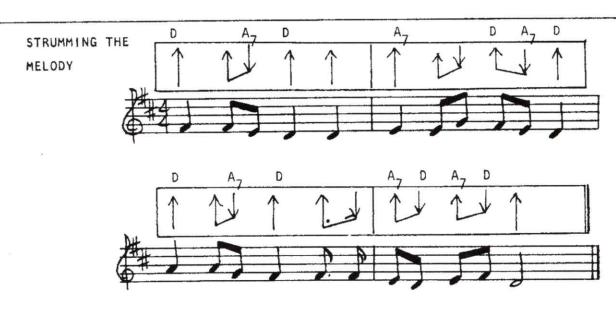
```
V7 V7 V7
          1 1 V7 1
                    1
Chord:
          PPPP
                    P
                           PP
                                PP
Right Hand:
Solfa Melody: m m r
                 d
                    d
                                m r d
          AAG
                 F
                     F
                         G G Bes A G F
ABCs:
          1 I V7
                 1
                    1
                       I I V7 I V7 I
          PPP
                 P
                    PPPPPP
                 m m mm r d r m d
          C CBess A A A A G F G A F
```

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

#### Go, Tell Aunt Rhody

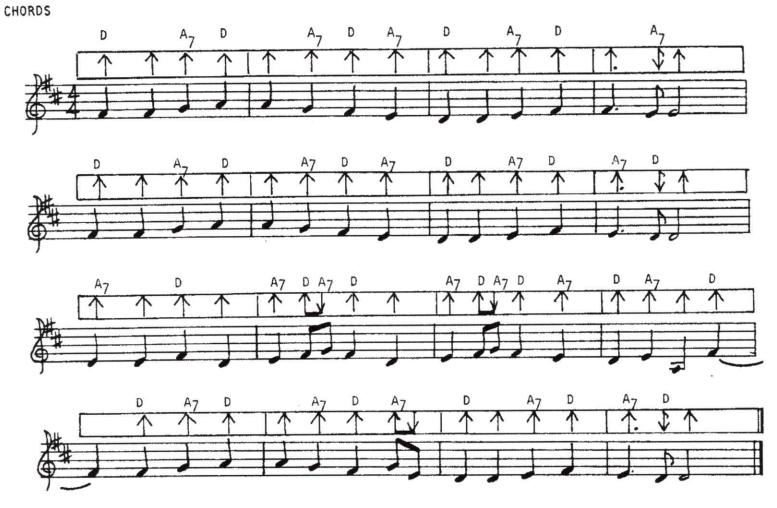
```
I V7 I
                           V7
                               V7 V7
Chord:
                             SPPPPP
         PSP P PSP S
                           P
                                           S
Right Hand:
                                r f
                                    m r d
Solfa Melody: m
             m r
                  d
                      d
             A G F
                      F
                           G
                                G Bes A G F
ABCs:
         A
                          I I V7 I V7
              I V7
                       1
                  1
         PSPP
                  P S
                       P PP P PP P PS S
                       mmmrdrmd
              C Bess A
                       AAAGFGAF
```







STRUMMING THE



\* Try "pinching" the entire melody:

