

Autoharp Workshop

A Guide for the Occasional Player

Georgia



Autoharps

INTRODUCTION

If you store your Autoharp under the bed or in the closet, this workshop is for you. The Autoharp is a wonderful instrument for the occasional player because it offers a wide range of playing possibilities. With no more than a two-hour workshop and this little resource guide, you'll be equipped to play your Autoharp whenever the mood strikes.

What We'll Cover

Since the objective is to get you playing in two hours, we'll just touch on the basics rather than going into great detail. If you find yourself hungry for more information, you can check out the resource section at the end of this guide. Here's a list of what we'll cover:

| Basics | Songs & Tunes |
|---------------------------------|--|
| Types of Autoharps 2 | Skip to My Lou10 |
| Holding the Autoharp 3 | Farther Along.....13 |
| Tuning the Autoharp 4 | Fly Around My Pretty Little Miss15 |
| Selecting Picks 5 | Mississippi Sawyer.....16 |
| Rhythm Playing 6 | I'll Fly Away17 |
| Melody Playing 8 | Soldier's Joy.....19 |
| Playing by Ear 9 | Southwind.....20 |
| Playing by Sheet Music 10 | Wildwood Flower21 |
| Additional Resources 11 | Will the Circle Be Unbroken.....22 |

About the Georgia Autoharpers

The Georgia Autoharpers, formed in 1999, was a loosely knit club of Autoharp players in and around Georgia... unfortunately no longer active.

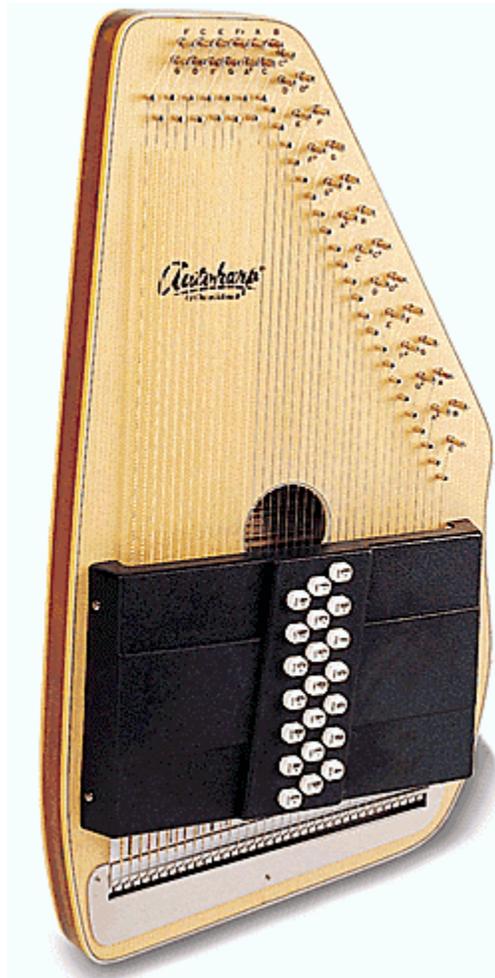
TYPES OF AUTOHARPERS

When someone asks you, "What type of Autoharp do you play," they're usually referring to chromatic or diatonic. Chromatic Autoharps are mass-produced, primarily by the Oscar Schmidt company, and are designed to play in multiple keys. They typically come with 21, 15, or 12 chord bars. Diatonic Autoharps are usually custom-built instruments designed to play in one, two, or three keys. The number of chord bars depends on the number of keys and the owner's personal preference.

Most likely, you have a chromatic Autoharp that looks like one of the two shown below. (Oscar Schmidt Autoharps are available at: <http://oscarschmidt.com/>)

Oscar Schmidt Model OS100 21

- 21 Chords
- Plays in 11 keys



Oscar Schmidt Model

- 15 Chords
- Plays in 7 keys



HOLDING THE AUTOHARP

There are two basic ways to hold an Autoharp – lap style or upright. With lap style, you hold the Autoharp flat in your lap or on a table with the chord bars facing you. With the upright position, you hold the Autoharp with its back against your chest. In both cases, the preferred hand position is to press the chord buttons with your left hand and strum the strings with your right.

If you've already started playing lap style and you intend on remaining an occasional player, there's no need to change. However if you're just starting out, or you think you might want to get deeper into Autoharp playing, the upright position is recommended. Playing with the Autoharp against your chest has several advantages: it allows you to play either sitting or standing, it frees up your picking fingers to play faster, and it projects a bit more sound.



Gregg Averett, Georgia Autoharper and Workshop Leader, plays in the upright position. This is known as "Hugging your Autoharp."

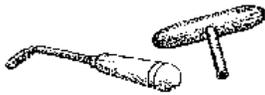


Judy Carson, an accomplished Autoharper from Clinton, TN, plays lefthanded lap style.

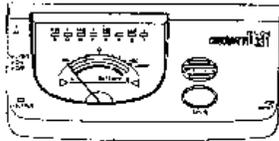
TUNING THE AUTOHARP

Take heart – tuning is a whole lot easier than it used to be. Used to be that you actually had to be able to match a pitch to tune a stringed instrument. Not any more. With the invention of the way-cool and affordable electronic tuners, tuning is a snap!

What You'll Need



Autoharp Tuning Wrench



Electronic Tuner



Pick Up (optional)

What You'll Do

If you ask 10 different people how to tune an Autoharp, you'll get 10 different answers. My recommendation is to start at one place on the Autoharp and work your way up, then go back to where you started and work your way down. While some of the notes might fall out of tune a bit when you tune this way, it's easier on the untrained ear to hear notes going up or down in their step-wise order.

For the occasional player:

1. Lay the Autoharp on a flat surface
2. Lay the tuner near the Autoharp
3. Turn on the tuner
4. Put the tuning wrench on any tuning pin
5. Pick that note
6. Check the tuner
 - a. If the note is sharp, turn the tuning wrench counter clockwise
 - b. If the note is flat, turn the tuning wrench clockwise
7. Work your way on up the harp, return to where you started, then work your way on down the harp until all notes have been tuned.

* Note: for the occasional player, I think it's more important to spend what little time you have playing the instrument, rather than tuning it. The exception is if you plan on playing with anyone else. In that case, better to tune than to risk losing a friend.

SELECTING PICKS

You don't need no stinking picks. There, I said it. If a few professional players can play without picks, that should be good enough for you, the occasional player.

But if you want to avoid calluses or blisters, or if you want to play a little louder, here's a little primer on finger picks.

Flat Picks

You can play the Autoharp with a single flat pick, just like the kind guitar players or some dulcimer players use. They come in standard or triangular shapes; thin, medium, or heavy strength; and are made out of plastic or felt.



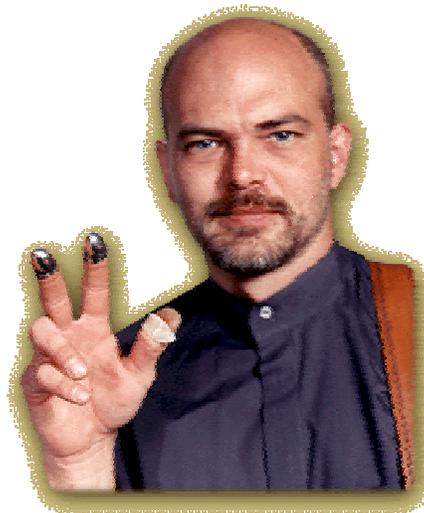
Thumb & Finger Picks

Most Autoharp players who do use picks use a combination of thumb and finger picks. Thumb picks are made out of metal or plastic and are typically one of two styles – standard or speed pick. Finger picks are made out of metal or plastic and are generally worn on one to four fingers, with the enclosure worn just below the face of the fingernail.



The Art of Wearing Picks

If you've never worn finger picks before you might be tempted to wear them backwards. The proper way to wear them is with the pick closure on top of the fingernail. (Just the opposite from wearing fake finger nails.) The picture to the right gives you a pretty good idea.



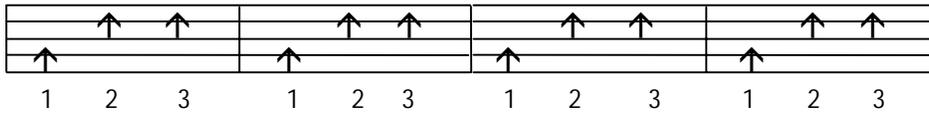
RHYTHM PLAYING

Rhythm playing is used to back up the melody while someone sings or plays the main tune. Here are a few basic patterns used in rhythm playing.

- ↑ Strike in the direction of the high strings – usually with the thumb
- ↓ Strike in the direction of the low strings – usually with the index finger

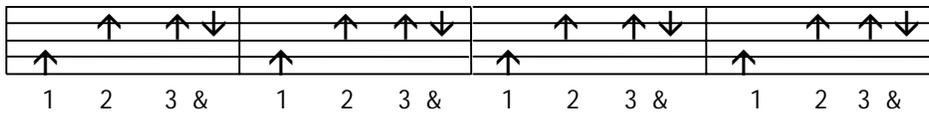
3/4 Strum Patterns

 D A7 D



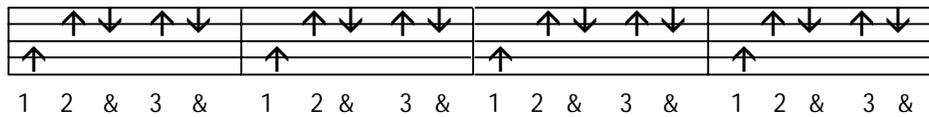
1 2 3 1 2 3 1 2 3 1 2 3

 D A7 D



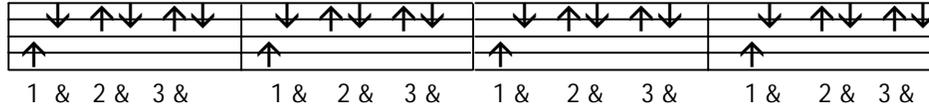
1 2 3 & 1 2 3 & 1 2 3 & 1 2 3 &

 D A7 D



1 2 & 3 & 1 2 & 3 & 1 2 & 3 & 1 2 & 3 &

 D A7 D



1 & 2 & 3 & 1 & 2 & 3 & 1 & 2 & 3 & 1 & 2 & 3 &

4 / 4 Strum Patterns

✈ D A7

1 2 3 4 | 1 2 3 4

✿ D A7

1 2 & 3 4 & | 1 2 & 3 4 &

✦ D A7

1 2 & 3 & 4 & | 1 2 & 3 & 4 &

! D A7

1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & | 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &

MELODY PLAYING

Melody playing is used during instrumentals breaks – designated times in a song when an instrument plays while the singer takes rest. It is also used in tunes where the Autoharp plays without a singer.

For the occasional player, the easiest way to get started on melody playing is to use your thumb to accent the melody during your rhythm playing. This gives you a start at a technique called, “thumb lead.” As you play around with this technique, you’ll soon discover that some of your rhythm chords don’t have the specific melody note. If you don’t have time to put anymore into your playing, you can still have fun just playing a few of the melody notes.

But if you have more time to fiddle around with the melody, all it takes is figuring out which other chord in the key has the melody note you’re looking for. In many songs you can get by with play just 3 chords – 1, 4, 5 – so it’s just a matter of trying the other two chords to see where your melody note is. And if you happen to have the sheet music, the melody notes are sometimes provided.

If you get this far – you can play thumb lead AND change chords fast enough to play a melody, you might want to give the old, “Pinch Pluck” a try. Autoharp players use the Pinch Pluck technique to accent the melody notes. Here’s how it works.

The Pinch ↓ ↑

The Pinch is used primarily to sound out the melody note. Using your thumb and middle finger, make a motion like you’re going to snap your fingers, except don’t follow through once your thumb and middle finger make contact. That’s the basic motion. What you do on your Autoharp is aim your middle finger at the melody note and your thumb about 2-3 inches below. Then strike the stings making your snap finger motion.

The Pluck ↑

The Pluck sometimes follows the Pinch as a filler. If you use your thumb and middle finger to Pinch, then use your index finger to strike one note in the ↑ motion. If you get this far in your playing, it might be time to purchase one of the instruction books or take a lesson from an instructor in the resource section. Pinch Pluck is something you should try to get right to start out with cause it’s hard to fix bad habits.

PLAYING BY EAR

To keep matters simple, you can get along fine on most songs by playing only three chords – the I, IV, and V chord. The numbers I, IV, and V refer to the major chord's position in a key. (The (7) after the V chord means playing the 7th is optional.) When you have more time, you can learn scales and music theory, but until then the following chart should be all you need.

| Key | I Chord | IV Chord | V Chord |
|----------------|----------------|----------------|-------------------|
| C | C | F | G ⁽⁷⁾ |
| G | G | C | D ⁽⁷⁾ |
| D | D | G | A ⁽⁷⁾ |
| A | A | D | E ⁽⁷⁾ |
| E | E | A | B ⁽⁷⁾ |
| F | F | B ^b | C ⁽⁷⁾ |
| B ^b | B ^b | E ^b | F ⁽⁷⁾ |
| E ^b | E ^b | A ^b | B ^{b(7)} |
| A ^b | A ^b | D ^b | E ^{b(7)} |

A good way to learn to play by ear is to start with a familiar two-chord song and use one of the basic strum patterns on page 7. Let's take "Skip to My Lou." If you play it in the key of F you know your other chords will either be B^b or C⁷. If you hum the song as you play along, you should be able to tell when the F chord doesn't sound right anymore. At that time, try either the B^b or C⁷ to see which sounds right. If you need a little help, here are the words and the chord changes for Skip to My Lou.

| Skip To My Lou | |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| (F) Lost my partner what'll I do, | (C ⁷) Lost my partner what'll I do, |
| (F) Lost my partner what'll I do, | (C ⁷) (F) Skip to my Lou my darlin'. |
| (F) Skip, skip, skip to my Lou, | (C ⁷) Skip, skip, skip to my Lou, |
| (F) Skip, skip, skip to my Lou, | (C ⁷) (F) skip to my Lou my darlin'. |

PLAYING BY SHEET MUSIC

If you like the idea of having someone else figure out the rhythm and melody chords, there's a boat load of sheet music out there. And even if you don't know how to read music, it's pretty graphical – when it goes up in pitch the notes are higher on the staff and when it goes down in pitch the notes are lower.

With most Autoharp music, the rhythm chords are written above the staff and the melody chords are written below the staff. Sometimes the / symbol is written to indicate that you should repeat the particular chord.

Autoharp

Skip to My Lou

Rhythm Chords F C7

Melody Chords F F F F F F F F C7 C7 C7 C7 C7 C7 C7 C7

5 F C7 F

9 C7

13 F C7 F

Lost my part-ner what 'll I do, lost my part-ner what 'll I do,
 lost my part-ner what 'll I do, skip to my Lou my dar - lin'.
 Skip, Skip, skip to my Lou, skip, skip, skip to my Lou,
 skip, skip, skip to my Lou, skip to my Lou my dar - lin'.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Autoharp Resources

Autoharp Quarterly (magazine)
<http://www.autoharpquarterly.com>

Elderly Instruments
(517) 372-7890 • <http://www.elderly.com>

Andy's Front Hall
(800) 759-1775 •
<http://www.andysfronthall.com>

Autoharp Page
Home of the Cyberpluckers chat group
<http://www.autoharp.org>

Georgia Autoharps
Web site is no longer active – this document is now hosted by UK Autoharps at: <http://www.ukautoharps.org.uk>

Autoharp Books

The following books are a few of the author's favorites:

Mel Bay's Complete Book of Traditional & Country Autoharp Picking Styles
By Meg Peterson
\$17.00 through Elderly Instruments

Beginning Autoharp Instruction Book
By Bonnie Phipps
\$9.45 through Elderly Instruments

The Autoharp Owner's Manual
By Mary Lou Orthey
\$18.85 through Elderly Instruments

About the Author



I'm Laurie Searle – a novice Autoharper who finds great joy in playing with the Georgia Autoharps. Among our group, my special inspirations are Laurie & John Simpson, Anne & Robert Martin, Judy Austin, Jennifer Cordier, and Peggy Martin. In addition to these fine folks, I've been touched by the talents of many professional Autoharps including Bill Schilling, Gregg Averett, Carole Stober, Mark Fackeldey, Karen Mueller, Carole Outwater, Nadine White, Les Gustafson-Zook, Neal Walters, Bob Lewis, Mike Fenton, and Bryan Bowers.

MUSIC SELECTIONS

About the Music

Songs in this guide are in the public domain. Arrangements were taken from the NGFDA Tablature Book, with permission from NGFDA, to encourage Autoharp and Dulcimer players to play together. Autoharp melody chords were provided by Laurie Searle.

Farther Along

NGFDA Arrangement

Autoharp - Key of D

1

D / / A D / A D A D /

7

D / G D / / A D A

13

D / / A D / A D A D /

19

D / G D / A D A D

25

D / G D / A D A D /

31

D / G D / D A D A

37

D / / A D / A D A D /

43

D / G D / A D A D

Farther Along

VERSE I

Tempted & tired, we're oft made to wonder
Why it should be thus all the day long
While there are others living about us
Never molested, tho' in the wrong.

CHORUS

Farther along we'll know all about it
Farther along we'll understand why
Cheer up my brother, live in the sunshine
We'll understand it all by & by

VERSE II

When death has come & taken our loved ones
Leaving our homes so lonely & drear
Then do we wonder why others prosper
Living as sinners year after year

VERSE III

Often I wonder why I must journey
Over a road so rugged & steep
While there are others living in comfort
While with the lost I labour & weep

VERSE IV

"Faithful till death" saith our loving Mater
Only a while to labor & wait
All of our toils will soon be forgotten
When we sweep thru the beautiful gate

Fly Around My Pretty Little Miss

NGFDA Arrangement

Autoharp - Key of D

1 D
D A7 D / G D / / / G D / /

9 A7 D
D A7 D / G D / A7 / G A7 D /

17 D G D A7
D / / / G / D / / / A7 /

25 D G D A7 D
D / / / G / D / / A7 D /

REFRAIN

Fly around, my pretty little miss
Fly around, my daisy
Fly around, my pretty little miss
You almost drive me crazy

VERSE:

The higher up the chetty tree
The riper grows the cherries
The more you hug and kiss the girls
The sooner they will marry

* Refrain

Coffee grows on white oak trees
The river flows with brandh
If I had amy pretty little miss
I'd feed her sugar Candy

* Refrain

Going to get some weevily wheat
I'm going to get som ebarley
Going to get some weevily wheat
And bake a cake for Charlie

Mississippi Sawyer

NGFDA Arrangement

Autoharp - Key of D

1

D / / / / / / / G D A7 / / / / / / D A7

5

D / / / A7 D A7 / D A7 D /

9

D / / / / / / / A7 / / / / / / /

13

D / / / / / / / A7 / D A7 D /

I'll Fly Away

NGFDA Arrangement

Autoharp - Key of D

1 **D**

D / / / D A D G D A

5 **G** **D**

G / / D

9

D / / / D A D G D

13 **A** **D**

D A / D

17

D / / / / D A D

21 **G** **D**

G / / D

25

D G D / A D A D G D

29 **A** **D**

D A / D

17

I'll Fly Away

Some bright morning when this life is o'er, I'll fly away
To a home on God's celestial shore, I'll fly away
I'll fly away, O Lordy, I'll fly away (in the morning)
When I die, Hallelujah, by & by, I'll fly away.

When the shadows of this life have grown, I'll fly away
Like a bird that prison bars has flown, I'll fly away
I'll fly away, O Lordy, I'll fly away (in the morning)
When I die, Hallelujah, by & by, I'll fly away.

Just a few more weary days & then, I'll fly away
To a land where jobs will never end, I'll fly away
I'll fly away, O Lordy, I'll fly away (in the morning)
When I die, Hallelujah, by & by, I'll fly away.

Soldier's Joy

NGFDA Arrangement

Autoharp - Key of D

1

D / / / / / / / G D / / / / / A7 / D A7 D /

6

D / / / / / / / / A7 D / 1. D 2. D

11

D G D / A7 D G D G D D A7 /

15

D G D / A7 D G D / A / D / 1. D 2. D

Southwind

NGFDA Arrangement

Autoharp - Key of D

1. D A7 D A7 D / A7 D A7 / D A7 D A7

6. D A7 D G D G D / 1. D / 2. D

12. D / / / / A7 G D / / G D A7 D A7 D

18. 1. D A7 / A7 D A7 / D A7 2. A7 D / / D /

VERSE I

Southwind of the gentle rain
 You banish winter weather.
 Bring salmon to the pool again
 The bees among the heather.
 If northward now you mean to blow
 As you rustle soft above me.
 God speed be with you as you go
 With a kiss for those who love me.

VERSE II

From south I come with velvet breeze
 My word all nature blesses.
 I melt the snow and strew the leaves
 With flowers and soft caresses.
 I'll help you to dispel you woe;
 With joy I'll take your greeting
 And bear it to your loved
 Mayo upon my wings so fleeting.

VERSE III

My Connaught famed for wine and play,
 So loyal, so gay, so loving,
 Here's my fond kiss I spend today,
 Borne on the wind in its roving.
 These Munster folk are good and kind,
 Right royally they treat me,
 But this land I'd gladly leave behind
 With your Connaught popes to greet me.

Wildwood Flower

NGFDA Arrangement

Autoharp - Key of D

1 D A7 D G D / G D A7 D A7 D

7 D / / / A7 D / G / / D

12 D A7 D / / A7 D A7 D

VERSE I

Oh, I'll twine, and I'll mingle my waving black hair,
With the roses so red, and the lilies so fair,
And the myrtle so bright with the emerald dew,
The pale amanita and islip so blue.

VERSE II

I will dance, I will sing, and my life will be gay.
I will charm every heart, and this crowd I will sway.
When I woke from my dreaming my idols were clay,
All portion of love had all flow away.

VERSE III

Oh, he taught me to love him, and promised to love,
And to cherish me over all others above.
How my heart is now wondering, no misery can tell,
He's left me no warning, no words of farewell.

VERSE IV

Oh, he caused me to love him, and called me his flow'r
Than was blooming to cheer him through life's weary hour.
Oh, I long to see him and regret the dark hour,
He's gone and neglected this pale wildwood flower.

Will the Circle Be Unbroken

NGFDA Arrangement

Autoharp - Key of D

1 D

D G D / / A7 D / / A7

6 G D

G A7 G G D D G

10

D / / / / / A7

14 A7 D

D / /A7 D A7 D

VERSE:

I was standing by my window
On a cold and cloudy day
When I saw the hearse come rolling
For to carry my mother away.

CHORUS:

Will the circle be unbroken
By and by, Lord, by and by?
There's a better home a-waiting
In the sky, Lord, in the sky.

Well, I told the undertaker,
"Undertaker, please drive slow,
For that body you are holding,
Lord, I hate to see her go."