

# THE TREBLE HARPIST

An Introduction to Music on the Harp

by

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## Foreword

Music for the harp — just like the piano — is customarily written in two clefs. The forty-seven strings on a concert grand pedal harp certainly require this for legible notation in a six and one-half octave range. There is an increasing interest in harps with fewer strings. Many manufacturers of lever harps produce models with nineteen, twenty-two and twenty-six strings. These harps are very popular with the rapidly increasing numbers of adult learners. A smaller range of strings provides an option to modify traditional harp notation. This also facilitates study for the expanding group of new harpists.

By writing music using occasional ledger lines — three below the staff and two above — a range of two and one-half octaves can be achieved on a single staff. Only the treble clef is used. The range begins with the F below Middle C and finishes with the C two octaves higher. These nineteen pitches comprise the range of The Treble Harpist.

Many of today's new harp students have never studied music of any sort. Learning to read pitches in two clefs is a daunting task. The Treble Harpist provides study material and arrangements which can be notated on a single staff. Other new harp students have sung soprano or alto in a chorus or perhaps played a treble instrument such as flute or violin. For them, study is facilitated by an immediate approach to the fundamentals of harp technique. In all cases, this study is intended for participation between a student and a teacher. It is not self-guided.

My adult learners are very motivated and engaging people. They have careers in health, technology and the arts. They excel in their careers. The process of learning to read and perform music has posed a daunting challenge for each of them. The abbreviated approach to music in The Treble Harpist is not part of today's trend of "dumbing down." It seeks to accomplish a goal of value. It is an approach to learning that permits the basics to be conveniently revealed. It provides encouragement and stimulation through successful participation.

The repertoire for this study comes from folk tunes, religious and holiday tunes in both the Christian and Jewish traditions, well known melodies by Stephen Foster and other familiar selections from the "Gay 90's." The technical advancements from one finger on a single hand to one, two or three fingers on each hand will bring dedicated students to satisfying levels of accomplishment. They will be very aware of their interest and dedication to the harp. Hopefully, many will continue on to higher levels of participation.

Ray Pool  
February 17, 2003

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Dedicated to

Ruth Kamen, Priscilla Cho, Aurora Olivieri, Penny Beasley and John Tucker

They taught me what they needed to learn.

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Special thanks to Ellen Osborne and John Wolfe  
for their generous hospitality during the creative process.  
(With fond remembrance for "Alex" who shared my toast and honey...)

# The Treble Harpist

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## A Message for Teachers

Your students will come with various backgrounds in music. Some will have prior knowledge of music notation. Some may have extensive experience on other instruments. Some may be total beginners at all aspects of musical study. There will undoubtedly be areas of study that will be redundant or seemingly superfluous for some. For others, there will be topics that are not covered in this text. Your own ingenuity will be called upon to fill in the blanks or smooth out the edges. One topic that is not covered in this study is the manner of tuning the harp. With so many instruments in size and variety, methods of tuning would take up far too much space. I have written a pamphlet called "Tuning Your Lever Harp in E flat Major" that addresses a more advanced method. In this study only two key signatures are used: C Major / A minor (no sharps or flats) and G Major / E minor (F sharp). C Major tuning for lever harps is adequate. Pedal harps tune in C flat, as usual.

An additional use of this study has become quite apparent to me. Students who have experienced the harp in previous years need a "brush-up" as they resume study later in life. The exercises and arrangements in this collection provide an excellent resource for strengthening reading skills, rhythm notation, counting and basic hand position. Don't overlook the opportunity to review these important topics. My motto is:

*If you don't start at the beginning, you'll never get to the end.*

## A Message for Students

We all have very complex lives. We have learned to deal with modern “advantages.” Banking at an ATM, pushing endless buttons for telephone prompts while trying to reach a human on a business call, successful operation of a microwave oven – these and countless other situations give us procedures that must be accomplished in an irrevocable order. One false move, one wrong button, one missed cue and it all has to start over again.

The study of music is more forgiving than these procedures. However, for the greatest amount of satisfaction it should be approached in a systematic way. By developing effective practice habits, concentrating on small phrases, you will be able to move forward with increasing skill and satisfaction.

I jokingly call my metronome an “instrument of torture” for students who find it intimidating. Trying to make light of its relentless nature, I want my students to realize its great benefit. Using it as a constant pulse in practice is very important. Do not be afraid of it. If you have never used one before, turn it on to a comfortable tempo for walking. Listen to it (carry it in your hand if it is battery operated) and walk around the room. Walk at varying paces. You can put one foot in front of the other at a steady pace without faltering. Learn to do the same thing with notes.

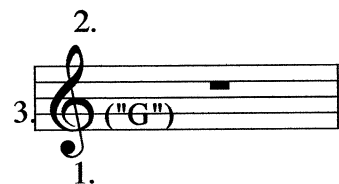
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*I extend my special thanks to Cynthia Otis  
for her long hours of consultation and proof-reading.*

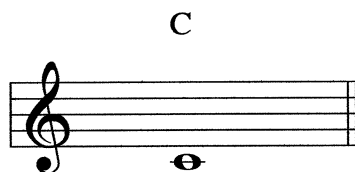
# The Treble Harpist

## Introduction to note reading in the treble clef

Welcome to note reading on the harp. Before we start to learn and practice the notes that occur in the treble clef, we need to look at the clef symbol more carefully. Look at the measure given on the right. The number "1" indicates the beginning of the main stem of the treble clef below the staff. The number "2" shows the loop that is made above the staff before it begins to descend. Finally, number "3" indicates the point on the staff where the clef loops again -- this time around the second line from the bottom of the staff. This, we will learn, is the line that indicates the pitch of "G" above "middle C." Therefore, this is sometimes called the "G clef" as well.



The note on this staff at the left is "middle C." This is the most famous note in music. If you were studying piano, it would be the C that is directly in front of you as you sit in the center of the keyboard. Due to the varying sizes of harps that are played today, it takes a little bit of counting to locate this string. First of all, the notes of C are colored red. At least that part is easy. Now, how many strings are on your harp?



If you're playing a pedal harp, you may have from 42 to 47 strings. Middle C is somewhere around string number 24 - 26 from the shortest string at the top of the harp. If you're playing a lever harp with 36 strings, middle C is number 23 from the top. If you're playing a smaller lever harp, such as a 26 stringed instrument, middle C is probably string 19 from the top of the harp -- or 8 up from the bottom. Locate middle C on your instrument.

### *Isolating a region of strings*

If you have never read lines and spaces before and are coming to the harp with no other musical background, I highly recommend that you isolate nine strings on your harp. You have just located middle C. The next two white strings above middle C (towards the shorter strings) are D and E. Then, there is a black string which is F. It is followed by three more white strings which are G, A and B. Then comes another red C, and so on.

Look at middle C again. Go to the next string above it. This is D. Take a piece of string about four feet long and loop it between the D and E string and then all the way around the column of the harp. Tie it so it is secure. You will not be using these longer bass strings for quite a while.

Go to the first F string that is now in the range of available strings above middle C. (Middle C should be in the "tied off" area.) Once you have located this F string, count your way up the strings to the next F (black) string. Place another long loop of string between the F string and the G string that is just above it. Tie this loop around the upper body of the harp. At this point, you should have only nine strings that are unfettered and ready to play. Their pitches, from longest to shortest strings, are E, F, G, A, B, C, D, E and F. These are the notes on the five lines and four spaces of the treble clef. We'll study them on the next page. Having tied them off, they are much easier to locate as we look back and forth to the printed page.

## Note Reading

There are nine strings in the available area of your harp (if you followed the instructions from the previous page). The longest available string is the note E which is represented on the bottom line of the staff. Look at "Example 1" below. With your left index finger, touch the arrow that appears beneath the first note "E." With your right index finger, gently play the E string. At the same time, say the letter of the string: "E." This is called "Say, touch, play." It is a very important part of the learning process. Please do it whenever it is suggested. It will expedite the process of learning to read notes. (I happen to know very well that if you can't say it, you certainly can't play it!)

You can count numbers in groups of odds and evens: "1 - 3 - 5" or "2 - 4 - 6." Learning to read lines and spaces is no different. We have only seven letters to keep up with: A, B, C, D, E, F and G. They should be thought of in a lengthy, repetitive chain: A-B-C-D-E-F-G-A-B-C-D-E-F-G-A-B-C...

You have to be able to start anywhere in the series of those seven letters and count every other one in order to read the lines and spaces. Just like 1, 3, 5, you could say A-C-E. Or, like 2, 4, 6, you could say B-D-F. This is the key to reading lines and spaces.

Again in "Example 1," starting with the E string (the longest string among your available group of 9), "Say, touch, play" the notes that occur on the five lines of the staff. Notice that only the last string F is a colored string. Repeat this study until you are comfortable locating and naming these strings.

*(black string)*

	"LINES"	E	G	B	D	F
--	---------	---	---	---	---	---

*Example 1*

Touch this arrow  
say and play  
"E"

...  
say and play  
"G"

...  
...  
"B"

...  
...  
"D"

...  
...  
"F"

In "Example 2" below, begin on the longest black string among the nine available notes. This is the F located on the bottom space of the staff. By playing every other string, starting with F, you will play four pitches: F, A, C and E. Notice that the first string you played — F — is black. The third string is red. It is a C.

Slowly "Say, touch, play" the notes on the spaces of the treble clef as written below...

	<i>(black string)</i>		<i>(red string)</i>		
	"SPACES"	F	A	C	E

*Example 2*

Touch this arrow  
say and play  
"F"

...  
say and play  
"A"

...  
...  
"C"

...  
...  
"E"