



Autoharp Notes

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CHAIRMAN'S CHIRPINGS from our President Derik Palmer

'That Was the Year That Was – It's Over, Let It Go'

Yes, here I am – it's that man again...

It's a while ago now, but I still remember BBC Television's flagship Saturday night show in the early sixties that introduced us to satire along with David Frost, Willie Rushton, Lance Percival and others including Millicent Martin who sang the show's introductory song. Ordinarily of course she sang 'That Was the Week That Was' but for the first edition of 1964 it became 'That Was the Year' as they looked back on the events of the previous twelve months. I particularly remember it because the show was the first time I saw the Moody Blues and heard their first hit single, 'Go Now' which became the first No 1 of 1964 and made a big impression on my 16-year-old self.

That title comes back to me now because it pretty much sums up my feelings about 2022. 'It's over – let it go'. Yes I'll gladly do that; it's been a year of struggle to keep going for so many people as we come out of Covid and into recession, and with precious little to help see us through; thankfully music helps, and those of us in UKA have had an excellent year of monthly workshops and more to keep us occupied, entertained and involved; now we're through, we've got to the end of a pretty grim year and it's time to relax, draw breath and get ready to go again.

So – what of 2023? In a couple of weeks, it'll be upon us; do we just carry on as before, as though nothing has changed? Or do we enter the new year with a new attitude, a determination to regain at least some sense of normality in our lives? I hope it's the latter, because a couple of things are changing...

Firstly, as the world slowly returns to some sort of normal after covid and people are

getting out and meeting again, Karen Mueller's live performance and teaching schedule means her workshops for UKA will be every two months instead of monthly. We'll arrange something different for the intervening months – watch this space.

Secondly, we desperately need your support. UKA was founded with the idea of bringing autoharpers together to learn and play together; the 'together' is as important an ingredient as the music. And we have had a number of enquiries from members about when we might restart our live UKA Days. Arranging these takes a fair amount of organising and no little expense; a couple of hundred pounds or so to hire the venue, payments to tutors along with travel expenses and so on. So, after a few more enquiries and some consideration by the committee, we started by negotiating a deal that allowed us to offer members the Saturday at the Sore Fingers weekend in October as a UKA Day; the whole day in the Oxfordshire countryside, learning and playing together both as autoharpers and with other musicians too - for our usual cost of £25.00. We thought we'd be trampled in the rush. In the event, the number of people taking advantage of this unprecedented offer was ... *DRUMROLL* ... one.

I'm just relieved that we hadn't booked and paid for a venue, that the tutor was already being paid by SF and we didn't incur a financial loss as a result. But it does mean that we'll be much more circumspect about arranging a UKA Day until we *know* that people are prepared to support it. The simple message is; use it or lose it for good. And that goes not just for our own events but for the Sore Fingers involvement too. Autoharps are somewhat esoteric instruments and the class at Sore Fingers has usually run on a knife-edge; John Wirtz has always cross-subsidised it from other better-attended and more profitable courses as he's keen to keep us in the loop, but this can't continue indefinitely. Sore Fingers is an incredible experience, legendary even in the USA where despite having many more autoharpers than here there is simply nothing like it. The experience of learning with other autoharpers together with the opportunity to jam at whatever level you wish with so many other musicians playing other instruments is utterly unique. It would be a huge shame for all of us and a disaster for UKA if our involvement in Sore Fingers were to cease through lack of support.

There are of course those of us who will always attend Sore Fingers – we're hard-core! But, by ourselves we're not enough. We need some more of you to take the plunge and come along too. In the next few weeks, we'll be announcing an introductory package for new attendees to encourage you to come along and experience it for yourselves in the almost certain knowledge that once you've tried it you'll become regulars too.

So – a New Year's Resolution for you all. That you'll attend at least one UKA Day if we

on the committee can be persuaded that its financially viable to run it; and that you'll give serious consideration to having a week-long break in the Cotswolds at Easter that you'll remember for the rest of your life. In twelve months' time we can sing not 'That was the year that was – it's over, let it go', but 'That was the year that was – let's have more like it'!

Happy 'Harping, and a very Merry Christmas to you all.

Derik Palmer.

A little note from Jan Brodie (Editor)

Hi Everyone,

Here is the Winter 2022 issue of Autoharp Notes and another year is drawing to a close. I am looking forward to what 2023 will bring.

Heartfelt thanks to all of you who contributed articles for inclusion in the magazine. You and your efforts are very much appreciated. I couldn't produce it without your support and I am grateful.

I don't make New Year Resolutions any more. Mine were doomed to be broken, leaving me feeling guilty and a failure. I now, instead, set myself three Challenges, two smaller ones and one larger. This is a much more positive approach and is without pressure. I have not decided entirely on my choices for 2023, but I feel that paying more attention to my neglected bowed psalteries might figure somewhere amongst them and making more positive moves to calm stress and anxiety will too. I will meditate on it and see what might surface.

Meanwhile, wishing you all a Cool Yule/Very Merry Christmas/Happy Holidays and a Bright and Cheerful 2023.

Happy 'Harping, Jan x

WEEKEND JAM SESSION AT MONIAIVE

from Helen Slade

Some months ago, back in the early Spring I saw a Facebook post about an informal gathering at Moniaive, in lieu of a formal Scottish Autoharp Weekend. I vaguely thought about it, but was still feeling rather unadventurous following months of Covid restrictions. However, shortly before the actual weekend, at the beginning of August, I found myself staying up in County Durham at my holiday home and I thought maybe I could go for one day, on the Saturday, travelling there and back? And then Anja Lyttle posted that a room had unexpectedly become available at the B&B in the village, and I made a snap decision to go for the whole weekend.

I am so glad that I did. Firstly, it was great to pull up into the car park and see a familiar face in the doorway of her camper van (Anne Cole) whom I had only ever met on Zoom. Then Anja herself wandered along with some other people and I really felt as though I was among friends, although I had only previously met one of them – Heather Farrell-Roberts. Then a strange figure emerged out of another van in the car park and I was finally introduced to

someone I had only ever spoken to on the telephone – Joolz. This was the first time since before lockdown that I had been with other autoharp players, and only the second time that I had been amongst such a gathering at all.



(Photos taken by Nadine Stah White)

So, I was grateful for the friendly and encouraging shove in the direction of the B&B, and the pub, neither of which you could really miss. Having settled in I had a lovely walk around the village in the sunshine, and made my way in the early evening to the pub for a dinner which had been arranged by Anja.

My real purpose in writing this article is not to give you a blow-by-blow account of what we did, but to urge people to get back to joining up with other players and having fun. In the 48 hours that I was there (Friday afternoon to Sunday lunchtime) I had a one-hour tutorial with Heather (who had given me my very first lesson in 2020 at the UKA Day at Tewksbury) and then had the opportunity to spend a useful hour with George Haig who worked out a string and chord bar schedule for an OS 15 Silvertone that I want to try as a diatonic. It was so helpful and illuminating being able to talk to someone and understand more about what I was proposing to do and how to make it work.



I was also able to spend several hours playing along with everyone else, learning to improvise without music in front of me (something which terrifies me!) and also listening to a variety of playing styles, and getting playing tips along the way. It was a real privilege for me to be able to sit alongside Mike Fenton, as the last time I met him I was still playing lap-style and trying to understand how on earth one could get a melody out of all those strings. I remember him urging us to 'just grab a handful' of them, which I tried to do enthusiastically! Now I felt confident enough to strum along, knowing that any mistakes I made would be drowned out by everyone else! I found it immensely useful to be able to watch what people's fingers were doing on the chord bars, and being given the freedom to experiment with musical genres that I tend not to play myself. And I know that my melody playing style has benefitted from Heather's tutoring and all that practice. So much more confident that I recently turned up at a gig and played a short set off the cuff as one of the other acts had not turned up. It was a lovely weekend and I came away really fired up to tackle the conversions and re-felting jobs I have got planned. In that context, it was also a pleasure to meet

Crawford Keane who had supplied me with the first neoprene strips that I used when I renovated my original OS15 during lockdown.

There were so many lovely people there, and I am hopeless with remembering everyone's name, so I am not going to refer to anyone else in person for fear of offending someone I leave out. But I know that for at least two people it was a huge step to take, coming to the event, and it was lovely to meet them. Overall, I felt as if I was among UK autoharp royalty and it was a great experience. I would like to thank Anja and everyone else involved, including the B&B hosts who were lovely, and the pub management who handled everything without fuss.

I was not able to attend the Sore Fingers event earlier in the year, and the autumn event clashes with another family get-together, but I can absolutely see the value of these gatherings, and would encourage everyone to try to go to some, or even to arrange one in your own area. And next time UKA organises an in-person event, do make the effort to get along. Zoom is great, but there is no substitute for being able to hear each other and to play together. Thank you everyone for a fabulous weekend.

Helen Slade (Isle of Wight)

The Autoharp and Me

From Patricia Breen



I came to the Autoharp later in life. It found me when a good friend, Doug Curran, who many of you may know, introduced me to this lovely instrument. I was totally unfamiliar with the autoharp, but Doug very kindly put me in touch with Nadine Stah White, who was leading a workshop at an upcoming ScAW Gathering at Moniaive. At this taster workshop Nadine gave me a loaner harp to try and I was in love.

Since then, my love story with Autoharp continues. I am now lucky enough to own two Sparrowharp Autoharps, one chromatic and one diatonic DG. Since starting to play, I have enjoyed hours of pleasure from these instruments, both playing alone and

enjoying the experience of playing with friends both remotely and face-to-face.

My only regret is that I came to playing Autoharp so late in life. Since finding the joy of music my mission has been to encourage younger people to take up a musical instrument early and persist in pursuit of attaining a really good level of playing, I urge them not to put it off "until I have more time" because that time never comes. Start early and enjoy all those years of pleasure. I have encouraged my young grandson to play the piano and he is enjoying this very much. Also, one of my sons is embarking on a relationship with the melodeon despite his busy life.

My mantra has become "Start young and persist".

Many thanks to all my Autoharp tutors and friends for the joy 'harping' has brought me.

Happy 'Harping xx
Patricia Breen (Dumfries, Scotland)

A SONG TITLE QUIZ **from Hilary Robinson**

I was recently challenged by the Chairwoman of the Hallamshire Guild of Spinners, Weavers and Dyers to think of as many songs/tunes as I could that referenced spinning, weaving or dyeing. This was my response. How many do you know, and how many more can you think of?

Coat of Many Colours
Joseph and his Coat of Many Colours
The Work of the Weavers
The Doffing Mistress
Frog Went A-courting
The Spinning Wheel
I Can Sing a Rainbow
Somewhere Over the Rainbow
There'll Be Bluebirds Over the White Cliffs of Dover
Mellow Yellow

My Love Is Like a Red, Red Rose
Little Boxes
Ancient Britons National Anthem
Poverty, Poverty, Knock
Forty Shades of Green
The Green Glens of Antrim
The Green Hills of Tyrol
Yan Tan Tethera (about counting sheep)
Aragon Mill
Molly Metcalf
Tarry Wool
Cotton Mill Girls

Go on, think up some more!
Hilary Robinson (Belfast, Northern Ireland)

HAIL THE SOUND OF THE AUTOHARP

Anne Pyne

... But is your fingering distorted?
Practice a little every day
And do not be thwarted.
Take a lesson now and then
'Sore Fingers' is a good bet
You'll fill your life with many new friends
And your Autoharp journey gets sorted!

Hail the sound of the autoharp!

AUTOHARPS AVAILABLE FOR PURCHASE FROM UKA

Helen Slade

UKA is constantly looking for ways in which we can provide benefits to our membership. As you will be aware, during the COVID era we have largely moved on-line to continue to be able to deliver tuition and opportunities to play together. This has resulted in an expansion of our membership, and a corresponding increase in numbers of people seeking to purchase autoharps. In the UK this is not the easiest of instruments to lay your hands on and, as you may know, we hold a collection of 'harps which can be loaned to members who are starting out, to give them a chance to gain experience. However, this still leaves the slight problem of where to obtain their own instrument.

We are now investigating a possible way in which we might assist in that process by offering for sale second-hand autoharps which we purchase and hold for resale at cost price. Sometimes these instruments are offered to UKA without being offered on the open market, so they may not come to the attention of members looking for themselves.

Some of our members do a sterling job of obtaining and refurbishing second-hand models, and offering them for sale on Facebook and other platforms, and sometimes members will be seeking to move on instruments by offering them for sale through UKA, or other mediums.

We are hoping to be able to contribute to this flow by obtaining a few second-hand instruments which we can check over and then offer to members wishing to acquire their first autoharp confident that the instrument will be in a playable condition. Buying a 'harp on eBay or a similar platform can be risky, especially if you are just starting out.

If you know a member who currently has a loaner 'harp, and who is seeking their first harp, but nervous about jumping in, especially on the open market, do encourage them to contact us by emailing our President Derik Palmer (derikpalmer@gmail.com) to discuss their needs.

And if you know people who would like to learn to play, encourage them to join UKA so that they can take advantage of the loaner 'harps, and hopefully progress to owning their own instrument with confidence.

Helen Slade (Vice-President) Isle of Wight.

MY AUTOHARP JOURNEY

Fiona Shaw

An open day! Come along! It's easy! Says she
Puts it on Facebook, for everyone to see.
T'other Fiona, bagpiper, I don't even know her that well
I drag Poor Mike to the pub, what the hell!



I recorded myself on 7 November 2013
I know what it was, but not what it's been.
That first song was Silent Night
Lucky it's labelled, it sounded a delight!

I keep going along, I'm not a musical being,
But enjoy the banter and new friends that I'm seeing.
My second song was Away in a Manger
I promise you; you've never heard stranger

One year later I dislocated my shoulder
Not playing much better, but another year older.
Still, invited to the Christmas dinner I was
"It doesn't matter" they say, come just because ...



A 5-year hiatus, recovery is slow
The autoharp is really heavy, don't you know!
In 2021 I picked it up again
Starting like a newbie, what a pain!

In 2022, to my boss I declare
I'll not work on that day, don't you dare!
Once a month we meet, and sing and learn
It means more to me than the money I'd earn.

I joined in on a Zoom class with Karen Mueller
Mike said it was good, I felt even cooler!
Then a warble I listened to, but I did not play
I will, I promise. I will, one day.



So now I join in proper, I do my homework, I sing
Whatever topic it is, I find a tune I can bring.
My best, I believe, was the Killers pop song
"Human" with the instrumental that didn't go
wrong!

And now I've got a job, I'm the cake maker, I am
They never know if it'll be Marmite or jam!
Willing guinea pigs, this lot are, you see
Because Letitia Cropley is who I aim to be!

Fiona Shaw (Isle of Man)

Waist Pack For Optimal Autoharp Upright Playing Positioning

Janice Rock, USA

I had purchased and tried out a Slider strap, a guitar style strap, and also sewed a foam cushion with straps before I finally found my best solution—a waist pack. There are other terms (some offensive in the UK) for this small bag which is secured around the lower waist by adjustable straps.

Lucille Reilly and Hal Weeks both mention the use of adjustable waist packs and suggest buying one that has a large flat top surface to rest the corner of the autoharp on. Leather material also prevents slippage.



Janice with her Laura Lee 'Harp & Waist Pack

Lucille Reilly packs hers with whole peanuts. Hal Weeks suggested small pieces of plastic bubble wrap which is what I have found to be very practical. When the small strips of bubble pack get squished or pop, they are easily replaced.

Hal Weeks also suggested putting a piece of corrugated cardboard in the front pocket of the ~~fanny~~ waist pack for more support and I followed that advice.

This is an informative 5-minute Hal Weeks You Tube video on autoharp positional devices: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e50rxyeOI7I>

Lucille Reilly's (AKA The Dulcimer Lady) website discusses the waist pack which she calls a "hip pouch" <https://thedulcimerlady.com/teaching/fohp/>



Above is a photograph of my black leather waist pack and a photograph of it unzipped to show the corrugated cardboard in the front pocket for extra positioning strength and the bubble wrap that indents nicely when the corner of the autoharp is placed on it.

Janice Rock (USA)

GOING LIVE?

Neil Gillard

Covid Lockdowns did have some benefits, not least the ability to meet regularly (albeit via social media) members who we previously met only rarely - if at all! Zoom will continue to play a big part in UKA's activities – our Committee meetings using this medium are now far more regular than they were, and the workshops and Warbles that can reach all members are sure to continue, but there is undoubtedly also a considerable appetite for real live meetings. In this regard, the informal meeting of autoharpers in Moniaive in August proved popular.



The Trooper Inn, Stourton Caundle, Dorset

So, in 2023 we are hoping that UKA may be able to offer 2 or 3 live events in different parts of the UK, and I am considering running a weekend-long event in Dorset – we are, of course, always reliant on members offering to organise such events in their own neck of the woods. My initial thoughts are that this event would take place in June or July in my own village of Stourton Caundle. We have a Village Hall, a Pub, a Camping and Caravan Club listed site, a Glamping site and at least one Air B & B. Other B & Bs, Inns and hotels are available within a few miles.

The format of the weekend would be something like this: Friday evening meet for social chat and play/sing around in the Trooper Inn which also serves fish and chips that evening, Saturday meet in Village Hall for workshops – hopefully a choice of 3 in 2 time slots and one workshop for all (bring own lunch), evening Concert in the hall – simple meal provided for a small charge before the concert (or burgers available in the pub), Sunday morning meet in Village Hall for further informal social and music

activities, roast lunches available in the Trooper. I would hope that I might persuade some of my local musician friends to play some part in the weekend too. If anyone wanted to stay longer in the area, I could provide ideas of places to visit (beautiful coast and countryside, NT and English Heritage properties, Motor museum) and of any local music events and sessions happening.

I would love to hear from you if you think that you would like to take part in such an event, and later in the year, or early next year, I will be emailing all members about this, and putting some feelers out on our Facebook pages too. Then, if there is sufficient interest/intent, we will get on and organise it.

Happy 'Harping!

Neil Gillard (Stourton Caundle, Dorset)

OUR AUTOHARPING LIFE

Brenda & Bob Hale



There is so much I could write about. It's knowing where to start. Bob and I are both retired but we seem to be busier than when in full time employment. We thoroughly enjoy our garden and harvesting and preserving, pickling, dehydrating and freezing our home-grown produce.

Bob loves restoring old cars (he has a rare 1950 Rover Cyclops and more recently acquired a 1953 Rover 75 "barn find").

Left: Brenda with Alec Anness Resonator



Above: the 'Rare Rovers'

Bob and I very much love playing our autoharps. We listen to a lot of music and often say "We must learn that song". I was introduced to the autoharp when I attended the Sore Fingers Summer School in 2016. I had intended to go to the fiddle workshops at SFSS but ended up sitting in on the autoharp lessons. It was not long after that I acquired my very own autoharp, a d'Aigle Sparrowharp.

Bob started on his autoharp journey back in October 2019 after we attended the workshop in Woodbridge the previous month when Mike Fenton was teaching. In 2020 Bob was given a 1970 Oscar Schmidt autoharp which belonged to his musician friend, the late Pete Sayers (who died on 11th February 2005 aged 62).



Bob with Pete Sayer's 'Harp

At this time, we were introduced to Alec Anness, autoharp luthier and fine furniture restorer. We were surprised to learn that Alec knew Pete Sayers when they were boys and both trained as French polishers and played music together. Alec was delighted when we approached him to fit new chord bars on Pete's autoharp. Now in 2022 between us Bob and I have six luthier made autoharps: the Oscar Schmidt, a Greg Schreiber G/D diatonic, Alec Anness made F/C diatonic (with resonator back); plus, two chromatics and the new d'Aigle Tahoma chromatic.



I am staggered when I look at the music we have been taught over the last six years by so many wonderful autoharp players whom UKA have introduced us to. I just wish I could play each and every song.

Left: Brenda with their stable of autoharps

Bob also loves making wine/cider from locally picked veg and fruit. We have much in common with our interests. We also love our little Dachshund, Sage, who brings laughter into our lives every day.

I end by saying: "Three Cheers" to the autoharp community who have helped Bob and I to progress on our musical journey and thanks to UKA for organising the wonderful Zoom Workshops.

Brenda Hale (Suffolk, UK)



We applaud the organisers of the Southwold Sausage Walk. Since the walk started in 2017 the event has raised awareness and funds of £10,000 in support of the charity Dedicated to Dachshunds with Intervertebral disc disease (IVDD). The numbers attending the 2022 event was a jaw-dropping 2,238 dachshunds walking together along Southwold beach.

Left: Bob, Brenda & Sage, laughing.

Here is a song which Bob wrote about our Sausage Dog Sage (also affectionally known as Ratbag). I wonder if anyone can guess what the tune might be, based on songs recorded by The Carter Family, Mac Wiseman, Lester Flatt & Earl Scruggs, Norman Blake and others.

Sage is our little dog with a wiggly tail and bum
She goes out every morning always with her mum
She barks at the back door runs in and rings the bell
She wants her breakfast now as fried bacon she can smell

She scoffs it down and rings the bell quickly for some more
Then she does the washing up when the plates go on the floor
Sage is a ratbag and when we go for a walk
She tells us when its far enough although she cannot talk

She sits down on the grass with her legs splayed right out
The little bugger will not move no matter how we shout
We'll soon be on the Sausage Walk all along the beach
With hundreds more Sausage Dogs barking at our feet

When it's time to leave Southwold, she'll be dreaming of the boys
We can have some peace at last
No more barking noise.

ADVANCED DRIVING, AQUAPLANING & ADVANCING MY AUTOHARP SKILLS

Sore Fingers October Weekend 2022

Anne Pyne

I set off for Sore Fingers (SF) in the Cotswolds, my heart in my mouth, and not for the usual reasons - nerves or anxiety about meeting strangers - but because of the rain –

absolutely torrential, continuous, driving, sheets of the stuff. As a 'silver-surfer' I am currently taking Advanced Driving lessons towards the test and they were all used in the drive to SF: before I'd driven 20 miles, my little Fiat aquaplaned on an unseen patch of road water at 30MPH ... luckily no other cars were around.

The journey continued through the deluge at much lower speeds than one would normally drive, and just before reaching the SF school base, a silly boy-racer zoomed towards me through a new ford created by floodwater, so fast that the sheer volume of H2O whooshed over the roof of my car. I didn't EXACTLY wish his brakes then failed ...but I didn't exactly wish him well, either! Swear? What ME?

And so, to Sore Fingers and a simple but comfortable single room and a much-needed supper. And then it all kicked off - my first experience of a music jam session with everyone joining in, playing and singing enthusiastically, with real gusto. What joy!

Over the weekend through many lessons, our very experienced Autoharp Tutor, Heather Farrell-Roberts, took us under her wing beginning on Saturday morning, for a very different experience of Autoharp playing. Many Tutors concentrate on teaching their arrangement of various tunes: Heather's considered plan was to help us develop new playing skills, that suit our own individual tastes - using our fingers to explore ALL the strings on our instruments, not just those necessary to play a particular tune.

We strummed in new ways, used all our fingers across all the strings, with and without fingerpicks (blisters guaranteed!) in rhythmic patterns to suit both the mood and the lyrics of each piece and were encouraged to play WITH FEELING, not just to play a tune using all the correct chords. We experimented with Diatonic 'Harps. What absolute joy, once I made myself stop feeling embarrassed. A Tutor after my own heart! Having only been learning to play for 18 months, skills in interpretation were what I needed and longed to develop.

It will take me a while to do this, PRACTICE PRACTICE PRACTICE, but now, thanks to Heather, I have a framework to explore and develop. I hope it will open up the Autoharp experience for me in lots of good ways and it will be an intriguing, enjoyable exciting – and challenging - new world. 'Sore Fingers' has done that for me - (yes, my fingers are sore!) and it might well be your answer to continue developing your playing, too. And to top off the experience we were entertained to a concert by all the tutors. Heather treated us all to some heart-rending pieces on her beautiful Diatonic 'Harp (I'll just have to start saving for one).

There is no other meet-up quite like Sore Fingers in the UK and it can only continue if lots more of us Autoharpers give it a go. The October weekend is great as an introduction, but the whole week at Easter is even better.....come on, Easter isn't that far away. And what a wonderful opportunity to look forward to, and to make many new friends.

****You really will enjoy the Sore Fingers experience - and it may just change your life.****

Anne Pyne (Bradford upon Avon, Somerset).

FROM EARWORM TO CONCERT TURN **(Selecting a Set List)**

Karen Torell Hoffman

Earlier this year of 2022 I was teasing my brain searching my vast tune catalogues, books, and iTunes collection for suitable and (always has to be fun or it's a no go!), interesting tunes to play for an upcoming concert set at the California Autoharp Gathering. This is an event held (Covid notwithstanding), once a year in May at a lovely retreat called the St. Nickolas Ranch in Dunlop Central California (USA). Our wonderful host, Mr. Mike Mueller had again graciously trusted me as the opener for the concert portion of the event which goes for several days with an Early Bird session, a total of 6 glorious days.

A tune that had become a real earworm for me, heard on a CD recording by a favourite instrumental guitarist of mine, Mr. Edward Gerhard, seemed like an excellent candidate since the theme for the May 2022 event was "Folk Music". The tune in particular is an African folk tune, sung in Swahili by many international choruses, though there are words in English. I chose to sing it in the original Swahili as the information was readily available along with multiple examples by my favourite folk singer Miriam Makeba. The tunes name is "Malaika". Not complex to play, I chose the key of G for my voice.

Ah, but harmonies were a plus I envisioned if I could pull it off with the help of several good friends who I knew from prior CAG in 2019. I asked three of my zoom buddies, Patricia Henley, Alex Bassett, and Marcia Ford if they'd join me on-stage for this tune. Patricia and Alex to do harmony, Marcia to tell the audience the translation of the words we were about to sing in Swahili. Then Marcia assisted in playing chords on her autoharp while I did both sings, play melody and so on. Of course, there is someone who everyone knows and appreciates for her incredible talent on the autoharp, the guitar, the dulcimer, mandolin...to name a few stringed instruments; that wonderful addition to my every performance at CAG since back as far as I believe 2011, the one and only KAREN MUELLER!

Just to take a step back here ... I am humbled and overjoyed that Karen from the beginning of our first acquaintance has been a shining light on my journey as a musician playing autoharp.

So back to the performing of "Malaika": Karen accompanied us on not only this tune but the entire set. It has become tradition for me to bring my brother's gift to me a beautiful Goodall six-string acoustic guitar to every CAG. Karen, in a few short minutes of practice and review, masters any tune and "musician's musician" that she is, she becomes an important part of any musical ensemble.

Here is a photo from my set 2017. Here you see Karen on guitar, Steve Gittleman on percussion, Danny Nicely on stand-up bass, and Brandon Buss on alto sax. We had just finished the blues tune: "In the Midnight Hour". I asked everyone to wear the dark shades to set the mood.



So, in conclusion: They say play what moves you, and your love for it will be conveyed to your audience with the greatest sincerity. I do not have a separated out

recording of how Malaika came out for the concert, but it was well-received. Here instead are the tune words sung in Swahili. This is what I sent to my zoom buddies for them to add their most excellent harmonies to. They were just wonderful adventurers and backup singers for a sweet folk tune that went from my earworm to the concert stage at the California Autoharp Gathering May of 2022.

Follow the link below to listen to Karen playing and singing 'Malaika'.

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/loazyzh711b7poj/MALAIKA..2%20FINAL%20VERSION.mp3?dl=0>

Malaika Lyrics ... English Only

Angel, I Love You, Angel ... Angel, I Love You, Angel
And I, Your Young Lover, What Can I Do?
Was I Not Lacking in Fortune, I Would Marry You, Angel
Was I Not Lacking in Fortune, I Would Marry You, Angel
Money Is Troubling My Soul, Money Is Troubling My Soul
And I, Your Young Lover, What Can I Do?
Was I Not Lacking in Fortune, I Would Marry You, Angel
Was I Not Lacking in Fortune, I Would Marry You, Angel
Little Bird, I Dream of You Little Bird,
Little Bird, I Dream of You Little Bird
And I, Your Young Lover, What Can I Do?
Was I Not Lacking in Fortune, I Would Marry You, Angel
Was I Not Lacking in Fortune, I Would Marry You, Angel

Thanks for listening and reading. Hope to catch everyone on Zoom soon!

Karen Torell Hoffman (USA)

PLAYING THE AUTOHARP LAP STYLE

Christine Turner



The first time I saw and heard an autoharp I was enthralled. I was a student at university in the southeast of England in the early 1970s, and my cousin was due to be married in a picturesque village in Dorset. The couple were committed Christians, and during the informal reception a middle-aged woman sang a lovely Christian song with an autoharp on her lap. I can't actually remember the details of the song, but the lovely music and the easy way in which it was played really intrigued me. I was part of a Christian group at college where it was usual in the 1970s to sing with guitars, but I had a disability that prevented me from turning my wrist so had never been able to play one. I realised straight away that the autoharp would solve that problem for me. Also, I have wondered recently whether seeing that lap autoharp might have tapped into a

subconscious memory from early childhood of seeing a person called Shirley Abicair regularly play a zither on her lap on our 12" B&W TV in the 1950s!

I surmised it was likely that part of the autoharp's development entwined with the Christian heritage in America (though I now know that the autoharp had other roots too). I was fascinated to learn about the autoharp originating from the Appalachian Mountains, although before the internet existed, I wasn't able to find out any details about that. It was interesting to contemplate how the writers of the psalms in Bible times had used small harps to accompany their songs. And I had always loved the sound of the full-size harp, with its sound like a waterfall, though I had realised it was an impractical instrument due to its size and the expertise needed to play, but the autoharp was compact and transportable, and so easy to play!

Strangely, I can't now remember how I bought my first autoharp. I think it was second-hand and it was white, and had 12 bars - but I can't remember how I found it; I think I may have discovered it in a shop in my university town (I am hoping I will recall the details in time to include in this article). It was perfect for my wrist disability, because crossing my arms to play the bars happened to put my hands at exactly the angle that was suitable for me; it seemed like a miracle in its own way. In my room at Uni, I strummed the various chords and I particularly loved the sound of the minor chords. I bought a simple book of songs to which I knew the tunes (so that I knew roughly what I was aiming at) and this book had chords above and I did my best to sing and play. Mainly I just strummed the chords and sort of let the autoharp play its own beautiful music. (I had by now discovered that having only 12 chords regrettably seemed to prevent me from playing along with guitars, but that didn't really matter). Several years later, married and attending a small informal church in my town in the north of England, I used to write my own worship songs; often it was as if the words and tune were downloaded into my mind, though at other times, as I strummed the chords on the autoharp at home, particularly the minor chords, a melody would form and the words would come to my mind too. The leader of the church encouraged me to sing and play these songs in our meetings, and although I am a shy person, I found I could do that without embarrassment, maybe having the example of the woman at the wedding reception to encourage me.

At around this time I decided to get a better autoharp and ordered one from a music shop in the city; I would have loved an Oscar Schmidt one that I had by now seen pictures of, but they were not available in England even by import in the 1970s (as far as I know), and so it was an East German one, labelled as a chord harp. It was a dark wooden varnished one and had 15 enclosed chords, and I was just delighted with the tone of it and the fact that the 3 extra chords gave much more scope for songs. Tuning was always a problem as I don't have a good ear for pitch; my brother used to tune it for me sometimes as he has a very good ear, or very occasionally I had it tuned by a piano tuner who lived locally.

Life went on, with family responsibilities and location moves etc, and the harp ended up in the loft. I decided to bring it down in the 2010s, and was sorry to see that one of the chord buttons had broken. By then the internet was in full swing, and so I was able to google, (more in fantasy than in expectation), 'autoharp buttons'. To my total amazement the search had links to Oscar Schmidt autoharps, which apparently could be ordered direct from the USA on Amazon!!! Realising that there was a risk about import duty etc. etc., and having the blessing of some savings available to buy it, I ignored all the risks and ordered an Oscar Schmidt 21 bar autoharp, with electronic pickup, and the best I could find from the small amount of research I was able to do. I

was slightly disappointed that it didn't have that modern rounded lowercase Autoharp logo and honey colour that I had remembered from pictures of OS harps of the 1970s, but I felt that in all other respects it would be perfect for my needs, in terms of sound and construction quality etc. It arrived very soon afterwards and was in perfect condition after its flight, and I just loved it. Amazon had paid the customs import duty automatically for me so it wasn't a hassle, and it arrived well packed in its Oscar Schmidt cardboard carton, which I was so excited to open.

Well, on the same google search I came across UK Autoharps, and I was just astonished to find that there were other autoharp enthusiasts in addition to just myself! I couldn't wait to enrol and join in the UKA instruction days. I travelled by train to whichever ones I could, and it was fabulous to meet with other autoharp players, and see the variety of instruments and everything autoharp! I learnt that Mike Fenton had actually been supplying/importing autoharps for years but I hadn't known about it. I also discovered that almost all players played the autoharp vertical and that it was regarded as a better way to play because of the sound, so I felt a bit disappointed that I needed to play it flat, but simultaneously felt so grateful that there was one instrument that, in my view, God had provided for me to play despite the disability. I also discovered diatonic autoharps which are beautiful in sound, but for now I have decided to stick with my chromatic harp - just because I like it!

On that same google search I discovered that little electronic tuners are available very cheaply and so I bought one. This has transformed my playing and my confidence, and I have learnt melody picking, and I have so much enjoyed the online workshops that were provided by UKA during lockdown.

One of my favourite things, though, is to play along with other instruments at the UKA days, in particular the workshops run by Mike Fenton for all abilities to join in together. I would love to join in with jam sessions in my local area, but there are very few autoharpers in the North of England, and I don't travel much nowadays either.

At home I find I go through phases of either playing a lot or neglecting the autoharp for a while. It stays in good tune (though of course I tune it again each time to be sure), and it is always a happy reunion when I bring it out of its current special place in the lounge cupboard, to play.

Christine Turner



Alec Anness

Instrument Maker & Furniture Restorer

Based in the Cambridgeshire Fens, Alec Anness makes Autoharps, Hammered Dulcimers and Banjos. Use the links below to view examples of his work. <https://www.alecanness.co.uk>

Alec also stocks autoharp spares, such as felt, strings, etc.

Contact Alec at

Telephone: +44(0) 1353 863 442

Mobile +44(0) 7837 507 425

Email: info@alecanness.co.uk

Postal address: 7 Ely Road, Sutton, Ely Cambridgeshire, CB6 2QD

THE CAT CAME BACK - Harry S. Miller

from Lyn Jones



Many of you will know that I arrived at Sore Fingers without a harp and needing to know much more about playing our 'wee box o' strings' as George would say. Karen, Heather and Nadine helped me so much. That was April 2008. In the autumn of the same year, I attended my first of many Seattle Autoharp Weeks. Here I met Bryan Bowers, Cathy Britell and Richard Scholtz.

Bryan had honed his skills as a street musician. He was passionate about the delivery of the lyrics in a song so that the audience understood the story the song told.

We sat around in a circle and were asked to each play/sing a song. After some light-hearted critique, he encouraged us to let the words sound out, not to be drowned out by the autoharps many strings. Whilst the song was being sung, the autoharp should play a supportive role, playing the backup chords, maybe with varied interesting strums, not to play the melody that was being sung. There would be opportunities to show off your melody playing in the intro, outro and in an instrumental break between verses.

With this in mind, here is the first of two American Children's Songs.

"The Cat Came Back" is a comic song written by Harry S Miller, at Christmas 1893. It has since entered the folk tradition and been recorded under variations of the title - "But the Cat Came Back", "And the Cat Came Back", etc. It is also a popular children's song. The song is humorous in nature, telling a silly tale about "ole Mister Johnson" who had an "ole taller cat" that he did not want, and which kept coming back when he tried to get rid of it: Throughout the song, Mr. Johnson tries disposing of the animal in a variety of perilous ways. In Miller's original, the cat finally died when an organ grinder came around one day and: De cat look'd around awhile an' kinder raised her head When he played Ta-rah-dah-boom-da-rah, an' de cat dropped dead. Even then the cat's ghost came back.

There are many versions of the song, acquiring stories to update a verse for each new generation. A version of the song emerged during the Cold War, in which the final

verse made references to the 'A bomb' and 'H bomb', and the subsequent destruction of the human race. Why not make up your own.

Listen: There are major and minor versions of the tune, with melodic variations. Here is a major version

<https://youtu.be/MKBisvrw-18>

But I shall be focusing on a minor version

Laura Berkner

<https://youtu.be/OE8gsYejpQc>

<https://youtu.be/gTLZHoRH394> (dance version)

Fred Penner

<https://youtu.be/J2XgXStPms4> (segueing into 'Hit the Road Jack' same accompaniment)

Like many children's songs, the song has a strong well-defined beat pattern. It consists of one weak beat, one strong beat, thus it can be (and often is) sung while walking, with, for example, strong beats when the left foot hits the ground and weak beats when the right foot hits the ground.

Key: This tune is often found in Em, but as many chromatics don't have B or B7 I've transposed it into Am.

Chord Progression

The chord progression (Am G F E7) lends itself to a bass line that is a natural minor descending in the key of A minor this would be AA, GG, FF, E, G sharp This is practically the lament bass used in many chaconnes e.g., Pachelbel's Canon.

Practice emphasising the descending line.

Lyrics: On the lyric sheet I've underlined the words which are on the first beat of the bar. In the second verse (Telegraph wire) some quick enunciation is required to fit the words in. The words are a mouthful. So, who needs a complicated backup. Emphasise the drama. Kids will love it.

A few pointers to those who would like to learn the melody, perhaps for an instrumental Intro/outro/interlude during singing. A feature of this tune is the repeated notes. These will be easier to play using two fingers to alternately pluck the notes (maybe 1st and 2nd fingers) But ultimately you must use which fingering will work for you.

A final note: The last but one note can be sung as a G sharp with the chord of E7. Alternatively, it can be sung as a G natural using the chord of Em. You choose.

The Cat Came Back (Harry S. Miller)

Am G F E7
Now **old** Mr. **Johnson** had **troubles** of his **own**,
Am G F E7
He **had** a yellow **cat** that **wouldn't** leave his **home**,
Am G F E7
He **tried** and he **tried** to **give** the cat **away**
Am G F E7
He **gave** it to a **man** going **far away**.

Chorus

Am G F E7
But the **cat** came **back** the **very** next **day**,
Am G F E7
The **cat** came **back**, we **thought** he was a **goner**,
Am G F E7
The **cat** came **back**, he **just** wouldn't stay **away**.
Am G F E7
The **cat** came **back**, he **just** wouldn't stay **away**.

On the telegraph wire birds were sitting in a bunch
The cat licked his lips and said he'll have them for his lunch
He climbed softly to the top and put his foot upon the wire
Well, his fur got scorched and his tail caught fire

He gave it to a man going up in a balloon
He told him for to take it to the man in the moon
The balloon came down about 90 miles away
And where he is now, I dare not say

He gave it to a man going way out west
Told him for to take it to the one he loved the best
First the train hit the curve, then it jumped the rail
Not a soul was left behind to tell the gruesome tale.

Score

The Cat Came Back (Am)

Harry S Miller

Lyn Jones for Autoharp

Autoharp

Am G F E7

A.Hp.

3 Am G F E7 Am G

A.Hp.

6 F Dm E7 E

A.Hp.

9 Am G F E7 Am G

A.Hp.

12 C E7 Am G F E7 Am

Score

The Cat Came Back (Am)

Harry S Miller

Lyn Jones for Autoharp

Autoharp

Am G F

Am / / G / / F G F / E7

A.Hp.

Am G F E7 Am G

Am / / G / / F G F / E7 Am / / G / /

A.Hp.

6 F Dm E7 E

F / / / Dm / E7 / / / / / / / / D C E / / /

A.Hp.

9 Am G F E7 Am G

Am / G / F G Am E7 / Am / G /

A.Hp.

12 F E7 Am G F E7 Am

F G C D E7 / / / Am / G / F G Am E7 / Am



My Autoharp Journey

Marilyn Cowan

My autoharp journey began 17 years ago. For relaxation from work and family I used to join other 'folkies', at sessions and at a local club, for the joy of singing, and creating harmonies, without the formality of a choir. One evening I was approached by a guitarist who asked me if he could accompany my singing. He didn't have a very strong voice but was a good instrumentalist and could harmonise. This collaboration lasted two years but it became evident that he was likely to move from Plymouth to Cornwall,

so I decided I must learn an instrument to accompany myself. My attempt to learn the guitar was not a success. The instrument did not feel right and I struggled with the stretch needed for some chords. Perhaps if I had learnt on a parlour guitar (smaller) I may have taken to it but that did not occur to me, at the time.

My guitarist friend asked if I had ever considered taking up the autoharp? He formed this idea after visiting a 'Hobgoblin' music shop in Wadebridge, Cornwall (sadly, now closed). I was going for a break to the north coast of Cornwall, a month later, so decided to take his advice. Fortunately for me there was an assistant, in the shop that day, who was familiar with autoharps. He demonstrated some basics of the instrument and adequately conveyed its sound and possible scope. I tried it and liked its feel. It was a good shape, size and sound, for my purposes. So, I bought my first autoharp, an 'Ashbury': also, a 'Mel Bay' beginners' autoharp book. I began by learning how to hold the harp, play different strums to tunes and become familiar with the tuning process. I practised with the set tunes in the book, then branched out by experimenting with simple, 3-chord folk songs. A friend also lent me a beginners' autoharp DVD compiled by John Sebastian of 'The Lovin' Spoonful'. 'This enabled me to observe strumming and picking techniques.

I am sure my technique was rather imperfect (and I suspect, still is) but I learnt to adapt the strums, and plucking, to suit the rhythms and speed of the songs I sing. I watched some very good autoharp players online and these left me with a sense of enjoyment and awe, but I don't think I learnt much from them. I needed some tutoring which is why I have found Karen Mueller's workshops so enlightening and valuable (also the other tutors I followed in lockdown because of the Zoom sessions provided by 'UK Autoharps'. These were such a joy)!

Anyway, my repertoire of autoharp accompanied, folk songs gradually increased. I could listen to a tune, write down the words, and work out accompanying chords quite speedily. Then I would experiment, by ear, with strums and plucks. Most Guitarists would look at me, askance, but gradually became used to the autoharp and often listeners would say how much they liked the sound, as well as asking me, 'what is it?'. In our local pub folk session, many visitors have videoed me singing and playing over the years. I am sure it's because they want to show friends this 'unusual' instrument.

I have also given some talks, over the years, about the autoharp and its history, illustrating its versatility in accompanying songs.

After about five years I began to think of buying another autoharp and became set on obtaining an Oscar Schmidt, having listened to its tone online. Its acquisition began more quickly than planned because one day my 'Ashbury' fell out of its case onto a hard floor. I thought the zip was done up and it wasn't! The chord bar casing shattered and all the chord bars fell out. I had to buy a replacement.

After some research, I ordered my Oscar Schmidt through Thomann's, from Germany. Thomann's was recommended to me and as Germany was the original home of the autoharp, I judged they would know how to produce a good instrument. It arrived and had a lovely tone. However, when I played at my local folk club it was quieter than my Ashbury had been-which was a surprise to me. My autoharp had an outlet for amping up but this wasn't a practice encouraged at the folk club, on local singers' nights, nor was it usually necessary. Pondering the problem, with a friend, she pointed out that my autoharp had no sound box, it was purely designed to plug into sound equipment. Within two weeks I bought another, acoustic, Oscar Schmidt, from America, and this is the one I usually play, now.

When I retired from teaching in 2011, I was able to widen my musical circle and I met John Rawlinson who also plays the autoharp, as well as other stringed instruments. It has been very pleasant to have 'autoharp' conversations with him and we have, on a few occasions, played our autoharps, together, in public. There is something exciting about not being the only autoharp player in the room and the audience tends to be fascinated by the spectacle as well - at least, in Devon.

Then in 2020 Covid struck - but how good that proved for the wider autoharp community. Hooray for Zoom and the chance to link with other autoharp players and learn from tutors. My knowledge expanded and I have been given the tools to develop further as an autoharp player. My aim is to learn some melody picking and notate a folk song properly, not just with chords, but with strums, picks and plucks. Talking to other autoharp players and having tutorials, on Zoom, has given me the tools I need for more steps along my autoharp journey -and it feels great!

Marilyn Cowan, Plymouth, England

SUPPLIERS OF AUTOHARP SPARES AND ACCESSORIES IN THE UK

NAME	CONTACT DETAILS	SUPPLY
Alec Anness	Website: www.alecanness.co.uk Email: info@alecanness.co.uk Phone: 01352 863442 Mobile: 07837 507425 Location: Ely, Cambs.	Custom strings (£84.00 plus P&P) White felt strip (non-adhesive but use Evo-stick) Tuning pins (various gauges) chord bar combs, springs, bridge pins, pick-ups etc. Can make many parts to order Also makes and restores autoharps
Crawford Keane	Email: crawfordkeane@gmail.com	Neoprene strip as alternative to felt (self-adhesive and cut to correct width and length)
Mike Fenton	Email: fen.lonesomedove9@gmail.com	Individual strings or sets and felts
A W Hainsworth	Website: www.awhainsworth.co.uk/our-brands/hainsworth-technical-felt/ Location: Dewsbury	Manufacturer of felt for musical instruments. May be able to supply bespoke items. Contact direct via the website.
Red Cow Music	Nab Farm, High Street, Thornton-le-Dale, Pickering, YO18 7QW Email: info@redcowmusic.co.uk Telephone: 07812064322	Good range of instruments (Ashbury and Oscar Schmidt) and accessories, including felt.
Hobgoblin	Shops all around the country: see website for contact details of nearest store to you. https://hobgoblin.com HQ/Mail Order - 0333 800 9500	Limited selection of new (Ashbury) and second hand (various) Autoharps and small range of accessories, including Chomaharp strings.
Joolz Buggy	jools@autoharpwitch.com	Jools is hoping to set up a shop in the next few months to stock all things Autoharp.