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Beginning Strumming Techniques

TABLATURE

The symbols (also called Tablature) for the right hand are as follows: ↑ - Strike the strings in a motion towards the high register strings. You can use either your thumb (Figure 6a) or your finger(s) (Figure 6b). I suggest you use your thumb, especially when you are striking the lower register strings. If you use your finger(s), hold them at a slight angle as you strum toward the higher register. This helps to avoid getting them caught in the strings.

↓ - Strike the strings in a motion towards the lower register strings (Figure 7). Use your finger(s) only.

Before you begin the strumming exercises, practice pressing the chord buttons and strumming across the strings. For example, firmly press the F major chord bar with your middle or index finger. Strum across the strings several times with your thumb. Keep your wrist loose and your elbows raised slightly; create an arc-like movement as your thumb moves quickly across the strings (Figure 8). On the next page are two songs to help you become familiar with strumming and pressing the chord bars.



Figure 6a.



Figure 6b.



Figure 7.

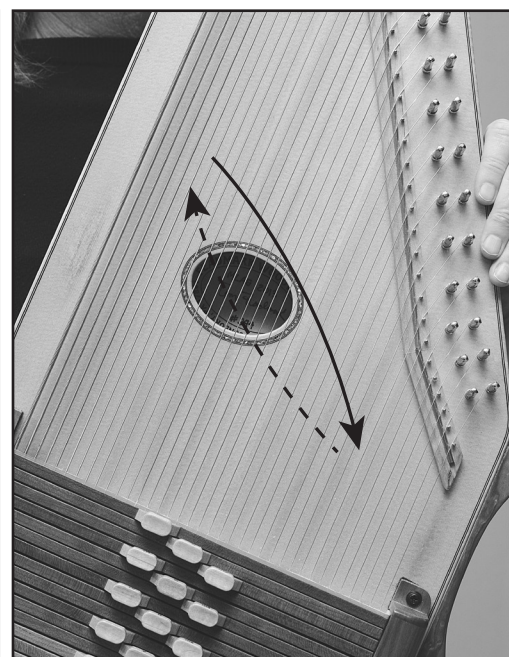


Figure 8.

DOUBLE STRUMMING

In Exercises 5 and 6, you will strike the strings in a back and forth motion (↑↓). I call this double *strumming*. Some Autoharp players move only their fingers back and forth over the strings, keeping them at a slight angle. Other players, myself included, use their thumb and finger(s) alternately to strike the strings. It is important to keep your wrist loose and your fingers curved (Figure 11). The movement is similar to shaking your hand back and forth with a very loose wrist.

The rhythm of Exercise 5 is made up of eighth notes, so the count is 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 &. If you were to tap the beat of the exercise with your foot, it would tap the floor directly on the counts 1-2-3-4, and come off the floor between each count on the &. It is called the downbeat when your foot taps the floor, and the upbeat when your foot comes off the floor. The symbols are tied together when they occur within one beat. For example ↑↓. The first beat of each measure is accented (>). This means to strike the strings harder.



Track 5

EXERCISE 5

G Amin

C G

Finger Positions

12-15 Bar OS. Autoharp - Your middle finger rests on G and your index finger on C. Your thumb plays A minor.

21 Bar Autoharp - Your ring finger rests on G and your thumb on C. Your middle finger plays the A minor. The middle finger is good at working the bottom two rows of chords.

Suggested Practice Songs

Buffalo Gals, page 30

Down By the Riverside, page 36

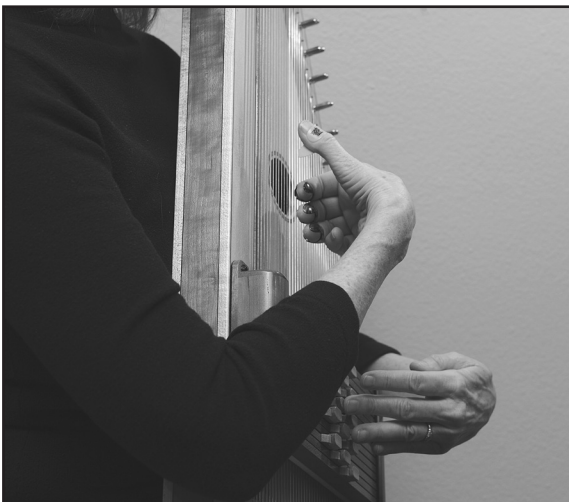


Figure 11.



Brian Bowers

Photo courtesy of Brian Bowers

SECTION B

SONGS

Strumming and singing involves a certain amount of coordination. You are doing two different things at the same time, strumming one rhythm pattern while singing another. You have already been playing the chords for *Mary Ann* in Exercise 1. Now you will learn to sing and play the song.

The slashes above the staff represent the beats in the measures. Use them as a guide for your strum patterns. The example below shows how the strum pattern from Exercise 1 fits with the beat. Notice, also, the relationship of the words to the beat. You can see that in the second measure you do not sing as you strum on the third and fourth beats.

Musical notation for the first two measures of "Mary Ann". The first measure is in 4/4 time with an F chord and lyrics "All day, all night". The second measure is in 4/4 time with a C7 chord and lyrics "Ma - ry Ann.". Slashes above the staff indicate the beat pattern. Arrows below the staff indicate the strumming pattern.

It is important that you can hum the first few notes of a song before you begin playing and singing. The first note you sing in *Mary Ann* is an A note. You can tell because it is in the A space on the music staff (see Music Theory, page 75). Pluck the A note on the Autoharp and hum that note while you strum across the first chord in the song, which is F. Can you hear how the melody begins? If not, pluck the first two notes, etc.

MARY ANN



Track 36

Chords: F, C7

Musical notation for the song "Mary Ann" in 4/4 time. The first line has lyrics "All day, all night, Ma - ry Ann. Down by the sea - shore". The second line has lyrics "sift - ing sand. All the lit - tle child - ren love Ma - ry Ann,". The third line has lyrics "'cause she sings and danc - es like no one can.".

You can add an introduction to a song by strumming a few extra measures before you begin singing, even though it is not written in the music. Below is an example of how you can add a short introduction to *When The Saints Go Marching In*. You would begin singing on the second beat of the second measure you strum.

WHEN THE SAINTS GO MARCHING IN



Chords: C, F, G7, C7

2. And when the revelation comes...
3. And when the sun refuse to shine...
4. And when the new world is revealed...
5. And when they gather 'round the throne...
6. And on the hallelujah day...

LULLABY

Track 60

Johannes Brahms

HINT: Are you having trouble accurately pinching from one note to another in certain places of a song? Try taking that section and practicing it a number of times until you get the feel of how your hand (and arm) needs to move from one note to the next.

You do not always have to play a melody exactly as it is written. Sometimes it is easier or desirable to leave out certain notes. For example, if the same note is played a number of times in rapid succession, it may sound better on the Autoharp to play only a few of those notes. Or if a portion of a melody line is rhythmically hard to play, you may want to play only the key notes in that section. Learn the songs *She'll Be Comin' Round the Mountain* and *Old Molly Hare* as an introduction to leaving out notes.

In *She'll Be Comin' Round the Mountain* some of the melody notes are syncopated and may be hard to play, so these notes will not be played. The *pinches* (↓) are written only under the notes that are to be sounded. For example, in the 2nd measure you play only the notes that occur on the 1st and 3rd beats and fill in the 2nd and 4th beats with a strum.

SHE'LL BE COMIN' 'ROUND THE MOUNTAIN



Track 68

G

14 16
She'll be
G C

19
com-in' 'round the

16 14 11 14
moun-tain when she

19
comes.

↓ ↓ ↑ ↓ ↑ ↓ ↓ ↓

D7

19 21
She'll be
D7

23
com-in' 'round the

26 23 21 19
moun-tain when she

21
comes.

D7 G

↑ ↑ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓

G **C**

26 24
She'll be

23
com-in' 'round the

21 19
moun-tain, she'll be

16
com-in' 'round the

G D7 G C

↑ ↑ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓

G **D7** **G**

21 19 18 16
moun-tain, she'll be
D7 C D7 C

14
com-in' 'round the

23 21 19 18
moun-tain when she

19
comes.

G D7 G D7 G

↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓ ↓