Forward

When Fingers Meet Strings is designed as a comprehensive method series for younger beginners. The material and pacing are geared towards students as young as five years old, and no previous musical experience is necessary! The exercises and theory reviews are designed to be interactive and fun, and the colorful illustrations help to illuminate the music and spur on the imagination of young minds. I hope you enjoy this series, as it has come from the depths of my heart.

Happy Harping!

Kara Gibson
Important Symbols

Glissando

The harp is known for glissandos! For glissandos going up start on the bottom note and using your second finger, slide up and stop on the note just above the top note. Some songs may require you to pluck out the top note. Always ask your teacher for guidance.

Fermata

Sometimes you will see this symbol above a note in music. This is called a fermata, and it means to hold the note longer than its original value. A good rule of thumb is to double the length of the note it appears on, so if the fermata is on a half note then hold it for four beats instead of two.
Welcome to the Harp!

This book is designed and geared towards young beginners to either the Classical or Celtic harp. It is recommended that the harp you practice on have at least 24 strings, and sharpening levers on F, C, and Bs. Your teacher will guide you to finding an appropriate instrument to start on.

In this book, we will be learning about proper harp technique and posture, basic music theory, and note recognition. No previous musical experience needed! Welcome to When fingers Meet Strings, and congratulations on entering into the wonderful world of harp!

Basic Harp Equipment

Before we get to learning music, it’s important to cover some things. There are some items you will need as a new harpist that your teacher will discuss with you. This list may include such things as:

1. Chromatic Tuner
2. Tuning Fork
3. Adjustable Stool or Bench
4. Adjustable Music Stand
5. Harp Case
6. Extra Strings

Tuning Your Harp

Depending on whether or not you will be practicing on a lever or a pedal harp, you will tune differently. For lever harps, I recommend tuning your harp to the key of C with the E, A, and B levers up. Your teacher can help you with this. By tuning your harp this way, you will be able to play a wider range of songs without having to retune the strings. For pedal harp, you should tune with all of the pedals in the “flat” position, or in the highest position.
Posture

Before we begin playing the harp, it is important to have correct sitting posture. Begin by placing your feet flat on the floor about a foot apart with your knees bent. Make sure you sit up straight! Never hunch over when playing the harp. A poor posture can result in back and neck pain over time, and isn’t very pretty to look at. Take a look at the pictures down below.
In the first picture, the harpist has a very poor playing posture. Look at that back! In the second picture, the harpist has a straight back and looks happy, and ready to play!

**Holding the Harp**

Once you have a good sitting posture, place both hands on either side of the soundboard and bring the harp back so that it rests on your right shoulder. The harp is a big instrument, and sometimes they can be very heavy. For this reason, an adjustable stool or bench is a must so that the height can be altered. You should not sit so low that the weight of the harp hurts your back, but not so high that it feels like the harp is falling forward. Your teacher will help you adjust your bench to the correct height. Before you begin practice, always make sure you have good posture! Nothing should hurt or ache when holding your harp, so if something doesn’t feel right tell your teacher and he/she can help you adjust to be more comfortable.

**Finger Numbers**

As harpists, we do not play with our pinkies, so we only play with 8 of our ten fingers. Each finger is given a number 1-4.
Be sure to study the picture above! Thumbs are always 1, index fingers are 2, middle fingers are 3, and ring fingers are 4. Never play with your pinkies!

**How to pluck**

Using good playing technique is the single most important aspect of learning to play the harp. Without good technique, you can cause a lot of strain on your joints and muscles. While practicing good technique may seem a little boring for a blossoming new harpist, it is vital that you start using it from the very beginning! Here is a list of some important things to remember.

1. High thumbs
2. Table Top
3. Close fingers
4. Lower Shoulders
5. Release Tension
6. Raise

High Thumbs – When playing the harp, you always want your thumb to be higher than your other fingers. This space gives you a better sound when you pluck!
Table Top – Look at the picture down below. When your thumb is high, there is a nice big space between your thumb and index finger.

This is your table top, you should always keep it flat enough that something small like a penny could rest on it without sliding off. Remembering to keep your “table tops” flat will keep you from playing vertically.

This next picture is an illustration of someone who does not have a flat table top, and they will not be able to get a very good sound when they try to play.
Close Fingers – When you pluck a string, immediately snap your finger flat into your palm. Here is how your hand should look when you close your fingers properly.
Closing down into the palm creates less tension, and produces more sound. These are two very important aspects of proper harp technique. Always stay relaxed when playing. When your muscles are relaxed you produce a better sound. Tense muscles produce a tense sound.

Lower Shoulders – Remember to always keep your shoulders down and relaxed. As you go higher on the harp, it’s easy to raise your shoulders a little. Your teacher may choose to gently tap your shoulders to remind you to relax.

Release Tension – If you ever feel pain or tension when playing the harp, you should tell your teacher right away. Chances are it will only take a minor adjustment to relieve the tension.

Raise – Raising is a very important part of relieving tension. We will be practicing different raising techniques on page 27.

---

Cs and Fs

Take a look at your harp. Your strings should look like this:

The red strings on your harp are Cs and the black strings are Fs.
The Quarter Note

Now it’s time to learn your first type of note; the quarter note. A quarter note looks like an oval that has been filled in, with a stem that can point either up or down. When the stem points up that means you play it with your right hand, when it points down, you play it with your left.

Quarter Note = 1 beat
It’s important to study what the quarter note looks like, and that it is worth 1 beat.

Now draw four quarter notes of your own in the boxes below:

![Quarter Note Example]

Now you are ready to start playing! Look at the song on the next page.

1.) First try to tap the song on your lap and say “Ta” for every quarter note

2.) For the first three notes, you will play C’s. Start on a lower C and play two more, jumping up each time. Then start on a low F and do the same thing. Can you hear how the longer strings sound low and the shorter strings sound high?

3.) Practice this song using your 2nd finger to pluck the strings. Try playing it once with your right hand, and once with your left hand. Remember to use good technique!
My First Song

How did you do? It’s a lot to remember at first but you’ll get the hang of it!

The Half Note

Half Note = 2 beats
Be sure to study what a half note looks like, and that it is worth 2 beats.

Now draw four half notes of your own in the boxes below:

To remember what a half note looks like, think about the note being “half” full.

The Whole Note

Whole Note = 4 beats
Be sure to study what a whole note looks like, and that it is worth 4 beats.

Now draw four whole notes of your own in the boxes below:

To remember what a whole note looks like, remember that a whole note looks like a “hole!”

Theory Review

Let’s review what you’ve learned about quarter notes, half notes, and whole notes.

1.) Write in the names of the notes in the blank spaces
2.) Draw a line connecting the note to the correct number of beats
Middle C

Now that you have learned what F’s and C’s look like, let’s find our very first note. This C is called “middle C” because it is in the middle of your harp. Every harp is a little different, so your teacher will help you find middle C on your harp. Try playing the song below on your middle C string!

1.) First, tap the rhythm of The Roaring Lion on your lap. Remember that half notes are worth 2 beats and whole notes are worth 4. Count half notes by saying Ta-a and whole notes by saying Ta-a-a-a.
2.) Then using your 2nd finger, pluck the rhythm you just tapped on Middle C
The Roaring Lion

The Staff

Music is written on a staff that has five lines and four spaces. A staff looks like this:

Can you count the lines and spaces? Give it a try!
Notes can be written on either a line or a space. A note that is written on a line will have the line going through the middle of it, like this:

\[\text{\includegraphics{music_line.png}}\]

A note that is written in a space, will not have any lines going through it. Instead, it will have a line above and below it, like this:

\[\text{\includegraphics{music_space.png}}\]

Take a look at the piece of music below, and see if you can identify which notes are written on lines, and which notes are written on spaces.

\[\text{\includegraphics{music_piece.png}}\]
Now it’s time to learn about something called the Treble Clef or G clef. It looks like this:

![Treble Clef Diagram]

The reason the Treble clef is also called the G clef, is because the second line on the staff is a G. Do you see how the Treble Clef circles around the G line?

It’s time for you to practice drawing your own Treble Clefs. They can be a little tricky at first, but follow these simple steps and you’ll be a pro in no time!

**How to Draw a Treble Clef**

Step 1: Draw an upside-down candy cane that starts below the staff
Step 2: Starting at the top, swerve down and to the right, then cross over to the left
Step 3: Draw a swirl around the G line, almost like you are drawing a snail shell
Step 4: Practice, Practice, Practice!

Practice drawing treble clefs in the empty spaces below. Try to make each one better than the last!
Base Clef

Now it’s time to learn about the Base Clef. The Base Clef or F clef looks like this:

The Base Clef is also called the F clef, because it starts on the fourth line which happens to be an F. You can also see the two dots are drawn above and below the F line.

How to Draw a Base Clef

Step 1: Draw a dot on the fourth line
Step 2: Draw half of a heart
Step 3: Draw two dots: one above the fourth line, and one below

Drawing a Base Clef is a little easier than a Treble Clef, but it is still important to make it neat. Practice drawing your own Bass Clefs below using the steps listed above.
The Grand Staff

Now that we have learned about the Treble and the Bass clef, we can now talk about the Grand Staff. The Grand Staff is what most harp music is written on, it consists of a Treble and a Base Clef, joined together by two lines. One line is straight, and the other is a fancy scroll. Look at the Grand Staff below and see if you can point out where the two lines are.

Now it’s your turn to make your own Grand Staff. Connect the two staves below with a straight line, and a scroll line, and draw a Treble and a Base Clef.
The end of a piece is marked with a double bar line. This is a thin line, followed by a thick line. It looks like this:

Go back up to where you drew the two lines to create the Grand Staff, and add in a double bar line at the end.

Do you remember Middle C? Now that we have learned about the Grand Staff, it’s time to learn where Middle C is located. Here is Middle C on the staff below.

Now that you can read Middle C on the Grand Staff, let’s learn a new song!
Look at the song below called “I’m a Cow.” Do you see how it is divided into three sections? These sections are called **measures** and they are divided by **bar lines**. For now, each measure will have a total of 4 beats. Your teacher will explain to you how to count the beats. Sometimes it helps to tap the beats on your lap and count out loud. Try it with this piece! Tap the rhythm on your lap, and then let’s sight-read!

I’m a Cow

```
Moo  Moo  Moo  Moo  I’m a Cow
```

**D-E-F-G**

Now that you know what Middle C looks like on the Grand Staff, it’s time to learn some more notes! Take your finger and pluck the note right above Middle C, this is a D string, and on the staff, it looks like this:
Play the next two strings, these are E and F. They look like this:

The last string we will learn in this lesson is Treble G, here it is on the second line:
So now we know five different notes on the grand staff! Go ahead and pluck them in order starting with Middle C.

Ducks Love Puddles

Now it’s time to learn some left-hand notes! We’re going to learn the same notes C-D-E-F-G we learned before, but this time they will be in the bass clef and we will play them with our left hand.
Go ahead and pluck them in order starting with C. Your teacher will show you how!

Mom and Baby Sloth

Putting it all Together

Now it’s time to put both hands together! Good luck!
A Song for Two Hands

Tea Party

We should have a tea party, Would you like some tea?

Yes I would enjoy some tea, would you pour it please?
Raising

Raising is important when playing the harp, because it helps to relax your arm muscles, and also to draw sound out from the strings. There are different ways harpists raise, depending on which technique is being used, but the two most common ways are to raise up, or to raise out. Your teacher will discuss which technique you will use, and how to practice it at home. On the next song *Types of Trucks*, try raising your hands on all the half and whole notes. The raise should last as long as the number of beats the note is worth, so half note raises will be much quicker and less grand than your whole note raises. Your teacher will demonstrate.

Types of Trucks

Honk, Honk, There’s a Truck! Honk, Honk, Can you see? There are many types of trucks, let’s name some. Sem - is, pick - up trucks, dump trucks too.
Exercise: Two-Note Brackets

Now it’s time for you to start using your thumbs! Below is an exercise for you to practice two-note brackets using your thumb and second finger. Whenever you see a bracket like this, it means that you need to place both fingers at the same time.

**High Thumb** - Always keep your thumb high, and point your second finger towards the ground. This will give you more space which equals more sound!

**Close Fingers** - When you pluck your second finger, snap it back into your palm immediately. Your thumb should snap down over the middle knuckle on your second finger to create a relaxed fist. Your teacher will demonstrate.

Let’s practice a song that uses two-note brackets. Try sightreading the Yellow School Bus on the next page. Use your second fingers to pluck any notes that don’t have brackets on them.
Yellow School Bus

Yellow School Bus

Yellow School Bus

Taking all the Kids to School.

Up and down the

Wheels go Round.

We love riding

On the Bus!
Theory Review: Note Recognition

Fill in the names of the notes below on the lines below the staff. Don’t forget to switch to Bass Clef!

Next let’s do some sight reading. First, clap the rhythm below. Make sure that you count! Then, try to sight read on the harp. Go slow!

A and B

So far, we have learned CDEFG in both the right hand and the left hand, so now it’s time to connect the two with A and B. They are both in the Bass Clef, and appear on the staff like this:
Here is a reminder of all the notes we have learned so far on the Grand Staff:

Now let’s learn some more songs with all of the notes we’ve learned so far!
Mary had a Little Lamb

Lyrics:

Mary had a Little Lamb,
Little Lamb,
Little Lamb.
Mary had a Little Lamb,
Her Fleece was White as Snow.
Twinkle Twinkle Little Star
Jesus Loves Me

\begin{align*}
\text{Jesus loves me, this I know.} & \quad \text{For the Bible tells me so.} \\
\text{Little ones to Him belong.} & \quad \text{They are weak but He is Strong.}
\end{align*}
Exercise: Three Note Brackets

Three note brackets are the same as two note brackets, we just add in our third finger. Place all three notes at the same time, then snap your third finger into your palm just like your second finger. Play the first three lines with your right hand, and then switch to your left hand to play in the Bass Clef. Always point your second and third fingers down and keep your thumb high!
Mustache Cat

Mustache cat is very cute, with his top hat and his boots.

He is dressed up to the nines, he is dressed up all the time.
The Cat and the Fish

The Cat and the Fish,
Unlikely of Friends.
The Cat likes to Play
And the Fish likes to Swim.
The Cat and the Fish,
They Hang out all Day.
They Stare out the Window
To Pass Time Away.
Crossing Hands

Sometimes in music you will have to cross your left hand over your right hand or vice-versa. In the song Jumping Frog, you will practice this. Make sure that you still have good posture, and flat table tops!
You may have noticed that all the songs we have learned so far have four counts or beats in each measure. That’s because we have been playing in 4/4 time. If you haven’t already noticed, look at the last song “Jumping Frog” at the very first measure. Do you see the 4/4? This is called a Time Signature, and this is what the two numbers mean.
The top note of a time signature tells you how many beats are in each measure. In 4/4 time there are four beats per measure. The bottom number will tell you what kind of note equals one beat. If there is a four on the bottom, then a quarter note equals one beat.

There are many other time signatures that we will learn as you progress, but for now we will only learn two; 4/4 and 3/4 time.

3/4 Time Signature

In 3/4 time, there are three beats in each measure and a quarter note equals one beat.
The Dotted Half Note

Dotted Half Note = 3 Beats

The dotted half note looks just like a regular half note, except that it has a dot on the right-hand side. This dot adds half the value of the note, so a dotted half note equals 3 beats because $2+1=3$!

Now draw four dotted half notes in the empty boxes below.

```
<p>| | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>d .</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
```

Let’s learn a song in 3/4 time. Tap the rhythm on your lap first. Be careful not to add in an extra beat!
The Wishing Well

Wishing Well, Wishing Well,
Please Grant my Wish!
I Want a New Bike that’s Shiny and Red.

Wishing Well, Wishing Well,
I’ve Changed my Mind.
I want a Puppy to Play with Instead.

Lyrics
More Notes

Ready to learn some more notes? Of course, you are! Let’s learn the rest of the notes on the Grand Staff. Below are all the notes in the Treble and Bass clef.

There are many ways to help you remember all the notes of the grand staff. Below are a few acronyms or sayings for you to study.

1.) The spaces of the Treble Clef spell the word FACE.

2.) Remember the saying “Every Good Boy Deserves Fudge” to memorize the lines of the Treble Clef.

3.) Remember the saying “All Cows Eat Grass” to memorize the spaces of the Bass Clef.

4.) Remember the saying “Good Boys Do Fine Always” to memorize the lines of the Bass Clef.

This is a lot to remember, so it might be a good idea to start practicing regularly with some musical flashcards.
Playing Two Notes Together

Now that you are comfortable playing one note at a time, let’s start practicing how to play two notes together. Below is an exercise to help you practice. Always keep your thumb high and your fingers low, and snap them back into your palm right after you play. Play the first line with your right hand, and the second line with your left hand.

Let’s Learn another song in 3/4! Did you know that a lot of dances are in 3/4? Let’s learn a simple waltz together!
A Little Waltz
Do you see the four dots at the end of “A Little Waltz?” This is called a Repeat Sign and it means you will go back to the beginning and play through the piece one more time. For fun, play one octave higher the second time through!

Theory Review

Let’s do a listening exercise. Close your eyes while your teacher plays the measures below in random order. It’s up to you to determine if they are in 3/4 or 4/4 time. See how many you can get right!

It’s time for you to learn your last song in this book. This is a beautiful song about a Rainbow with some glissandos in it. We hope to see you again in When Fingers Meet Strings Level 1!
Rainbow in the Sky

Quickly

Rain - bow in the sky, please tell me the
sun will soon be here. Please tell me that
grey skies are gone, the rain's
cleared.

Rain - bow in the
sky, you give hope to all of us to-
day. You are beautiful like a
dream. Please don’t
- away.

See you next time!