



Building the Lever Harp

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Introduction

Building the Lever Harp was written to allow the careful craftsman to build a solid attractive lever harp. This manual is the first of two sections. It outlines the processes and procedures I have developed in my shop for building lever harps. They are presented in the approximate sequential order I use when building a harp. In many cases I will present 2-3 options for tackling a specific task.

The second section will deal with more of the underlying mechanics and theory that can help the builder and designer tackle new projects. I expect to complete it in 2008. The second section is not needed to build a decent harp, but it will be my attempt to offer some thoughts to those that are truly afflicted with the need to dig deeper into theory and design topics.

As I have read other books on harp building I have found they lack specific descriptions of the step-by-step processes of harp building. This book is an effort to provide fairly specific descriptions of the processes I use. In doing so, certain compromises have to be made.

This book does not purport to be an exhaustive catalog explaining all the building options. In some areas, you will find a rather terse description because the procedure would be familiar to the average amateur woodworker. For example, building the frame for a square back sound box is not really that different than building a small trapezoidal book case. Other descriptions will get fairly detailed because they are not common (i.e. vacuum forming a round back) or they are for assemblies that need to be particularly strong to guarantee the longevity of the harp (i.e. attaching soundboards, fitting the neck to the sound board).

This book does not purport to show the “best” way to build a harp. The “best way” is going to change with the type of harp one is trying to build, the skills the builder has acquired, the materials he can procure and the tools at his disposal.

I tend to rely on modern joinery techniques and materials over the traditional approach. For example, many traditional builders would choose to cut a mortise and tenon for the neck/pillar joint. In this book I describe two alternatives (A dowelled joint, and a splined joint). I think they are quicker and more fool proof for the average woodworker that has access to a table saw and drill. I have omitted experimental techniques that have not yet stood the test of time.

Musicians tell me they often cringe upon hearing a tune that they had recorded years ago – they would play the tune quite differently now. I cringe at some of

my first harps. Experienced builders may also cringe or disagree with some of the statements made in this book or at the approaches I use for specific parts of the construction process. I play my tunes the best way I know how, and try to stay open to other's interpretations. I appreciate the opportunity to reinterpret the music anew each time I sit down to play. I would welcome constructive criticism on harp building, directly or via a spirited debate on the Yahoo group Harpmaker's list.

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Lee Gayman has been my mentor and encouragement since I first began to build harps. Visits to his shop have always driven me to improve the integrity, sound and finish of the instruments I build. His example has shown that we owe an eternal debt to the builders that have gone before, and that we must take pains to pass the best of the tradition on to others. This building guide is my effort to repay part of that debt.

Larry Fisher has also been a generous with his expertise as we have shared techniques and building approaches with each other. He is a master finisher.

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