

(Written especially for THE CADENZA)

THE MODERN HARP-GUITAR

Tuning the Sub-Basses

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THIS article is written by special request of the editor of THE CADENZA, who in turn has received numerous inquiries for information on this subject. It affords me considerable pleasure to have this opportunity of treating the subject, for several reasons.

First: because the matter will come before a greater number of interested players, teachers, and mandolin orchestra directors, if published in this valuable paper.

Second: because I deeply appreciate the honor and courtesy conferred upon me by Mr. Jacobs in assigning to me this subject, thereby signifying his willingness to accept as authoritative my treatise.

Third: because it is a subject on which I can wax warm and enthusiastic, and thereby possibly influence others who have not as yet gone into the matter thoroly, to give more serious attention to the hidden beauties of the Harp-Guitar, an instrument which, due to recent mechanical improvements, has set every awakened soul and lover of guitar music to discover new and greater possibilities in this splendid acquisition to the musical world.

Fourth: because by publishing this article in THE CADENZA it will save me considerable time from answering personally the numerous inquiries I have received of late, and which have accumulated during my recent absence from the city.

In 1897 I began experimenting with additional bass strings on a guitar, and found it was just as easy to manipulate the extra five strings which I at that time added. In fact I found that it was now possible to play some pieces on my guitar which could not be played on my old six-string guitar; for example: a piece in the key of G major which requires fingering in the higher positions. While the left hand is fingering in the upper positions, it is a physical impossibility to reach the G on the E bass at the third fret. It is true that the octave higher G may be made on the A bass string, but to the guitarist who has developed within himself an understanding and appreciation of *correct* musical form, and the *eternal fitness of things*, it is a bit unsatisfactory to be compelled (*simply by the limitation of his instrument*) to substitute a note which is in the *treble compass* (in this case the G or third string) for the correct one, which should be an octave lower in the bass compass.

The best way to get a forcible as well as convincing demonstration of the superiority of the Harp-Guitar over the six-string guitar is to try and play even easy selections which go in to the upper positions, and which require the continued use of the great barrer, first on the six-string guitar and then on the

Harp-Guitar, which has an open bass note for the twelve half-tones of the scale.

To those thousands of students who have studied the guitar up to the point when that exasperating stumbling-block, the great barrer, was reached, and who then thru discouragement laid aside their instruments, to those students I say with all the positiveism at my command, "Investigate the modern sixteen-string Harp-Guitar." Do not commit the same blunder (if it may rightly be called such) as I did in 1897, of trying merely four or five extra sub-basses, only to find out that when these four or five extra strings were mastered you still need more sub-basses to make your Harp-Guitar *complete*.

It is only natural that the guitarist who for the first time sees the modern sixteen-string Harp-Guitar is somewhat awe-struck by the array of additional basses, but believe me, this is merely the result of a wrongly made self-suggestion. To prove this assertion: What about the harp with its many more strings? Surely with so many on a harp, one need not be afraid to tackle the much smaller number of sixteen on the modern Harp-Guitar.

Having now shown that a Harp-Guitar with less than sixteen strings (ten sub-basses) cannot meet the true ideals of the musicianly player, it is my purpose to explain the best method of tuning these sub-bass strings, keeping in mind also the strictest economy of space taken up by these strings.

Beginning with the first sub-bass (nearest the finger-board) is G sharp, G, F sharp, F, (omit E), D sharp, D, C sharp, C, B and B flat. The sub-bass E is omitted because the sixth finger-board string (E) is a very satisfactory bass string. Duplicating this string in the sub-basses would therefore be entirely superfluous. This, however, cannot be said of the sub-bass D which is an octave lower than the D on the finger-board, and therefore one of the especially fine toned strings among the sub-basses.

The first four sub-bass strings (G#, G, F# and F) are unisons with the fourth, third, second and first frets respectively of the sixth (E) fingerboard string. This gives open basses to these much used chords, while the left hand is entirely free to finger *even the highest* positions of the neck. This in itself is a most valuable asset to higher guitar playing because of the freedom of the left hand to reach every fret without having to also make bass notes. Every guitarist knows that it is about all one can do to make the left hand play the melody without having to make torturous and sinew-wrenching stretches for the bass notes.

It is most surprising that this very self-evident fact has not been commented on before in the columns of our splendid and progress-stimulating magazines devoted to the interests and welfare of the mandolin orchestra. But when we stop to consider that the entire mandolin fraternity blundered along in octave

mandola and no mandocello ruts until only a few years ago, I say that when we stop to consider this, to us now most unpalatable fact, perhaps it is not entirely out of place to think a little deeper on the subject of higher guitar playing. Don't let's grow only in one direction (correct instrumentation and orchestration) but let us grow out in all directions, and let one of the most important directions be towards the Harp-Guitar.

A letter some time ago from one of our prominent ones in Philadelphia, contains the inquiry, "Tell me, how do you sell so many Harp-Guitars?" I wrote back just three words, but those three contained the entire answer. They were, "I play one." And by stating I played one, I did not mean that I merely had one in my studio to make show with, or that I struck a sub-bass once or twice in a selection. I meant that I never let an opportunity go by without giving every blessed person who comes into my studio a sample of what can be done on a modern Harp-Guitar. As a rule my auditors who happen to be guitar players always ask, "Is it harder to play than the six-string guitar?" And when I answer positively and truthfully, "It is easier," I always prove it so conclusively that there remains not a vestige of doubt in the now awakened student's mind which has grown from the less to that which he sees and hears IS greater.

One of the greatest pleasures of my life has been the satisfaction I have derived from being asked by prominent teachers and mandolin orchestra directors whom I have had the pleasure of meeting at the Guild conventions, to favor them with a sample of Harp-Guitar manipulation. And to watch that prominent one bristle and bubble over with enthusiasm at hearing new effects, and to have him say afterwards, "I shall devote a great deal of time to the study of the Harp-Guitar," only serves to fill me with greater desire to delve still deeper into the as yet but little explored field of Harp-Guitarism.

In the next instalment of this article I shall treat of a plan of study to gain mastery of the Harp-Guitar. Owing to the entire lack of a systematic course of this kind up to the present time, teachers and players will find therein a fund of valuable and interesting information which they may apply to advantage in their own work. I shall give a general outline describing the methods I employ, the graded music necessary to the student, and various practical hints that will prove useful.

There are a great number of splendid Harp-Guitars scattered all over this big globe that are being used merely for accompaniment playing. If this article is the means of inciting the owners of these instruments to greater achievement in the field of solo work, then my efforts will not have been in vain.

(To be continued in the September issue)