

Dusty Strings

Makers of Harps and Hammered Dulcimers

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Using Sharping Levers

Any harp with sharpening levers on all the strings can be played in any of eight major and eight minor keys simply by tuning the instrument to take advantage of the levers and then engaging the levers on the appropriate strings. Partially levered harps can play in fewer keys; see “Harp with Partial Levers” below. The most popular keys to tune a fully levered harp to are C and E^b. The advantage of tuning to E^b is that it starts you out in a flat key. You can then use your levers to sharp strings to get to C and then to the sharp keys. If you start out in C, you can't get to any flat keys. The advantage of tuning to C is that there is a lot of music that is in C, G, D, and A and you can play in these keys without having so many sharpening levers engaged. It all depends on what keys you play in most of the time. Here's how to get your harp into different keys and how to move from one key to another:

Harps with Partial Levers:

1. Harps with C and F levers can play in three keys: C, G and D. Tune the harp to the key of C (column 4 below). With no levers engaged, you are in the key of C. With the levers engaged on the F strings, you are in the key of G (column 5 below). With levers engaged on the F and C strings, you are in the key of D (column 6 below).
2. Harps with levers on the C, F and B strings can play in four keys: C, G, D and F. Tune the harp to the key of F (column 3 below), with the B strings tuned down to B^b. To play in the key of C, engage the levers on the B strings, making them B^bs instead of B^bs. Then follow the instructions for harps with C and F levers above.

Harps with Full Levers:

1. If you want to tune your harp to the key of C, tune it as in the fourth column and then skip to #6 below. This will allow you to play in the keys of C, G, D, A, E, B, F[#], and C[#].

2. A very common tuning for harps with a full set of levers is the key of E^b. To tune to the key of E^b, be sure all the levers are disengaged, i.e. off all the strings. Tune the harp as shown in the first column. You will have three flat strings in each octave.
3. If you engage all the A-string levers you will convert your A^bs to Aⁿs. Your harp is now in the key of B^b (2 flats – B^b and E^b). See the second column below.
4. Now engage all the E-string levers. You have just changed all your E^bs to Eⁿs. As shown in the third column, your harp is now in the key of F (one flat – B^b).
5. Next engage all the B-string levers. The B^bs are now Bⁿs. The harp is now in the key of C (no flats and no sharps). See the fourth column.
6. If you engage all the F-string levers you will be in the key of G (one sharp – F[#], fifth column). Adding all the C-string levers puts you in the key of D (two sharps – F[#] and C[#], sixth column). The key of A has three sharps (F[#], C[#], and G[#], seventh column). The key of E has four sharps (F[#], C[#], G[#], and D[#], eighth column).
7. If your harp is tuned to the key of C, you can play in more sharp keys: B, with five sharps (F[#], C[#], G[#], D[#], and A[#]) or the key of F[#] (six sharps – F[#], C[#], G[#], D[#], A[#], and E[#]) or the key of C[#] (seven sharps – F[#], C[#], G[#], D[#], A[#], E[#], and B[#]). Every time you add a flat string to the tuning, you lose one sharp key. Tuning to the key of F (third column) with no levers engaged means you can play in F, C, G, D, A, E, and B. Tuning to the key of B^b (second column) means you can play in B^b, F, C, G, D, A, and E. Most people either tune to the key of C or to the key of E^b.

| 1. | 2. | 3. | 4. | 5. | 6. | 7. | 8. |
|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| E ^b | B ^b | F | C | G | D | A | E |
| (3 flats) | (2 flats) | (1 flat) | (no sharps or flats) | (1 sharp) | (2 sharps) | (3 sharps) | (4 sharps) |
| C | C | C | C | C | C [#] | C [#] | C [#] |
| B ^b | B ^b | B ^b | B | B | B | B | B |
| A ^b | A | A | A | A | A | A | A |
| G | G | G | G | G | G | G [#] | G [#] |
| F | F | F | F | F [#] | F [#] | F [#] | F [#] |
| E ^b | E ^b | E | E | E | E | E | E |
| D | D | D | D | D | D | D | D [#] |
| C | C | C | C | C | C | C | C [#] |

Each major key has a minor key that uses the same sharpening levers:

| | | | | | |
|----------------------|-------|---------|---------|-------|----------------------|
| E ^b major | ----- | C minor | G major | ----- | E minor |
| B ^b major | ----- | G minor | D major | ----- | B minor |
| F major | ----- | D minor | A major | ----- | F [#] minor |
| C major | ----- | A minor | E major | ----- | C [#] minor |