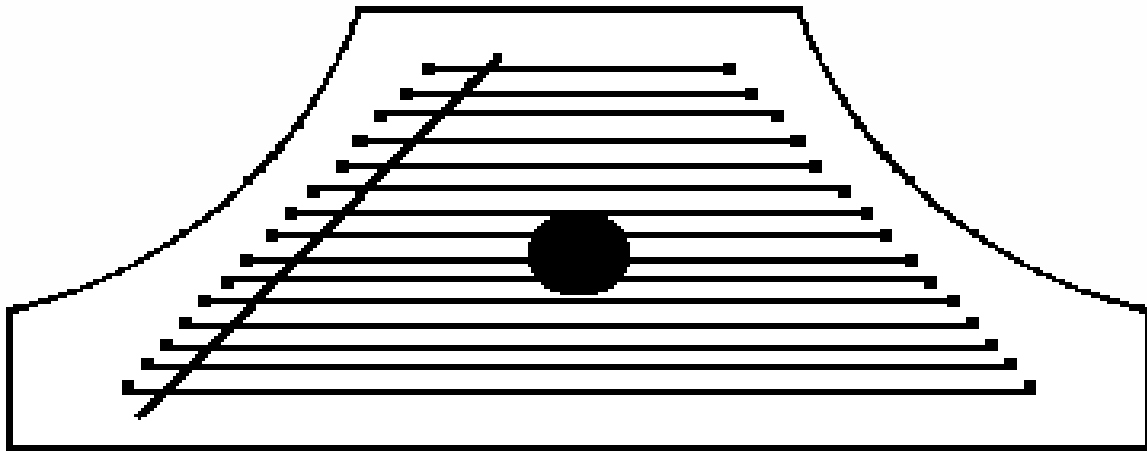


THE PLUCKED PSALTERY



By
Psaltery Dreams

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A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE PLUCKED PSALTERY

The psaltery is a type of medieval zither. It is an ancient instrument is seen in many forms (trapezoidal, wing-shaped and hog-nosed to name a few). The instrument's name may have began in the Middle East, around the Mesopotamia area, where Iran and Iraq are today. It is thought to be about three thousand years old, only slightly younger than the oldest stringed instrument, the harp. Crusaders are believed to have brought it back to Europe, although there is no way to positively prove this. Derived from the Greek psallein meaning plucked with fingers. Early versions were simply a wooden board with gut strings stretched between pegs. According to historic sources, metal strings were made of bronze. Compared to steel, the bronze strings gave the instrument a bell-like sound. The strings are normally plucked with a plectrum, pick, or the fingernails. The player performed with the instrument on the lap on a table, or in front of the chest held with a strap around the neck if movement was needed.

Southern Europe, influenced by Moorish Spain, preferred the trapezoidal psaltery with three or four strings to a note. Northern psalteries tended to be triangular or wing-shaped and single or double-strung. Like most other instruments of the time, the psaltery had no specific repertory, but was used to play whatever music the occasion demanded. It was referred to frequently in lists of musicians and instruments and in the art of the time. The psaltery was widely used until about 1500. After the 1500's it could not compete with the chromaticism of the Renaissance era, so was used less as time passed. It is thought that the psaltery evolved into the harpsichord, hammered dulcimer and then went through mechanization process producing the pianoforte, which became, of course, the piano.

The psaltery is the cornerstone upon which the most commonly played stringed instrument, the piano, is built. Due to its reference in the bible some scholars believe, psalteries like harps were acceptable for ladies of court to play.

Psaltery music has its own interesting story. Approximately two hundred years after its arrival in Europe, someone figured out that if they made marks on a material thin enough to slide under the strings, they would not have to remember the music being played. Original psaltery music, some of which has survived, fits under the strings similar to modern psaltery. The big difference between the old and new music is that in the old music, all of the notes were completely drawn by hand. Knowing that the modern musical staff arose approximately one hundred years after written psaltery music, historians believe that one day someone looked at the notations on lines for the psaltery music and figured out that if they used the spaces in between the scale could be compressed and, therefore, useful for instruments with larger range. In other words, though it cannot be proven, it is a logical assumption that not only did psalteries spawn pianos, but also begat the entire method of music notation (sheet music) used by all instruments and performers in the modern world.

How to Play the Plucked Psaltery

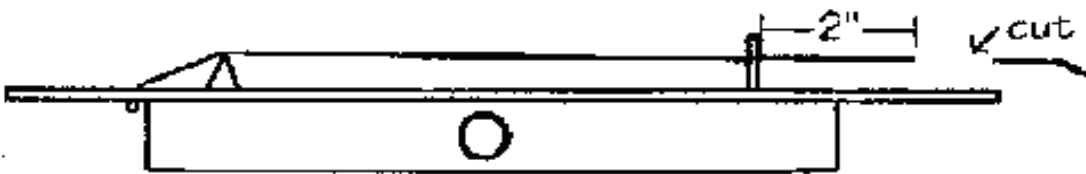
The plucked psaltery is most often played by using song sheets that slides under the strings area to help you learn to play. You don't have to know a thing about music to play. All you do is slide one of the sheets under the strings, and follow the notes from left to right, plucking the string directly above each note. This also helps so the player doesn't have to refer back to a music book or memory to play. The player plucks the strings where indicated on the sheet music. A pick or finger can be used to pluck. By following note-to-note and plucking, the player creates the song. Although not necessary, it helps if you know the song well enough to get the timing correct.

Restringing and Tuning the Plucked Psaltery

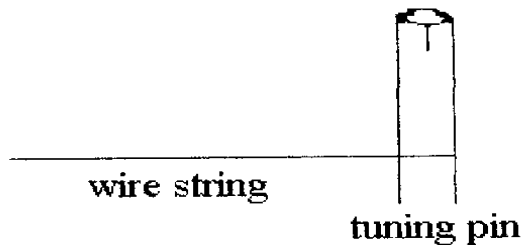
Our Psalteries use a ball-end guitar string

Following these six easy steps will help in restringing your instrument

Poke string through string hole, from the backside of the instrument, pulling it a little taunt (the ball end will be touching the wood underneath). Stretch the string (wire) across the instrument to the tuning pin and clip off the excess so it measures about 2 inches beyond the tuning pin as shown below.

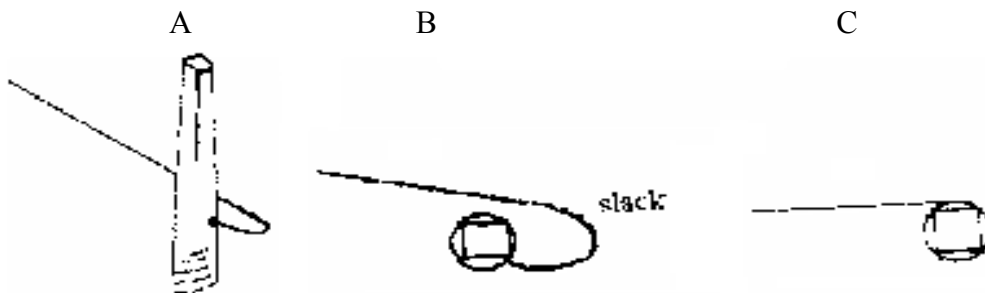


Thread the wire through the pin so that the end just goes through the other side of the pin, as shown below.

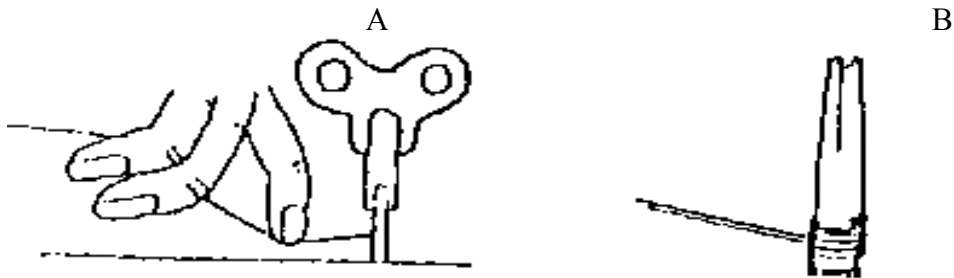


Using the tuning key, turn the pin clockwise about one-half turn before applying tension to the wire. Pull lightly on the guitar string to "SET" it in the pin (This will put a sharp kink in the wire where it enters the hole). Try to hide the end of the string inside the tuning.

It looks nicer and helps prevent you from pricking your fingers or snagging clothing when you handle your instrument



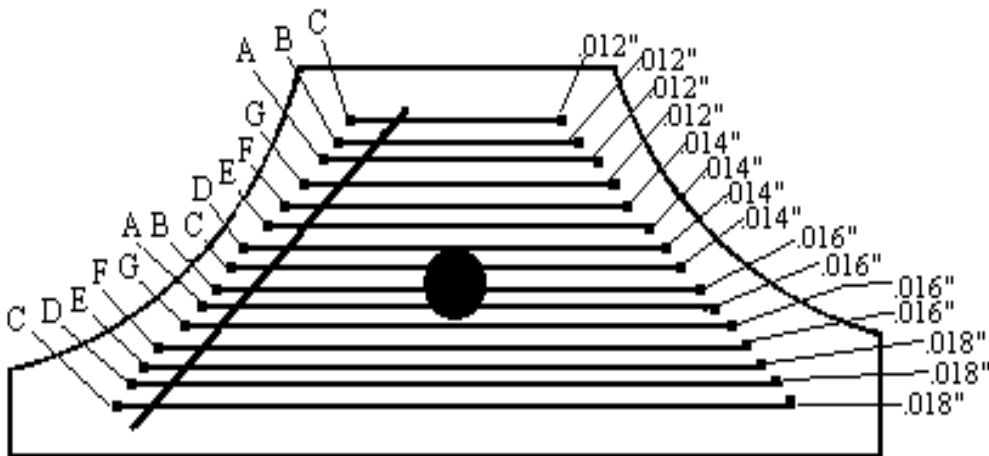
Keeping tension on the wire at all times, turn the pin clockwise until there is no slack and the wire is tight. (Do not over tighten or the string will brake).



Install the strings, using the below chart for string size and placement.

The three longest:	.018"
The next four:	.016"
The next four:	.014"
The four shortest:	.012"

Tune the Psaltery, beginning with middle C for the lowest string. Then go up the Scale matching the white keys on a piano, for two octaves above middle C. Or purchase an electronic tuner from a music store or online



Information compiled through

Psaltery Dreams

The Society for Creative Anachronism (SCA)

William Rees

infoplease.com

S. Virdung: Musica getutscht (Basle, 1511/r1970)

M. Agricola: Musica instrumentalis deutsch (Wittenberg, 1528/r1969)

Music makers

Notes