

## Autoharp Clearinghouse – September 1999 – Lindsay Haisley

My introduction to **Lindsay Haisley** came about by way of his holiday recording, which is appropriately entitled *Christmas on the Autoharp*. That was long enough ago that my copy of the album is on a long-playing record. Shortly thereafter, I began seeing references to, and articles by, Lindsay in *The Autoharpoholic* magazine. Of particular interest to me were Lindsay's writings on the subject of diminished seventh chords. For some time, I had been frustrated by my inability to correctly play songs such as *Over the Rainbow*, *White Christmas* and *Happy Trails* on a standard 21-chord chromatic autoharp. By disposing of the seldom-used Ab, Bb7 and Cm bars, I was able to add the three diminished seventh chords--thereby overcoming some of the instrument's limitations. Since the demise of *The Autoharpoholic*, Lindsay has been a feature writer for *Autoharp Quarterly* magazine and, more recently, has set up and maintained the Internet site for the **Cyberpluckers**. We all owe him a sincere debt of gratitude for his many contributions to the autoharp community, and I wish to do my part by dedicating this issue in his honor. **ER**

Lindsay has been playing music for most of his 58 years, starting with piano as a child, trombone in junior high, and guitar, bass and autoharp in his early 1920s. His initial musical influences were from classical music and jazz (especially Dixieland jazz), and his music has always reflected those roots. There was a great deal of live music in his childhood home. His dad was an avid amateur pianist, playing everything from Beethoven sonatas to pop tunes of his own childhood--which he arranged and played by ear. One of Lindsay's favorite pastimes in his teens was to sneak a couple of beers from his parents' fridge, go to his room, close the door and spend the next several hours playing trombone along with his favorite Dixieland records.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s Lindsay lived in Berkeley, California. Berkeley in those days, was a hotbed of new music and new ideas, and anything seemed possible in music, art and life in general. It was there that Lindsay acquired his first autoharp--which at that time took second place to his guitar. That nice old OS black-body 'harp ended up being beautifully painted by his Berkeley girlfriend at the time, and is probably today hanging on someone's wall as a perfect example of good 60s psychedelic artwork. Unfortunately, the 'harp never got played very much--but life went on.

Also in the late 1960s, Lindsay took his guitar, a backpack and a little money and set out for Europe to see what the rest of the world was about. While playing for change on the streets of Copenhagen, he ran into other travelers who piqued his curiosity about places still further on down the road. The great and ancient road through southern Asia was still open then--before wars and anti-American prejudice closed it to young American idealists traveling with little more than a guitar, a backpack and a lot of curiosity about people and the world. One could hitch-hike or ride local transportation safely from Europe to India for less than \$100. During the next year, Lindsay's travels took him through Europe, on through Bulgaria to Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Nepal, Bangladesh (then East Pakistan), Burma, Thailand, Malaysia, Japan and on back to the Bay Area. His music opened many doors and made him numerous friends. On returning to the US, he decided to make music the central focus of his life.

In the early 1970s, the San Francisco Bay Area was becoming increasingly politicized and, along with many other artists and free-thinkers, Lindsay decided to move on. Among his friends in Berkeley was a loose conglomeration of hip and very musical folk known as the "Anonymous Artists of America". Before Lindsay met them, some of the people in this crew had begun playing rock and roll together under that same name. The AAA didn't make many headlines, but was one of the more avant-garde rock groups on the West Coast scene and had played for such unlikely events as Ken Kesey's "Acid Test Graduation." The AAA had left the west coast scene altogether for southern Colorado shortly before Lindsay arrived back from his world travels and, what with the changes in the air in Berkeley, all it took was a "come join us" for him to gather his instruments and a few personal belongings into his VW bug and head east to the Huerfano River valley west of Walsenburg, Colorado.

The AAA had settled up into the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, far from paved roads, telephones and even electricity. With others in the group, Lindsay got to work building his own house and helping to keep the music rolling--in a brightly painted school bus in which the band traveled to its road dates in southern and central Colorado. You can hardly imagine a more unlikely bunch of musical compatriots! Rehearsals barely held together. Everyone had different ideas about how the music should go. Nonetheless, when the band started playing, magic happened, and everything came together beautifully and with wonderful energy. Many world-class musicians used to stop in southern Colorado on their way between coasts and play a few dates with the AAA just for the fun of it. Eventually the band, and Lindsay with it, moved to Denver to be closer to their work. The mountain magic was gone, though, and soon it became time for Lindsay and several of the other band members to move on. The AAA band broke up in 1974.

The AAA was Lindsay's first taste of working with professional music. AAA gigs were sometimes good, sometimes bad, sometimes disorganized, but almost always energetic, and Lindsay learned a lot about the relationship between personal energy and music. He had begun writing songs in Berkeley, and several of his songs had become regular features in the band's repertoire. Still, however, he was focused on guitar and trombone. The AAA had evolved from a very wild psychedelic rockin' weirdness band into a pretty passable R & B group playing a lot of Soul and R & B standards of the time, and the autoharp just didn't fit in with the genre. Music is, however, many things to many people, and Lindsay learned a lot from the AAA about playing for audiences and for dances, about improvising, and about really having fun with music--all of which are useful things to know about no matter what kind of music one is playing. In 1974 Lindsay left Colorado for the coast of Maine, ostensibly to help an ex-AAAr rebuild a large wooden boat. For income, Lindsay began playing in small venues in the area, and it was in one of these that a young fellow came up to Lindsay with an autoharp and offered him a deal that was too good to refuse. The fellow with the 'harp, it seems, liked to play music while he was driving. Even under the best of conditions, an autoharp requires two hands to play, leaving none for driving, and so this young fellow offered to trade Lindsay his autoharp for a harmonica (potentially a one-handed instrument) and a lesson on it. Lindsay has never been much of a harmonica player (he didn't even own one at the time) but he has always been good at improvising, so he picked up a harmonica at the local music store, gave the fellow the harmonica and a basic lesson, and thereafter incorporated the newly-acquired autoharp into his solo show.

About this time, Lindsay ran into a promising duo of young musicians who were playing the same club circuit in the mountains of New Hampshire and Maine. While they liked his work on the autoharp and guitar, they really needed a bass player, so Lindsay put away his guitar and autoharp for a while and picked up an electric bass. His time playing dance music with the AAA stood him in good stead here, and soon that tuneful folk group evolved into a fine acoustic/electric dance band playing a very eclectic mix of old-time and contemporary tunes--a lot of them from the emerging "outlaw" music scene in far-away Texas. The group adopted the name of "The Amanoosic Mud Flat String Band," and soon had a regular job at the Rangely Lake Lodge in Rangely, Maine. The Lodge didn't have a dance license (yes, you have to have a license in Maine if people dance in your club), but people couldn't sit still when the band played. The Lodge was an old one, and the floor in the common room where the band played was under-pinned with ancient-but-still- resilient spruce logs. When the room started jumping, so did the floor, and many a night the band members were fearful lest the shaking and bouncing of the Lodge floor tip over their amps and sound equipment.

Lindsay played with the Amanoosic Mud Flat String Band for only a season but, while there, he met and fell in love with Bridget Mahoney, a young waitress at the Lodge with whom he spent many happy years. Although they eventually separated, their two children have helped to keep them in touch over the years.

In 1973, Lindsay and Bridget moved to Texas where he continued to work as a musician and performer, primarily in folk venues. Over time, he began to reach audiences who were familiar with the autoharp as a traditional folk instrument, and a delightful chemistry started to emerge. Instead of dismissing Lindsay's approach to the instrument as un-traditional (which indeed it was), many of these audiences welcomed his fresh and energetic blend of improvised rock, jazz, blues, folk and country styles, and made him feel at home in many places. For a number of years, Lindsay played widely in clubs and small venues from California through the Midwest, spending several months of each year on the road. Summertime brought gigs at festivals, including the Walnut Valley Festival and the Mountain Laurel Autoharp Gathering. House concerts, clubs and performances at colleges and universities filled out the rest of the year, along with some recording for his own albums and with friends. Lindsay also drew on his family tradition as a teacher and developed a fine series of autoharp workshops which he still presents for autoharp clubs and at festivals wherever people are interested in learning more about the instrument.

Texas has an eclectic musical appeal of its own--not that different in some ways from California--and Lindsay decided to make his permanent home in the Austin area. He became virtually the "Autoharpist in Residence" at the Kerrville Folk Festival, and was awarded as a winner in the festival's New Folk Songwriting competition in 1979. Since that time, Lindsay has been back to the Kerrville Folk Festival every year for at least part of the festival's three-week musical marathon. He no longer plays as a featured performer on the festival's stage, but enjoys performing each year with a number of the event's other artists, including Peter Yarrow of Peter Paul & Mary fame, and with the incredible multi-talented writer, composer and jazz performer David Amram.

Lindsay went on to become a member of the Board of Directors of the Kerrville Folk Festival in the 1980s. He has recorded numerous albums, many still available on both tape and CD. His later recording projects featured his work on the autoharp and have become classics among autoharpists. In spite of his skills as a solo autoharpist, Lindsay soon found that he most enjoys playing with other people. His music friends have come to include a wide spectrum of fiddle players, folkies, jazz musicians, classical musicians and others with musical roots in many worlds. Texas is a real musical melting pot, and Lindsay has made the most of that situation.

Times change. In the 1990s, Lindsay decided to indulge one of his other passions--that being his fascination with communications technology. He had always enjoyed working with electronics and computers and, as the computer revolution was heating up in the early 1990s with the advent of the Internet, he decided to jump on board. He helped to build and maintain one of Austin's first Internet Service Providers and, after that, he was hooked. In 1995, he opened up his own Internet web hosting business, FMP Computer Services, and now hosts websites for numerous folks in the musical world, including the *Autoharp Quarterly*, Orthey Instruments, Timbreline Instruments and many others. While he still plays his 'harps for people (he'll be at the 2000 Mountain Laurel Autoharp Gathering in Newport, Pennsylvania) and still does workshops (he's scheduled to teach at the Autoharp Jamboree at the Ozark Folk Center in Mountain View, Arkansas in 2000), Lindsay prefers to stay at home with his wife, Cheryl, and do what he can to make the information revolution a little more revolutionary.

December 2007 Note: The following CDs by Lindsay Haisley are available the AQ Marketplace via a link from the *Autoharp Quarterly* homepage at [www.autoharpquarterly.com](http://www.autoharpquarterly.com)

*Christmas on the Autoharp*  
*Harps and Hammers*  
*String Loaded*