

Autoharp Clearinghouse – May 1999 – Lyman “Bud” Taylor

Although I had been previously aware of Bud Taylor’s presence in the autoharp community, I do believe that the Mountain Laurel Autoharp Gathering was where our paths first crossed. Bud’s reputation as an “autoharp innovator” had preceded that meeting, and I was anxious to witness the application of his *Jazz Style Autoharp* concept. In recent years, Bud has generously contributed articles as well as arrangements of music to both autoharp publications. I consider it a privilege to dedicate this issue in his honor, and to provide Bud with the opportunity to tell his story. **ER**

Music has had a deep effect on my life for as long as I can remember. I still recall most of the lullabies my mother used to sing. Through my earliest years, I “wore out” my mother’s small collection of records on our Victrola. It was a singing evangelist’s rendition of *The Stranger of Galilee* (which we also had on a record) that was largely responsible for my “conversion” at the age of six. (I can still play that record in my head.) I loved the third grade music appreciation “hour” when the teacher played classical music records on the Victrola. In fourth grade I had voice lessons, (unsuccessful) piano lessons, and (successful) violin lessons, plus music every week in church and Sunday School. Yes, music got an early start in my life. At the beginning of sixth grade, the music teacher negotiated with my home room teacher to allow me to sing in the high school chorus (which did not hurt my feelings at all). After that, I was always in chorus, orchestra (violin) and band (clarinet, then Sousaphone). From ninth grade on, I always sang in the church choir.

In my Junior year in high school, I persuaded the school administration to allow me to practice violin during two or three study halls each week. I also usually practiced two or three hours at home. My violin teacher discovered that I had a certain talent for musical composition and tried to teach me a little harmony, but I found it confusing. He invited me to join a special club of musicians composed of his and his wife’s “better” music students. It has always been a matter of pride for me that, in a competition to write a club theme song, my entry won. My prize was a bust of Bach, which I still have and which rests proudly atop my bookcase. In that same year, during a prolonged stay at home due to illness, I composed my first full-length piano composition. In my senior year, I added words, and our class sang it at our graduation Class Night. My extra violin practice paid off in that, at the beginning of my senior year, I was promoted to Concertmaster of the orchestra earning the nickname of “Maestro” from some of my peers. Chautauqua Institution, a musical mecca for thousands of people each summer, was only a few miles away. In the summers following my junior and senior high school years, I worked there. I sang in the (volunteer) Chautauqua Choir with upwards of 100 voices, singing at two services on Sundays accompanied by the huge five-rank Moeller organ and occasionally in concert with the accompaniment of the Chautauqua Symphony Orchestra. I attended every concert I could. (By swapping work shifts with others, during my senior summer, I attended 30 out of 33 concerts plus a few operas.) I know of nowhere else where I could have had such valuable and extensive musical exposure in so short a time.

By now, my life’s goal was to become a choral composer/conductor. In the fall of that same year, I entered a small denominational college, chosen because of its affordable price and good music conservatory. I signed up for a Bachelor of Arts Degree with a major in music. The result

of this (unheard of) educational program was that, during the first semester of my freshman year, I had to take all the required arts courses and all the required music courses, a total of 17 credit hours. Violin was my major instrument, and my instructor was a tyrant. (According to him I did everything wrong.) And for him, anything less than eight hours a day of practice was not enough. With my academic load, this was impossible. At the end of six weeks, he had convinced me that I would never make a professional musician. At that point, I decided to enter the Christian ministry. At the end of the semester, I changed my major to English, and put music “on the shelf.” With the exception of singing in church and some song-leading at summer youth camps, it stayed “on the shelf” for the next thirty years.

In January of 1973, I said to my wife, “I’ve got to get back into music.” One of my daughter’s girlfriends had a nearly-new autoharp (which she had given up on) resting in her attic. It was a Sears *Silvertone* Oscar Schmidt 15-chord chromatic model which, in those days, retailed new for about \$45, including a case. My mother, who happened to be staying with us at the moment, bought it for me for \$20. It immediately became my passion. I bought all the available autoharp books and began teaching myself. I also purchased an organist’s loose-leaf hymnal and began working out the chords for the most popular hymns, doing one or two hymns a night “after hours.”

I began experimenting with new kinds of strokes for my playing, and soon became frustrated with the limited number of chords available. Thus it was that, after extensive negotiation with my wife, I purchased a 21-bar chromatic Oscar Schmidt *Appalachian* Electric Autoharp and a Montgomery Ward amplifier in 1976. I had discovered so many “new” strokes and other ways to enhance playing (which were not in the then-current autoharp literature) that I published my own method book entitled, *Advanced Autoharp Notation and Technique* (all theory and no music). I sold several copies, but soon discovered that autoharpists were not rushing to purchase this work. Up to that time, I had a slender contact with about three live autoharpers. I continued to be a “loner” for many years to come. My public performances were few, mostly in church circles. But my autoharp became an important part of my Christian ministry. I took it with me when calling on shut-ins and sick persons in my parishes, playing and singing their favorite hymns for them, a practice which I have continued ever since. During these years as a solitary harper, I did have a teacher of sorts in that, during the fall of 1983, I began subscribing to *The Autoharpoholic* magazine, and devoured each issue until it ceased publication a couple years ago.

In the meantime, my autoharp taught me basic harmony (which I had never been able to fathom from a book). In 1974, I again began composing music and have done so off and on ever since. I have committed well over 200 tunes to paper, many still in pencil manuscript. Over the years, I have self-published perhaps a third of these. As a church pastor, I always had access to a mimeograph machine which became my “printer.” Using a typewriter, a 6-inch rule, and a razor-point felt-tip pen, I was able to produce respectable-looking perfect copy. Electronic stencils gave me my “masters.” Modern technology, first the photocopier and now the computer, have improved the quality of my self-published music. Types of music have included hymns, folk songs, love songs, choir music, a few piano pieces and a few arrangements for the autoharp. Twice, I hired a professional printer to reproduce collections of my works from my perfect copy: A *Christian Service Song Book* in 1980 and A *New Wesley Hymnbook* in 1983. In 1979, I self-published two major works. Early in the year, I published a musical “passion play” designed for presentation as a chancel drama in churches of any size entitled *Our*

Lord's Passion. It was presented by an ecumenical cast in 1979 and 1980, sponsored by the Greenville (NY) Area Council of Churches. In the fall of 1979, I published a Christmas cantata entitled ***Our Lord's Coming***, simple music designed for the small church choir. It was presented by the Greenville-Norton Hill United Methodist Church.

In 1989 my life as an autoharpist and a composer took a turn upward. That July, I attended my first music festival, The Cranberry Dulcimer Gathering, held in Binghamton, New York. It is a festival where our instrument gets almost equal billing with mountain and hammered dulcimers. It was there that I met Ivan Stiles, co-editor of the then-just-new ***Autoharp Quarterly***. Arriving early, I walked up to Ivan, stuck out my hand and introduced myself. His response was one of the great musical compliments of my life: "Bud Taylor? I thought I would never meet you. I have been living with your autoharp book for the past ten years." He later said, "You take a different approach to the autoharp than anyone else." I then met Mary Lou Orthey, the other co-editor of ***AQ***, and her husband, autoharp luthier George, creator of the famous Orthey Dulci-Harps. Mary Lou and Ivan heard me play and sing one of my compositions, a carol-type song entitled *Autumn*. They asked for permission to publish it in the forthcoming issue of ***Autoharp Quarterly***, and I willingly gave my consent. That was the beginning of a wonderful relationship which continues to the present. They have been kind enough to accept a couple traditional Japanese folk songs arranged for autoharp and a several articles for publication. Articles have included: ***Chord Bar Notation*** (Vol.3, No.1, October 1990) and ***The Jazz-Style Autoharp*** (Vol.4, No.3, April 1992). Both ***Autoharp Quarterly*** and the ***Autoharp Clearinghouse*** are on my required reading list.

Since 1989, summer autoharp-inclusive events have been a must for me. Nearly every year, I have attended the Cranberry Dulcimer Gathering and have taught a few workshops there. And, since its inception in 1991, I have attended each of the Mountain Laurel Autoharp Gatherings at Newport, Pennsylvania. (Editor's note: That event actually had its start in November of 1986 as the Dulci-Harp Gathering.) The benefit received from those and other autoharp events has been enormous. At the Cranberry and Mountain Laurel festivals, beginning in 1992, I have tried to promote interest in ***The Jazz-Style Autoharp***, which I had developed in October 1991.

My development of *The Jazz-Style Autoharp* came about through a chain of events. I had acquired a couple of old black OS Autoharps at a tag sale. (Editor's note: A tag sale is the New England counterpart of a yard sale or garage sale.) With the help of *Going Diatonic*, the book by George Foss, I converted one of the "old blacks" into a diatonic 'harp in the key of E and then proceeded to teach myself to play it. My original plan had been to make a second diatonic 'harp in a different key. However, I became so frustrated with the limited number of chords available on the first one that I decided instead to see how many chords I could get on an autoharp. Borrowing the concept of "delete note" chord bars from George Foss and Marty Schuman, plus the "push two buttons at once" principle from Marty, I took a pile of scrap paper and, after trying all the mathematical possibilities, in about six hours devised a chord bar arrangement which would yield 33 chords, with about half of them being jazz chords. (Chords my *Jazz-Style Autoharp* plays include: 5 majors, 4 minors, 5 sixth chords (which are also the 5 relative minor 7ths), 7 sevenths, 3 major sevenths, 3 diminished sevenths, and 1 augmented. (Two are a change from the original article. The majors and minors are the two-button chords.) Using these chords, songs which are unplayable on a standard 21-bar chromatic 'harp now become possible. This would include pieces of music such as *White Christmas*, *Embraceable You*, *When You Wish Upon a Star*, *I Left My Heart in San Francisco* and *Stardust*, to name a few. It was an unexpected pleasure in the summer of 1994, when playing some of these songs on my *Jazz-Style Autoharp*, to be among the five finalists in the Mountain Laurel Autoharp Championship. There are currently about a dozen autoharpers who play *The Jazz-Style Autoharp*. Mary Umbarger is the first to put this 'harp's sound on a commercial recording. Her tape *Too Many Songs, Too Little Time* has a cut of *Misty* using this 'harp.

The forming of a nodule on one of my vocal cords, followed by surgery and subsequent voice rest in 1994, gave me time to concentrate on picking the melody. This led to the release of my first cassette tape album, *An Autoharp Repertoire*. This album received favorable reviews in both autoharp magazines. In playing a wide variety of "classic" favorite tunes (which are also some of my favorites), I sought to bring pleasure to the maximum number of listeners.

I usually play the melody an octave higher than written where, to quote Bryan Bowers, "It sounds prettier." I use two original strokes to enhance the melody, (a snap-pluck-pinch and a push-pluck-pinch) resulting in each melody note sounding louder than its accompanying harmony notes. I pluck the melody with my fourth finger which makes for smoother plucks and gives my hand a broader reach to get additional harmony notes. I frequently use arpeggio strokes to get more of the concert harp sound. I have also restored the extra-high "d" string to my autoharps, which makes playing in the upper octave more often possible. On my standard 21-bar chromatic 'harp, I have replaced the Ab, Bb7, and A chords with three diminished seventh chord bars. To tune my 'harps (which are set up to play basically in the keys of F and C), I use a modification of the Charles Whitmer mean-tone tuning chart (AQ, April 1990). I have five OS Autoharps, and a Fladmark 'harp on order.

As a composer, I could not function without the electric keyboard which my daughter presented to me when I retired in 1990. Late in the fall of 1998, I completed composing 21 new hymn tunes to 21 of Fanny Crosby's "unsung" hymns. (This famous blind poet wrote over 7,000 hymn poems in her lifetime, of which about a dozen are currently sung.)

I have written a number of articles about the autoharp, and have submitted a number of original pieces of music and harmonizations of other hymns and songs for *Autoharp Clearinghouse* over the past few years. I will be teaching workshops on *Harping Hymns and Sacred Songs* and on *Jazz Styles on the Autoharp* at the forthcoming Cranberry Dulcimer Gathering. That festival is to be held in Binghamton, New York the weekend of 24, 25 and 26 July 1999. LT

The all-instrumental recording referred to in this article, *An Autoharp Repertoire*, is available in cassette format only, for \$10 from the address listed below. It includes the following cuts: *Lo, How A Rose E'er Blooming* • *Lover, Come Back To Me* • *Piano Song #1* • *I Love You Truly* • *Brahms Medley* • *Londonderry Air (Danny Boy)* • *Chopin's Etude in E (Op. 10, No. 3)* • *Sunrise, Sunset* • *Alpine Maid's Sunday Romance* • *Lord's Prayer* • *Ol' Man River* • *Ah! Sweet Mystery Of Life* • *Now On Land And Sea Descending* • *Believe Me If All Those Endearing Young Charms* • *Panis Angelicus* • *Easter Parade* • *Waltz Of The Autoharps* • *Anniversary Song* • *Rose Of Tralee* • *Over The Rainbow*.

Also of possible interest is the fact that Bud will either modify your 21-chord autoharp to his jazz configuration, or sell you one ready to play. Detailed instructions and song arrangements are included in either case. Bud Taylor may be contacted at: 105 Wesley Heights, Shelton, CT 06484 - (203) 925-8317.

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