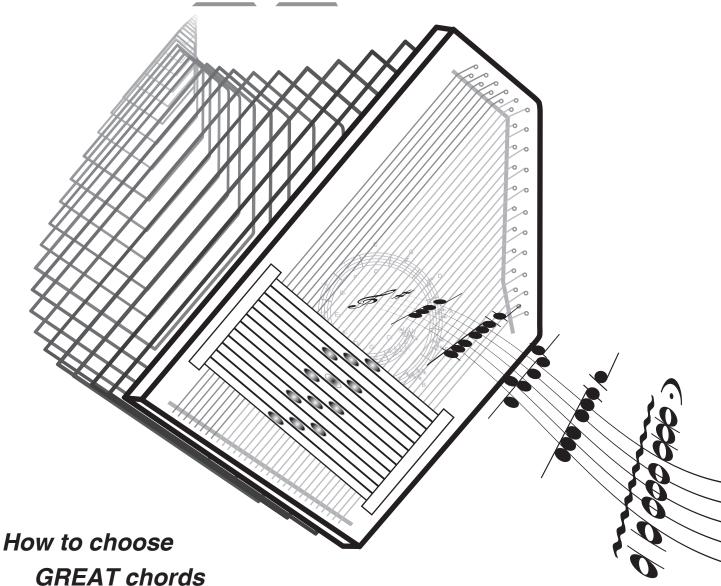
# Chords



to play the music you love on diatonic and chromatic AUTOHARP

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#### Companion MIDI files are available

The symbol "•" at the beginning of a tune or music example means you can hear it on a MIDI file. All MIDI files may be obtained from www.thedulcimerlady.com.

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and to the glory of God, my Source.

#### INTRODUCTION

History points to the autoharp as a diatonically tuned, chorded melody instrument since its invention in the 1880s. When its role became that of accompaniment instrument in American elementary schools in the 1950s, its tuning expanded to chromatic while its chord-bar set grew from 3 to 15 to 21 (even 28!) chord bars. Today, melody playing is once again the rage on both diatonic and chromatic autoharps, inspiring new harmonic challenges with larger arrays of chords.

I have been probing to understand how to play melodies with ear-pleasing harmonies on the autoharp since 1990, upon meeting the first of many melody notes whose underlying chord defied my ear's harmonic expectations. The autoharp begs us to look beyond I, IV, V, and V7 so that every song and tune we play holds our listeners' rapt attention from start to finish. This is a tricky combination to pull off well! Too often, the chords chosen fulfill the melody while ignoring its harmonic foundation. The listener feels the tune's energy "sink" without knowing why. Chord choice is the culprit.

This book explains how to create brilliant harmonic buoyancy through informed chord choices, using seven simple chords plus a handful of "color" chords on both diatonic and chromatic autoharps. The journey begins with chords aplenty in Chapter 1, presented in four formats over ten keys. The chord lists include common chords familiar to the autoharpist plus less-used chords that suggest where the autoharp's future appears to be going at the time of this writing.

While the chord lists are easy ways to "connect the dots" on the music staff, they still need useful context; hence, the 21 tunes in Chapter 2. After this are chapters providing an overview of how to determine a tune's key, how suspended, diminished-seventh, augmented chords, and so on fit in, and my take on the craft of chording tunes (including "fake" chords, which enlarge the autoharp's harmonic scope in creative ways) to ensure that every tune lilts and sings. As Chapters 3, 4 and 5 are reference chapters to go to as you have need, all you have to do now is take some time to thumb through them to see what's there, rather than read them from start to finish. The *Appendix* fills in some gaps to complete the harmonic picture a little more. Finally, for aural assistance, a set of MIDI files is downloadable from my web site, www. thedulcimerlady.com.

My intention with this book is to expand the autoharpist's current thinking about harmony, so that those of us who play this seemingly simple but extraordinarily challenging musical instrument can feed yearning ears and souls all over the planet with beautiful music.

Just 'harpin' on,

Lucille

Lucille Reilly Denver, Colorado September 19, 2013

#### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

My foremost thought while writing this book was, "Is it useful?" Along the way, a generous handful of folks helped me achieve this goal.

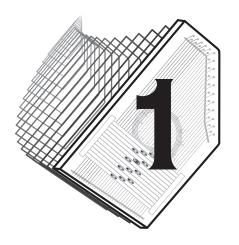
Dr. JoAnne Kyhl, composer and retired professor of music theory and composition, broadened my music-theory horizons beyond my college theory courses from years ago, while Jeb Barrett, John Collins, Rob and Louise Del Vecchio, and Dr. Nancy Ginsburg expanded on various chord insights. Dr. George Orthey divulged the history of "new" chords appearing on autoharps. Nancy Plum and autoharpists Stevie Beck and Mary-Jo Ward provided initial copy-editing advice. Sarah Gregg's eye for color helped me tweak the front-cover design. The folks at Adobe Systems' online forums offered liberal software help. Autoharpist Ruth Urban Shipley performed the final proof for stray typographical gremlins. Many folks at Frederic Printing, especially Phil Lorenzen and Aaron Kramer, ensured an uneventful printing experience from start to finish.

Six of my autoharp students got in the act: Michael Wolkomir read the entire manuscript for comprehension, as a typical autoharpist knowing just a little music theory. (He understood it all.) Kathleen Crabb, Judy Dugas, Kathleen Harris and Nancy Hay took various pages for a test drive. (When they didn't want to give the pages back, I took that to be a good sign.) And Ken Sluce, via webcam from Australia, asked me lots of questions about chording tunes; the answers to many of them made their way here.

Tom Fladmark enthusiastically kept me current about unusual chords his autoharp customers ask for by supplying a photocopy of the chord-bar labels used by many luthiers. The labels were created by autoharp friend Judy Ganser and her husband Mike Wilder, Wisconsin transplants to Denver, who cheered me on as the book progressed.

Sarah Christmyer edited my first book, *Striking Out and Winning!*, some 30 years ago when I lived in New Jersey (ironically, we met shortly after she moved back to New Jersey from Denver). I am thrilled that she had time alongside family, graduate school and work commitments to give every detail of the manuscript a thoughtful and friendly yet critical eye so that it reads well and looks good. Sarah doesn't play the autoharp, but her mother does (as did her great-grandfather!), so she knows enough about this beloved instrument to follow my story line. Sarah, I am blessed to be among the recipients of your many talents.

My husband Charles steadily made sure this book made it from computer to published product by giving me loads of time, removing untimely affectionate cats from my presence, and providing countless dinners from around the corner when writing, illustrating and designing took precedence. He asked probing questions about music theory, and in fact quipped the book's title during a brainstorming session that lasted all of ten seconds! Charles, thank you for your love, support, and belief in me and in this work.

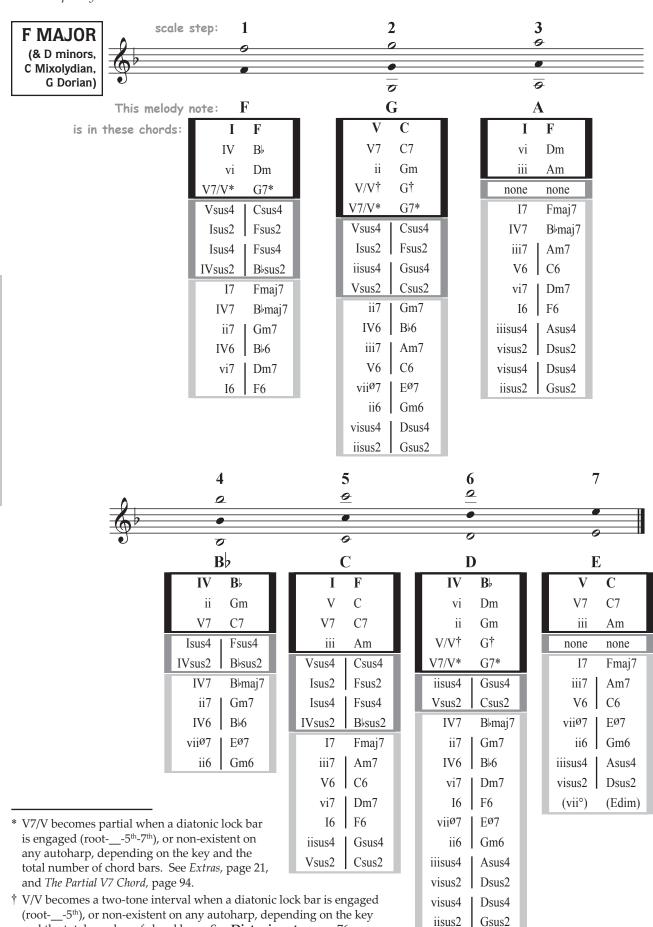


# Chorducopia

This chapter is brimming with chords to help you play tunes on the autoharp with brilliant harmonic buoyancy. Listed here are many chords in the ten most likely keys you will meet in tune books, at jam sessions, and on recordings. It's not everything (chords are a huge subject), but what's here is probably more than enough.

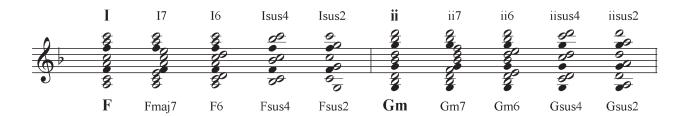
The chords for each key are displayed in four formats, as explained on pages 3-5. Not every chord listed in any one key appears on all autoharps, nor do I imply that they should. Most of the time "The Basic Seven Chords"—that is, I, ii, iii, IV, V, vi and V7—are enough. Should a tune point to a chord that is not on your autoharp, check out *Fake Chords*, page 121, which discusses how the plain major and minor chords already on your autoharp may serve as suitable alternatives. Do everything you can to exhaust all options before resorting to the effort and expense of cutting a new chord bar.

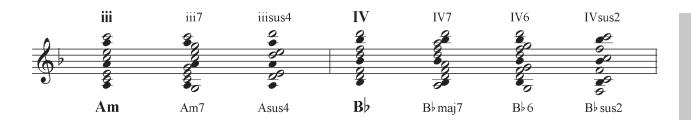
If you play a chromatic autoharp, bear in mind that some chords sound fuller than others: for example, the A<sup>l</sup> major chord usually lacks an A<sup>l</sup> bass string, making it sound "treble-y." If a tune frequently sounds a less-used chord and transposing the tune to a rounder-sounding key is not an option (because you are playing with an ensemble, for example), you can either re-work the string tuning and felts (a big job that even I don't relish undertaking) or see if the tune can be played on a stronger sounding diatonic autoharp.

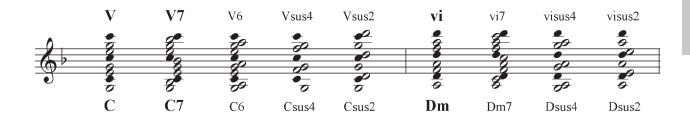


and the total number of chord bars. See Diatonic note, page 76.

# F MAJOR's chords in tune range









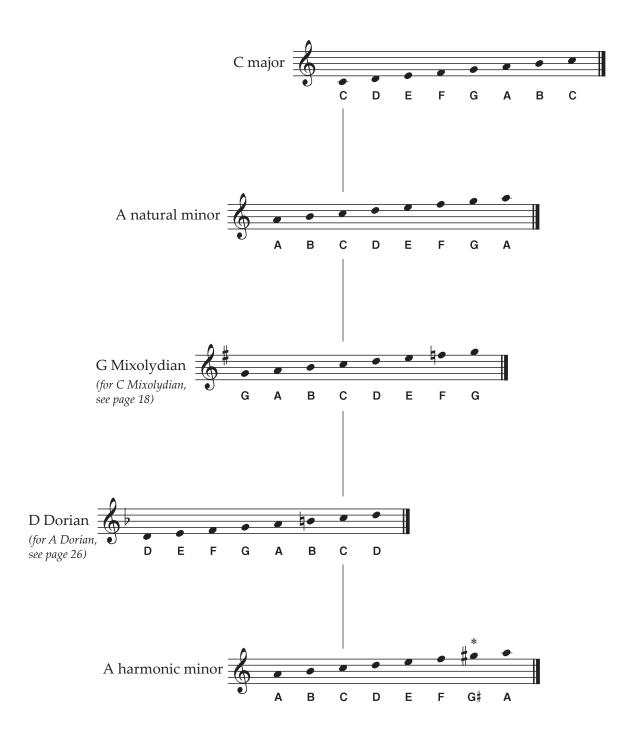
<sup>\*</sup> The diminished chord (or triad, page 141) can be found as 3<sup>rd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> of V7. It is little used in classical music and is shown here just for the record. Do not confuse the diminished chord with the *diminished-seventh* chord (at "§" above and below, and page 102).

<sup>†</sup> The lowered 7th of I7h (Eh) is outside of F major. See The I7h Chord, page 94.

<sup>‡</sup> The raised 3<sup>rd</sup> of V/V and V7/V (B) is outside of F major. V7p/V lacks B, giving V7/V presence on the autoharp when needed. See *The Partial V7 Chord*, page 94.

<sup>§</sup> A diminished seventh chord, whose 7th, Db, is outside of F major. See page 102.

# Scales and modes sharing the C MAJOR pitch set

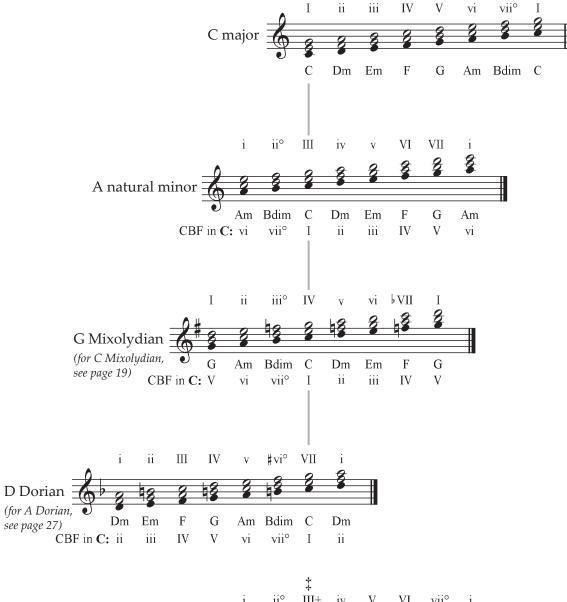


# Parallel keys:

C natural minor: page 10. C Mixolydian: page 18. C harmonic minor: page 10. C Dorian: page 14.

<sup>\*</sup> G# is outside of C major's pitch set. See how this tone alters the harmonic minor triad series on KC2.

# Triad series\* for C MAJOR, its relative keys and modes





# Parallel keys:

C natural minor: page 11. C Mixolydian: page 19. C harmonic minor: page 11. C Dorian: page 15.

<sup>\*</sup> For four-tone seventh chords, including V7 and v7, see KC4 for this key and page 92.

<sup>†</sup> CBF=Chord by Feel chords; see page 78. ‡ Augmented triad; see page 105.

# **All Those Endearing Young Charms**

<u>Key</u>: G major, page 72. This lovely, sentimental waltz takes advantage of the iii chord to extend the sound of V; see *iii*, *a.k.a.* "The Fake V Chord," page 121.



pick-up into m. 1: See page 123.

mm. 4, 12, 20, 28 (*CC*): V-IV are *neighbor chords*, see *Sound Tests*, page 134. mm. 8, 24, beat 3: Slide the button finger from iii to V, and pinch iii with a closed string hand so that the thumb strikes a high bass tone to complement V. pick-up to m. 17 (*CC*): Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to pinch the first pick-up note, D, *without* also sounding V7's 7<sup>th</sup> (C), for a clean sound. m. 26: In G major, I7<sup>b</sup>=G7, if you wish to play it; see page 94.

#### A SIMPLE WAY TO FIND A TUNE'S KEY

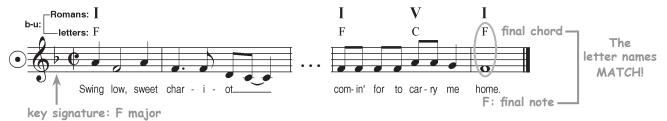
I struggled with key signatures in grade school when I was first learning about music and its written language. That's when our classroom music teacher told us a simple, helpful thing:

#### When you want to know what a song's key is, look at the last note.

The last note is indeed a good start, although I've since found that the letter name of the last chord, the letter name of the first chord, the key signature, recurring pitches in the tune, even how the score looks, can also help. Because letter chords point to a tune's key more readily than Roman numeral chords, you will see both throughout this chapter.

#### **MAJOR KEYS**

Tune example: "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot."



The score is clean.

The final note is F, the final chord is F major (the I chord), and the key signature is F major. "Swing Low" is in F major (see page 18).

**About "clean" and "not clean" scores:** "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot" is one of many tunes whose *score* (music notation on the staves) is *clean;* that is, no *accidentals* (sharps, flats or natural signs:  $\sharp$ ,  $\flat$ ,  $\dagger$ ) appear in front of any melody notes. Elsewhere in this chapter, and in Chapter 2, you will also see scores that are *not clean,* showing at least one accidental that impacts either the tune's key or a chord choice or both.

Let's find the key to another song:

Tune example: "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star."



This time, the final note is G, the final chord is G major (the I chord) and the key signature is G major. "Twinkle" is in G major (page 26).

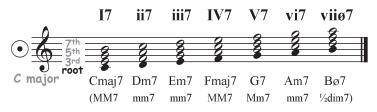
While the letter names of the final note and final chord match in many major-key tunes, there are always exceptions, as in this next tune:



#### SEVENTH CHORDS

Stack a 7<sup>th</sup> atop any triad's root-3<sup>rd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup>, and you've got a *seventh chord*.

At right is a series of seventh chords atop the tones of the C major scale, using just the scale's tones to create the chords. All of the following types are possible on diatonic and chromatic autoharps:



M, maj=major m=minor dim=diminished φ=half diminished

**Major triad + minor 7**th: V7, also known as a *dominant seventh* (and *major-minor*) chord. All seventh chords on traditional diatonic and chromatic autoharps are dominant seventh chords.

**Major triad + major 7**<sup>th</sup>: I7 and IV7. Some custom autoharps include these *major-major seventh* chords.

**Minor triad + minor** 7<sup>th</sup>: ii7, iii7 and vi7, with ii7 at the forefront of *minor-minor seventh* chords installed on diatonic autoharps.

**Diminished triad + minor** 7<sup>th</sup>: viiø7, or the *half-diminished seventh* chord, has interesting possibilities; see *Relentless Color*, page 95.

Keyboard illustrations of the above chords appear on page 142.

Other seventh chords that can be set up on the autoharp are:

**Minor triad + major 7**<sup>th</sup>: The *minor-major seventh* chord comes from steps 1-3-5-7 of the harmonic minor scale (KC1 in Chapter 1).

**Diminished triad + diminished 7**<sup>th</sup>: A *diminished-seventh* chord (see page 102).

#### What Makes a Seventh Chord a Color Chord?

Dissonance and usage render seventh chords colorful.

The root-position seventh chords at the top of this page don't look dissonant. But now look at G7's chord tones within the autoharp's pitch range at right. The 7<sup>th</sup> and root sit next to each other in three places (circled), creating dissonance and the seventh chord's color.



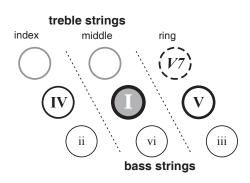
#### **Occasional Color**

V7, its partial cousin V7p, and I7, all dominant seventh chords, are the likely candidates providing occasional color.

#### The V7 Chord

V7 has been present on the autoharp since its humble beginning. See its placement at right.

You may not think of V7 as a color chord, because many folk-song books use it exclusively. However, when V7 is played all the time, it *loses* its color. V7 also cannot show its color when it is a hidden chord (see the tutorial on page 48).



When playing the autoharp upright against the chest, swing your button elbow away from your torso to pivot the button hand and ease the downward reach to V7.

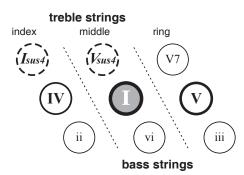
#### FOR DIATONIC AUTOHARPS ONLY: SUSPENDED-FOURTH CHORDS

Where major and minor triads are root-3<sup>rd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup>, a *suspended-fourth* (sus4) chord is root-4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup>. Compare D major (D-F‡-A) to Dsus4 (D-G-A) at right. Sus4 chords show visible clash on the music staff, telling us they are color chords, too.

Sus4 chords appear on 1- and 2-key diatonic autoharps. The chord-button illustration at right shows where the most common sus4 chords, Vsus4 and Isus4, live in the first-named key on my 2-key autoharps. They do well in my "treble-strings" button row with the seventh chords because I play them infrequently.

Chromatic and 3-key diatonic autoharps don't usually include suspended chords due to chord-bar space limitations. However, IV can substitute for sus4; see "Si Bheag, Si Mhor," page 64.

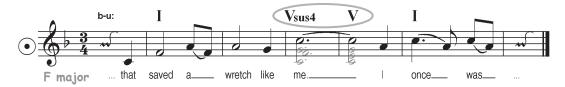




## The Vsus4 Chord

Of all the sus4 chords an autoharp can have, Vsus4 is the best known. Unlike V7, Vsus4 works in combination with V by *preceding* it: Vsus4-V.

Tune example: Phrase 2 of "Amazing Grace." Sing and strum the chords:



Now sing and strum phrase 2 of "Amazing Grace" at the top of page 93 to compare it with V7's "blooming" sound. Talk about color!

**Chording tunes with Vsus4:** When back-up chording or playing melody, Vsus4-V fits wherever there are at least 2 counts of V.

*Tune example:* "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star." Play the melody, using the chords shown.



V7 is a hidden chord! See page 48.

This is the "church sound" of 18th-century music, especially hymn tunes harmonized by Johann Sebastian Bach (to whom I bend the knee).

The <u>underlined</u> V over the second staff has 2 counts, yet I've left it alone. Vsus4 doesn't make the same kind of sense here that it does at the end of the staff, where "D.C." tells us the song continues.

#### THE MAGIC OF SAME-INTERVAL CHORDS

Major and minor triads are short-stack combinations of major and minor 3<sup>rd</sup>s, shown at right and on page 141.



Some chords stack *only* major 3<sup>rd</sup>s or minor 3<sup>rd</sup>s, expanding the autoharp's harmonic possibilities.

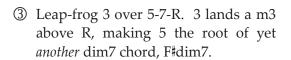
# For Chromatic Autoharps Only: Diminished-Seventh Chords

If you play diatonic autoharp, either include chromatic in your multi-stringed passion or take a look at the sus4 consolation prize on page 128.

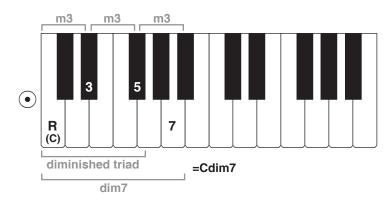
When all tones of a root-position seventh chord are stacked at minor 3<sup>rd</sup>s apart (m3), it's a *diminished-seventh chord* (dim7 or °7).

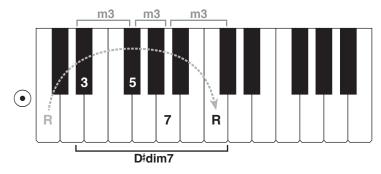
The magic of the dim7 chord is this (using keyboards to make them easy to see):

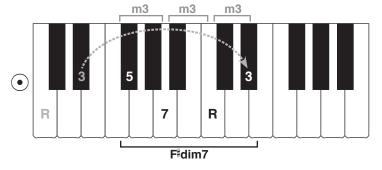
- ① Let's start with Cdim7 at right. All tones are a m3 apart, as shown by the grey brackets above the keyboard.
- ② Now leap-frog Cdim7's root (R) up one octave, over 3-5-7. R lands a m3 above 7 (brackets and intervals above the keyboard shift), making 3 the root of *another* dim7 chord, D‡dim7.

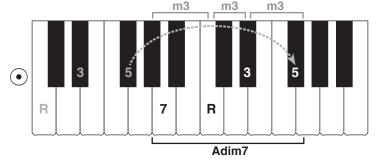


① Leap-frog 5 over 7-R-3. 5 lands a m3 above 3, making 7 the root of still another dim7 chord, Adim7. (When 7 leap-frogs, R returns to root position, and the cycle begins anew.)









Cdim7, D#dim7, F#dim7 and Adim7 all use *the same* four piano keys. The autoharp needs just *one* chord bar to sound all four dim7 chords!

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### Every Autoharpist's Back-Up-Chord Challenge

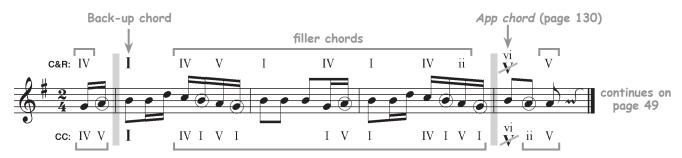
Our biggest challenge is finding the least number of back-up chords that fit a tune's harmonic structure. Because we depress many chords to play a tune—especially note-y ones like fiddle tunes—it's easy to add unnecessary chords. For example, should an upbeat chord among your back-up chords "hiccup" in a tune, test it by singing the tune and strumming the back-up chords without the hiccuping chord. If the tune sounds fine without it, then the chord wasn't a back-up chord.

#### BACK-UP CHORDS + FILLER CHORDS = HARMONIZED TUNE

Once the back-up chords are in place, we add *filler chords* to sound every melody note in the tune as written (no pitch substitutions!). It takes back-up *and* filler chords to play a harmonized tune.

Chord-and-release note: Before you look for filler chords, circle the upbeat notes to be sounded by releasing the chord bar ( , , ). Most released upbeats step away (up or down) from the downbeats before them, while a few skip away, as seen in this chapter and in Chapter 2.

Here is phrase 1 of "The White Cockade," showing filler chords (normal type inside grey brackets) between the back-up chords.



Well-chosen filler chords support each back-up chord through its entire territory. Notice that the bold **I**-chord territory above includes I chords in normal type, too. These I chords are filler chords, not back-up chords, because a back-up chord **I** would never land in these places.

Filler chords often amplify the total number of chords it takes to play a harmonized tune, by a little or a lot. In "The White Cockade" on page 49, the number of chord-and-release chords for diatonic autoharp almost doubles over the back-up chords. When chording continuously on diatonic or chromatic autoharp, the chords swell more than fivefold!

When adding filler chords, always remember:

#### The back-up chords stay put!

Don't let the score fool you in these and similar ways:

- <u>"Mismatched" letter chord</u>: A broken Am chord in the melody may fare better with the C back-up chord shown. Don't change C to Am.
- <u>Placement</u>: Don't remove a D major chord, or move it forward or back, because it is placed over a G melody note that's not in the chord. Clash of melody note and back-up chord is natural and happens all the time, as explained in *Appoggiaturas*, page 129.

Ears process chords more precisely than eyes ever will!



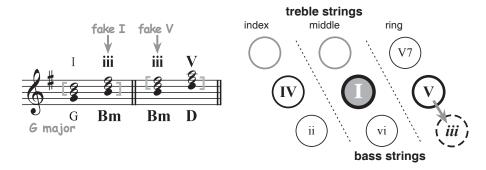
#### **FAKE CHORDS**

It's easy to think that major and minor chords are what they are and nothing more. Yet tunes played on the autoharp sometimes invite major chords to masquerade as minor chords, and minor chords to masquerade as major chords, to satisfy back-up-chord territories. When this happens, these otherwise "plain" chords become what I call *fake chords*.

#### iii, a.k.a. "The Fake V Chord"

The iii chord is the least used Basic Seven Chord (even in classical music); however, its usefulness as a fake chord on the autoharp is unparalleled.

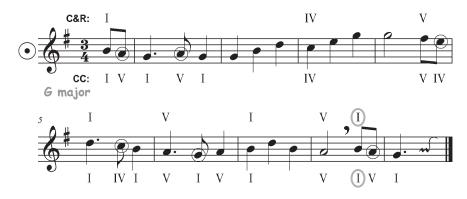
To find iii, set your button fingers atop any major-key Home Position. Now move your ring finger from V within its diagonal column to iii in the minor-chord row.



When playing the autoharp upright against the chest, move your button elbow towards your side to pivot the button hand and ease the upward reach to iii.

I call iii "the fake V chord" because it shares two tones with V (grey brackets above). To a lesser extent, iii is also "the fake I chord" because it also shares two tones with the I chord.

*Tune example:* mm. 1-9 of "All Those Endearing Young Charms," page 51. Pick the melody and sound its harmony, using the chords shown for your chording method.



What makes me squirm: The I chord in m. 8 (circled) sounds early.



#### **General Index**

Letter names of scale and mode keys, and chords and triad series, appear first under letters A-G. See the *Roman Numeral Chord Index* (RNCI) to locate a specific chord by numeral.

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