

Swing Picking: A Jamming Odyssey!

2025's featured topic for the

Phoenix Autoharp Retreat

taught by Lucille Reilly

Tuesday (er, Tuesday) dinner, Feb. 25, 2025
thru Friday dinner, Feb. 28, 2025

Is jamming *really* all about playing the same melody and chords to “Wildwood Flower” (etc.) over and over? Isn’t there more to jamming than this? The bluegrass jammers *know* there is: they routinely invent solo breaks off the cuff all over their fretboards. Yes, everyone can—and should!—expect to hear *this* kind of jamming in every jam session. But...

Is creative, off-the-cuff jamming possible on the autoharp? Yes! All you need is a handful of songs/tunes with easy back-up chords, one technique, a GD diatonic autoharp and an engaged ear to *Swing Pick* your way through all kinds of solo breaks and harmonizations. All of this and more can be yours at the 2025 Phoenix Autoharp Retreat (PAR).

PAR 2025’s transformative jamming journey over 3+ days will include:

- a “play-thru jam” of PAR 2025’s core music list (see the info with link on page 2);
- *diatonic* Swing Picking from the beginning up, based on the core song list;
- what the string hand and button hand do, presented separately and together;
- how to sound single strings singly and accurately (yes!—prepare to be amazed);
- improvising *melodic* solo breaks by ear (easier than you think);
- an easy intro to Chord-and-Release autoharping (C&R; a.k.a, “open chording”);
- guided jams to practice Swing Picking solo breaks of your own invention;
- Jamming/Swing Picking to one of *your* favorite tunes (bring a tune to share);
- jamming strategies, your autoharping questions answered, and more.

You will come away from PAR knowing how to jam heartily on a *diatonic* autoharp in harmonic *and* melodic ways. (See page 3 for important diatonic-autoharp specifications.)

PAR’s 3+ days of instruction also come with supportive handouts, engaging music discussions, delicious meals, impromptu jamming (ah, more Swing Picking opportunities!), and celebrating our accomplishments, all in an atmosphere of good fun and fellowship.

Take a look at the *List of Playing Actions* you’ll need *before* PAR 2025 begins (page 2) and *About “The Beginning”* (page 9). Then sign on and get ready to jam inventively!

The Phoenix Autoharp Retreat is limited to 14 PARticipants to maximize on personal attention. Reserve your spot today by filling out the registration form on pages 6-8.

List of Playing Actions for Swing Picking

The following, short list of playing actions needs to be established in your autoharp playing *before* PAR convenes. From this much, we will forge ahead into how to Swing Pick.

- Basic strumming: constant, steady down/up strokes;
strumming in rhythm (“bum diddy,” etc.) steadily; *all with...*
- Seamless chord changes while singing along and strumming. *For at-home practice:*
- Sing and strum all songs in PAR’s cored tune list, found at
<https://www.thedulcimerlady.com/teaching/par;>
(copy and paste the link in your browser, then scroll down a bit to access the song list).

NOTE: How to play the songs/tunes in the core tune list on the autoharp will *not* be taught! Instead, we will *jam creatively* to them via Swing Picking. It’s fine to sing the songs and strum their back-up chords. With this much, you can do a lot at PAR 2025!



Secrets of Musical Autoharping (2018): A hands-on, musical moment.

I especially liked becoming aware of various ways to help the autoharp sound full and beautiful... My playing improved and I feel confident to continue playing the autoharp.

[Lucille replies: Hooray!]
—HM, Arizona



Filigree Fingerpicking (2019):
Sometimes the teacher keeps time with her head!

Essential Items to Bring to PAR 2025 for Swing Picking

GD or GDA diatonic autoharp with a lock bar for each key (required!).

About lock bars: Lock bars are essential to “Chord-and-Release” (C&R, a.k.a. “open chord-ing”) autoharping. They allow you to advance to clear-sounding solo breaks quickly. Without lock bars, crisp, clear playing will difficult to master and will frustrate both you and us. **Do not bluff yourself into thinking you can get by without lock bars. You can’t!** Give yourself your best shot at Swing Picking with the help of lock bars.

If you need advice about lock bars, contact us immediately. While we’re at it,...

No chromatic autoharps. C&R Swing Picking is incompatible with chromatic tunings.

Needed chords: Ensure that you GD or GDA diatonic autoharp has *all* of the following chords to enable playing in The People’s Keys of G & D major with ease:

C, G, D, A; Am, Em, Bm, F#m; D7, A7

If your diatonic autoharp has sus4 or m7 chords, leave them on. (Who knows?)

Autoharp Stabilizer: *required;* the autoharp needs to support itself without your arms’ help. Both arms need to move freely to Swing Pick on *all* of the autoharp’s strings.

Hip Pouch (for playing the autoharp upright): Fill the pouch with peanuts *in the shell*, pistachio shells or large, dry beans. *Do not* use Styrofoam peanuts or plastic grocery sacks; these *do not work!* (We tested them ages ago so you don’t have to.)

To see a photo of a suitable pouch, go to <https://thedulcimerlady.com/teaching/fohp/> and click on *How to Set Up the Hip Pouch for Autoharping* in the Contents list. *Note the belt-length requirements* beneath the photo. The belt needs to be longer than you think in order for the hip pouch to do its job well. Finally, a pouch’s zipper works best when it follows the edge of a *curved* lid, as shown in the photo. A zipper going over the top and across the center of a wide gusset can’t hold the autoharp in place as well.

Thrift shops often sell pouches of similar size and design for cheap. Check there first.

Guitar Strap (for playing flat on the lap): Look for an adjustable strap that can extend long enough to set the autoharp a hefty distance from your torso. (The strap needs to be longer than you think!) Obviously, a guitar strap needs to be attached to an autoharp having screw-in strap buttons; install these buttons at home, *before* coming to PAR.

Picks: Absolutely! (No bare fingers; playing without picks cramps the string hand.)

Bring *three* finger picks of the same brand, gauge and material and
a thumb pick with a firm, broad blade
 (“flicker” thumb-pick blades can’t put out firm sound)

I learned more in three days at PAR than at any of the festivals I’ve attended. PAR gave me permission to play more strings and produce a full sound....well worth the time and money!
—MC, Arizona

Meet PAR's Instructor



Lucille Reilly

2019 Autoharp Hall of Famer

1995/2010/2015 Mountain Laurel Autoharp Champion

1995/2003/2010 International Autoharp Champion

Life-long musician and performer

Former feature editor of "The Diatonic Corner"
in *Autoharp Quarterly* magazine and
Accidental Autoharp Historian (AAH!)

"The best autoharp teacher in the world."
—Mike Fenton, *Autoharp Hall of Famer*,
Hereford, England

Lucille Reilly (www.thedulcimerlady.com) brings a wealth of autoharping wisdom and history to all autoharpists, all with endearing humor. She delights in helping every autoharpist sound good, using an easy and accessible, how-oriented teaching approach.

Lucille's students live all over the world: close to home in metro Denver, Colorado, incoming "B&B students" from out of state, and via webcam from anywhere else. She frequently presents workshops and classes at the major U.S. autoharp events, and has taught at the Southern Belles Autoharp Workshop in Georgia, John C. Campbell Folk School in North Carolina, and Sore Fingers Summer School in the UK.

She is the author of *Chords Aplenty*, a reference book devoted to finding great chords for all music genres played on the autoharp, and a monograph series devoted to the Chord-and-Release method of autoharping.

Everything Lucille offers when teaching stems from decades of honing and studying those technical skills that make her a consummate musician both in concert and on her three CDs: *All in a Garden Green* (solos played on six diatonic autoharps), *Contra-Intuitive* (imaginatively crafted fiddle tunes on hammered dulcimer with expert piano accompaniment), and *Thus Sing My Soul* (inspiring hymn solos on diatonic autoharp and hammered dulcimer).

***Music is all about how it sounds.
Discover how to achieve it
at the Phoenix Autoharp Retreat!***

—Midori Hall



Fabulous Fill-Ins (2023): Filling in fabulously while jamming on the patio after class.

I like learning and playing with fellow autoharpists and appreciate the emphasis on tweaking playing basics when we needed it. I now have a clearer understanding of how to make beautiful music on the autoharp because I discovered how to make mine *sing* at PAR!
—GE, Connecticut

Cost and How to Register

\$616.00 includes all hands-on/ears-on instruction, handouts, extra help from the instructor when you need it, and all meals from dinner Tuesday, February 25 through dinner Friday, February 28, 2025.

To register, fill out the form on pages 6-8 and mail it with your check or money order.

Postmark payment in full by Monday, February 10, 2025.

Got a question? Email (replace at and dot with “@” and “.” first!), call or text:

Midori Hall: 480/220-9243; midorihall at cox dot net *or*

June Fessenden: jsfessenden at gmail dot com *or*

Lucille Reilly: 303/408-3140; thedulcimerlady at junodot com

Phoenix Autoharp Retreat

Ah, that sounds wonderful!

Swing Picking: A Jamming Odyssey!

Tuesday dinner thru Friday dinner, Feb. 25-28, 2025

2025 REGISTRATION FORM (page 1 of 3)

To print the registration form only, select pages 6-8 in your Print dialog box.

- YES! I am eager to expand my jamming options with *Swing Picking at the Phoenix Autoharp Retreat!*** Enclosed is my check or money order for \$616.00, to include all workshops, handouts, meals and sheer fun from Tuesday dinner through Friday dinner, February 25-28, 2025.
- I understand that Swing Picking requires a GD or GDA diatonic autoharp with a lock bar installed for each key, as per the Diatonic Autoharp Requirements at the top of page 3.

Name (one form per registrant; please print): _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State _____ Zip _____

Telephone: Daytime: _____ Evening: _____

Mobile: _____

Email Address: _____

Additional Meals Request

- Please send info about meal costs for a non-autoharpist who will be with me in Phoenix and would like to join us for some to all of the meals.

One page done; two to go!

PAR 2025 REGISTRATION FORM (page 2 of 3)

Swing Picking

Tuesday Dinner through Friday Dinner, Feb. 25-28, 2025

Your name (please print):: _____

Emergency contact information (*required*)

Name: _____ Phone: _____

Relationship: _____

Other Information:

Food Allergies: _____

Special Physical Needs: _____

Flying/Arriving From: _____

Where will you be staying during PAR? _____

We'd love to know: How did you learn about PAR? _____

Phoenix-area PARTICIPANTS: Would you be able to house a fly-in PARTICIPANT?

Yes___ No___

(The Retreat includes all meals, so you will not also have to feed this person.)

Almost done! One page to go!

PAR 2025 REGISTRATION FORM (page 3 of 3)

Swing Picking

Tuesday Dinner through Friday Dinner, Feb. 25-28, 2025

ASSUMPTION OF RISK AGREEMENT AND RELEASE

This event is run by volunteer organizers who provide their services and efforts for the benefit of all. For obvious reasons, these volunteers cannot be held personally liable for damages to property or injuries to participants during the Retreat. Therefore, we require all participants to indicate their understanding and agreement with this principle by signing this Release as part of the Retreat’s registration process.

In consideration of the undersigned Attendee being allowed to participate in the 2025 Phoenix Autoharp Retreat, *Swing Picking*:

- Attendee releases the volunteer organizers (“Releasees”) from any liability for all claims, including claims for the negligence of Releasees, whether known or unknown, anticipated or unanticipated, which may result or arise out of Attendee attending and traveling to and from the Retreat.
- Attendee relinquishes all rights to sue or make a claim against releases.
- Attendee recognizes the risks of damage to property or injury to persons that may occur while traveling to and from, and participating in activities at the Retreat.
- Attendee will indemnify Releasees from claims of others against Releasees regarding any damage or injury that I either cause or receive.

The undersigned, intending to be legally bound, has read this release and has executed it with full understanding of its meaning.

Attendee Name (printed): _____

Attendee Signature: _____

Date: _____

All done!

Make your check or money order for \$616.00, payable to
James A. Hall (our Registrar), and mail it to:

James A. Hall (email: jhall26_at_cox_dot_net)
95 N. Mondel Drive
Gilbert, AZ 85233-5124

Please write PAR 2025 in the memo line.

Postmark payment in full on or before Monday, February 10, 2025.

CANCELLATION POLICY

1. A \$50.00 administrative fee will be withheld for cancellations occurring on or after Tuesday, Feb. 11 through Monday, Feb. 17, 2025.
2. No refunds after Monday, Feb. 17, 2025.
3. Emergency refunds will be considered on a case-by-case basis on or after Tuesday, Feb. 18, 2025.

About “The Beginning”

While every technique presented at the Phoenix Autoharp Retreat (PAR) is taught from the beginning, we wish to emphasize that it is a *modified* beginning. PAR is geared for autoharpists who play the autoharp regularly and desire to increase and diversify their playing proficiency and overall sound. PAR is not designed for brand-new players.

PAR does not specify a “playing level” (i.e., beginning / intermediate / advanced) to each year’s featured topic, mainly because no one seems to know what a beginning, intermediate or advanced player *is*. Also, instructor Lucille Reilly has observed over her decades of workshop teaching that autoharpists who have played a short time catch on readily to new techniques when the instruction is organized and paced to grasp. Why limit autoharpists to a level?

PAR supplies instead a short list of playing actions that all PARTicipants need to be familiar with and comfortable with *before* each Retreat begins. All playing actions in the list are common fare for most autoharpists and include, but are not limited to: strum, pinch, pluck, changing chords, etc. (See page 2 for this year’s list.) From here, Lucille weaves all playing actions together step by step at a comfortable pace to help each PARTicipant make the featured technique his/her own. The list on page 2 also places everyone on common ground. PARTicipants in past years have expressed how grateful they are to fit in without a “playing level” to live up to! We hope this is true for you as well.

We emphasize again that PAR is for those who actively play the autoharp. If you are just beginning to play at this time (guitarists are “newbies,” too: 36+ strings feel and play a lot differently than six strings), *or* you played the autoharp many years ago and are just now starting up again, either bring yourself up to speed by playing a handful of simple songs to “burn in” the playing actions on page 2, or plan to join us at PAR (and a new topic) next year.

Finally, every topic featured at PAR stands on its own as a complete, 3+–day unit. PAR has never been, and cannot be, “the continuing story of _____.” The only thing a first-time PARTicipant misses is a previously featured, want-to-know topic. (See the next two pages listing PAR’s past and future topics. With enough interest, Lucille will gladly repeat a topic taught before. Just let us know.) Every year, first-time PARTicipants find themselves on a “par” with PARTicipants who have attended in previous years.



Fabulous Fill-ins (2023): Lucille Reilly demonstrates how to fill in fabulously all over the autoharp’s strings.

I was very pleased with what I learned! Thank you for your thorough coverage of playing concepts, particularly when it comes to hand use.

—LS, Texas

Past Phoenix Autoharp Retreat Topics

- 2018: Secrets of Musical Autoharping: including 200+ ways to pinch!
- 2019: Filigree Fingerpicking: finger independence toward playing single strings.
- 2020: Orchestration on Solo Autoharp: varying fills and exploring dynamic range.
(2021: No PAR due to the Covid-19 pandemic.)
- 2022: Travis Picking: a desired guitar technique that adapts well to the autoharp.
- 2023: Fabulous Fill-Ins: intuitively brush between pinches by ear.
- 2024: Lotsa Strings, Lotsa Sound: string texture with big, long pinches.

Will any of the above be repeated?

They can be! Just make a request!



Orchestration (2020): PARTicipants thumb their noses at the teacher (far left—and at her request!). You, too, can join in the fun! (This “pose,” by the way, leads to a really useful technique!)

Future Topics Requested by Our PARTicipants

These topics have yet to be presented. Want one or more? Ya gotta tell us!

Beginning Autoharp: A true beginner's PAR, starting at the *very* beginning; includes set-up and strumming/singing along, while moving at an easy, comfortable pace. Maybe a little fingerpicking, too?

Solid, Basic Chords for Harmonized Melody Playing: We will play some tunes for exploration (yours and Lucille's), turn our ears on, and discover (um, learn to live with) the autoharp's quirky take on basic harmony.

Intro to Harmonic Variation: Change/add to the basic chords of the songs you already know how to play and surprise the ears you play for—including your own!— with fresh, harmonic surprises!

The Diatonic, Chord-and-Release Method of Autoharping (C&R): Lucille says C&R is the most fun you can have playing an autoharp. Here is your chance to find out why! We will ease into “pumping felt,” leading to harmonizing a couple easy melodies, while discovering which tunes lend themselves well to C&R. (All PARTicipants for this topic need a GD or GDA diatonic autoharp *with lock bars*. C&R playing is incompatible with chromatic autoharps.)

Intro to Melodic Variation: Take simple songs to the moon and back by inventing new ways to play them. The possibilities are endless with this skill's source.

De-clunking Endless Chord Changes: All those chords we need when Continuous Chording (CC) tend to make melodies played on any autoharp sound, well, clunky. Find out how to trade clunk for clarity and harmony alongside every melody you play.

And what have you? Do tell us!

PAR offers every autoharpist a tried and true way to play the autoharp with a full sound!
—WE, Arizona

The Phoenix Autoharp Retreat: A History

The Phoenix Autoharp Retreat (PAR) was conceived by Phoenix autoharpists Midori Hall and June Fessenden. June and Midori recognized a need to understand *how* to execute, combine and manage the various autoharp playing actions into memorable music, something they both continually guessed about in workshops devoted to learning tunes. (They knew plenty of tunes, but didn't feel like they could play any of them well. And they *wanted* to play well!)

In the summer of 2016, Midori and her husband Jim met Lucille Reilly for the first time at the Northwest Autoharp Gathering, where Lucille was a featured performer and workshop leader. Midori attended all of Lucille's workshops at that event and became energized by the content. Soon after this, June and Midori connected and talked autoharp for a long while.

In October 2016, June returned to metro Denver, Colorado for a second round of "B&B" autoharp lessons with Lucille to continue fulfilling her hunger to know *How* to play the autoharp well through music already in her head, heart, hands and soul. Once back home in Phoenix, June talked autoharp instruction all the more fervently with Midori. They soon envisioned a retreat where they and many other autoharpists having the same passion for playing well would be able to "fill in the blanks" and bump up their "techno-musical" proficiency without having to guess at it.

In mid-2017, June and Midori approached Lucille about being the teacher for the retreat they had in mind. (After all, Lucille had already been hot on the trail of making both the autoharp and its music sound good for at least a couple decades, and still is.) Lucille agreed to meet the challenge, and with that, Midori, June and Lucille launched the first *Phoenix Autoharp Retreat* in February 2018.



L to R: June Fessenden, Lucille Reilly and Midori Hall, the envisioners of the Phoenix Autoharp Retreat.