

## SONG Virtual Composition Project 2021 Writing for the Harp: Summary Handout

### Types of Harp

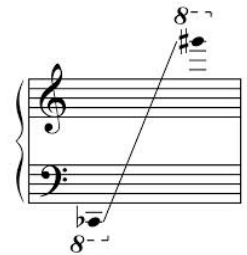
There are two main types of harp in Western culture:

- the lever (folk) harp - smaller, less loud and has a thinner, more 'folk-like' sound
- pedal (concert) harp - bigger, usually louder and has a wider range of notes

During this project, you're going to be **writing for the pedal (concert) harp**.

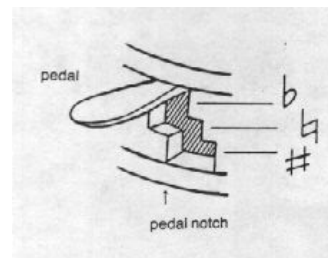
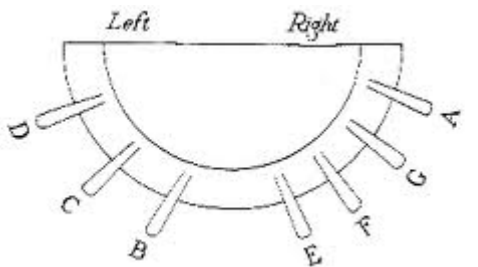
### Range of the Harp

The harp has a huge range, just a tiny bit smaller than the range of a piano. This diagram shows you the lowest and highest possible notes on the pedal harp.



### Pedal System

The harp has seven pedals, one for each note of the scale, and each pedal has three positions, one each for flat, natural and sharp - this is how the harp achieves different keys and accidentals.



**DON'T PANIC!** At this stage, it's just good for you to be aware of how the harp works, but don't let it worry you. Just remember that every time you use a different 'type' of note (e.g. you change from using a C natural to a C#), the harpist will

need to move a pedal to achieve this. This is our problem, and we are very good at it - you don't need to avoid accidentals altogether!

### Music Layout

If you are using conventional notation (which is by no means compulsory), a harp score looks exactly like a piano score, with a treble and bass stave, for right and left hands respectively:



### Articulation

Just like on the other instruments, don't forget to tell us how you'd like us to play the notes, as well as telling us which notes to play. On the harp, one of the easiest ways to demonstrate this is through chords:

- **Short** - use a 'staccato' dot above or below your note(s) and I will cut off the sound as soon as I can
- **Long** - the strings on the harp can resonate for a very long time. If you'd actively like this to happen, use the abbreviation L.V. to let me know: this stands for 'laissez vibrer - let ring'
- **Accented** - if you want something to be emphasised, just write this sideways V sign above the note or chord
- **Spread** - we often 'spread' chords on the harp. Simply use a wiggly line to show you'd like this to happen. Harpists assume you want us to play the chord from the bottom up. If not - just put a downward arrow on your wiggly line. You can also specify whether you'd like the chord to be spread quickly or slowly (just write what you fancy by the chord)!



### A few things to avoid when writing for the harp

- **Five (or ten)** note chords or patterns (harpists only use **four** fingers in each hand to play, not all five like pianists)
- The hands playing at opposite ends of the harp
- Too much quick jumping around between different registers
- Playing very low with both hands

### Some effective textures to use on the harp

- **Chords**
- **Repetitive patterns** – you could pick a chord or chord sequence and have the harp repeating these notes in a rhythmical pattern
- **Single or parallel lines** – don't be afraid just to write one single line for the harp: this can be very effective. If you'd like more depth to the sound, you can double the line an octave higher or lower with the other hand
- **Bass notes** – the harp has an impressive bass resonance: don't be afraid to use it a bit like a bass guitar!

### Special Sounds / 'Extended Techniques'

- **Harmonics** – they sound an octave higher than written and sound magical on the harp



- **Glissando** – sliding the finger along the strings. You can also ask the harpist to use their nails for this (just write the crescent moon shape below). You can pick any scale or chord for your glissando – just write the chord/scale name, or individual note names, on your music

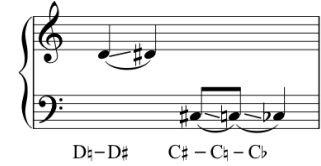


Nail Glissando



- **Percussive effects** - the harpist can drum on the body of the harp using different parts of their hand to get different sounds. Simply write out the rhythm you'd like, and make it clear that this is a percussive part, not a pitched part

- **Pedal slide** - the harpist moves the pedal while the string is still resonating to create a slide effect



- **Pedal buzz** - the harpist holds the pedal between two notches so that the string buzzes against the mechanism (this only works well on the low wire strings)



- **Air sound** - we can create an eerie sound by rubbing our palm or an object along the lower strings that are coated in wire. Simply write 'air sound' to indicate this, along with a note value.