

## TEACH-IN: **You Are My Sunshine**

As a beginning autoharp player, you can select a simple song that is familiar to almost everyone you might meet in a music circumstance. As you begin to learn, you must realize that songs are composed with three basic parts; the melody, the timing and chords.

On the autoharp the chords are the easiest to learn since the chord bars allow you to select the chord you want by simply holding a chord bar down with one finger. Next on the autoharp is the strumming of the strings in such a way that the timing of the song comes out and fits nicely with the melody notes that are being sung or played. Let us illustrate chord selections and strum patterns for the song: **You Are My Sunshine.**

First we will decide to play and sing the song in the key of C. . Your first strum should be from lowest strings (the long ones) to highest and this can be done with just your thumb either with a thumbpick or not. Your second strum should be from the highest strings (the short ones) to the lowest and this can be done with one or two fingers either with finger picks on or not. So now At this point you have discovered how much pressure to use to hold the C-chord down and how to gently glide the thumb over the full range of strings to have the full sound of the C-chord coming out of your autoharp (which should be in tune by-the way). Also your backward strum gives another version of the C-chord for your ears to hear.

Now let us apply these strum skills to the first two phrases of the song :  
You are my sun - shine  
My on - ly sun - shine..

We will use only the C-chord for these two lines of the song and we will start with a simple approach of only doing our strums on the word "Sun" and Shine". With this approach we can hear the

melody notes clearly and we can establish the timing for our strums according to how fast or how slow we are playing the song. If we play slower then this helps to learn how to make chord changes later in the song. We also need to focus on the melody note patterns in this song because they are fundamental for learning to hear when chord changes are used.

In this song the beginning note is a fifth below the note for the key we are using (key of C) so the note c is the root note and the 5th below is G. For the first line we have:

Strums:				C-strum	C-strum
Notes:	G	c	d	e	e
Words:	You	are	my	sun -	shine
Scale	5b	1	2	3	3

For the second line we have:

Strums:				C-strum	C-strum
Notes:	e	e-	e	c	c
Words:	My	on -	ly	sun -	shine
Scale	3	3-	3	1	1

For the scale note I am using 5b to denote the 5th below the root. The use of the "-" sign tells us that the note is a half-step lower. My goal here is to help you learn a song without having to go thru all of the formal sheet music rules. Also, with this approach I'm hoping you can learn to anticipate chord changes based on the patterns in the melody notes.

So for now we will only strum the C-chord on the words "Sun" and "Shine" and our strums will be exactly the same length of time as each of the words. Practice this now slowly for the first two lines of the song then we can continue and learn to make chord changes.

The third and fourth lines of the song are shown below:

For the third line we have:

Strums:				F-strum	F-strum
Notes:	c	d	e	f	a
Words:	You	make	me	hap ---	py
Scale:	1	2	3	4	6

For the fourth line we have:

Strum:				big C-strum
Notes:	a	g	f	e
Words:	When	skies	are	grey
Scale	6	5	4	3

So on the third line we have to change from the C-chord to the F-chord and we make the change at the word happy (notice that the f-note is used for "hap" (this is a clue for when to change to the F-chord). Then the melody comes back down and on the word "grey" we have to be back on the C-chord. Note: Although the note for "grey" is e -(the 3rd note of the C-scale) we can use the C-chord because the note e is in the C-chord.

At this point you are saying "TMI" too much information. I agree but bear with me. Now you can go ahead and practice doing the first four lines of the song strumming only the C-chord on the words "Sun" and "Shine" and only the F-chord on the words "hap" and "py" and finally just one "big" strum of the C-chord on the word "grey" . We are doing this simplified form of strumming so that you as a beginner can establish a way to provide autoharp accompaniment for a tune that keeps the timing and does not cover up the melody notes.

So now you have learned the basic flow of the song and how to use a simplified strum method to have the autoharp giving chords and timing while the melody notes are sung, hummed, or played on

another instrument. Let's go on with the same approach for the rest of the song.

For the fifth line we have:

Strums:				F-strum	F-strum
Notes:	c	d	e	f	a
Words:	You'll	nev - er		know	dear
Scale:	1	2	3	4	6

For the sixth line we have :

Strums:				C-strum	C-strum
Notes	a	g	f	e	d
Words	how	much	I	Love	You
Scale.	6	5	4	3	1

For the seventh line we have:

Strums:				big C-strum
Notes:	c	d	e	e
Words	So	please	don't	take
Scale	1	2	3	3

For the eighth line we have;

Strums:		G7-strum	G7-strum		big C-strum
Notes:	f	d	d	e	c
Words:	My	sun -	shine	a -	way
Scale	4	2	2	3	1

O.K. now we have the rest of the melody and we can work on the strum chords. Notice that the fifth and sixth lines are essentially the same but with two notes at the end for "Love" "You". Thus we use F-chord strums for "Know and "Dear" and then back to C-chord strums for "Love and You".

Now for the wind up lines of the song. On the seventh line all we need is a "big" C-chord strum on the word "take" and then

we use the G7 chord strums on "Sun" and "Shine" and "a" in line 8 and then the last strum is a "big" C-chord on the word "way".

To summarize, as a beginning autoharp player you need to focus first on just the basics of strumming simply on chords with proper timing for the speed at which the melody notes are sung or played. The idea is to have a smooth flow of strums without breaking the pace when you have to make chord changes. Also, as you can see, in this song variations on how many strums and where to place them helps to express the idea of the song without having just a regimented strum pattern that does not fit the words. Too many strums creates too much autoharp background sound and thus the important melody notes cannot be heard clearly.

As you go forward , you will learn more about autoharp language such as: In the Key of C, the C-chord is the One- chord (denoted I ) , the F-chord is the four-chord (denoted IV) and the G7 chord is the five-seven-chord (denoted V7). You will find that the autoharp can also play melody notes for many songs by just using these three chord bars. There is so much to learn but as a beginner you must be able to get the strum timings and the chord changes right. I think some autoharp beginners pay too much attention to just chords and neglect coordination with proper strumming. Their strumming is random and more like a broom sweeping a floor, that is , the sounds from the autoharp strings are not loud enough and too many strums do not allow the notes of the chords to ring out as they should. Again TMI but bad habits are hard to break.

I hope this type of write-up is good for you as a beginner. If you have any questions or comments, please call me (Jerry Stewart) at 703-368-5218.