

Carey Dubbert's Anti-Mush Bars



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why?

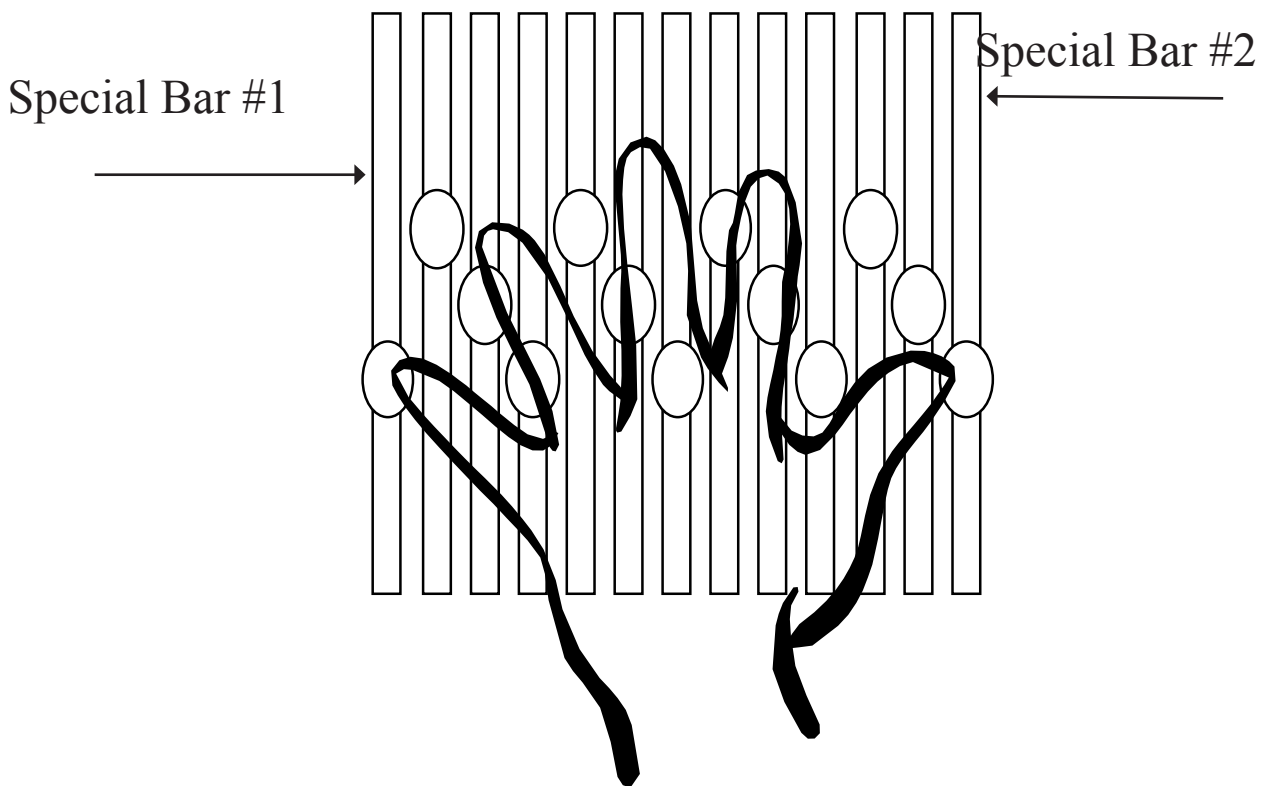
The autoharp is based on chords. Melody notes are played by playing a chord which has the desired note as part of the chord. This does achieve the melody note, but the frequent changing of chords for the sake of the melody usually has the harmonic structure of the piece moving much faster than would be called for by the piece itself. This can tend to make the music sound choppy as well as fatiguing to the ears.

The method of playing commonly called "open chording" addresses this problem and works best with single key autoharps. With open chording, you play the chords called for by the piece and any notes not in the chords are played with no chord bar depressed.

There are masters of this technique such as Bob Lewis, whom I tried to copy, but when I played an open chorded note, I often also plucked a string adjacent to the desired string, and this string was either a minor or a major second away from the intended note and usually didn't add much to the chord or to the melody. My accuracy some days was fair, but I wasn't satisfied, and that led to my development of the anti-mush bars.

what

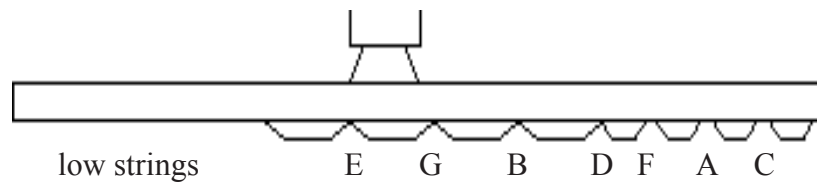
The anti-mush bars consist of two chord bars placed so that you can go back and forth between them with ease. On my harps, I placed them where I could reach one with my thumb and the other with my little finger.



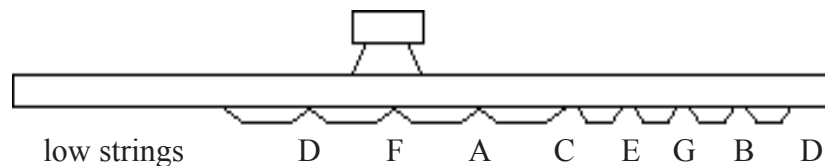
These special bars work on chromatic harps and single key harps. But because they target only one key, on a multi-key harp you must choose the one key you wish to enhance by the use of these bars.

how

The bars have no felt on the lower third and then alternate cutouts for every other note in the selected key. For example, let's use the key of C. For one bar, all the felt is cut up to and including the C in the second octave (about 8 to 16 stings up from the lowest note). Then the remaining felt is notched for E, G, B, D, F, A and C, as shown below.



The other bar has the lower felt cut up to and including B. Then the remaining felt is notched for D, F, A, C, E, G, B, and D (if present). This second bar is shown below.



So, you can see that between these two bars, all notes in the top two octaves of the chosen key are available.

when

Let's assume that the piece calls for a C major chord and the melody notes are C D E. Strum the C major chord while plucking the C. Release the C chord bar and press down the anti-mush bar with the D cut out and pluck the D without plucking any strings with your thumb. You will be quite accurate because the nearest other string that could sound is separated from the note you want by two or three damped strings. Strings in the bottom two octaves that are part of the C chord will still be sounding while you pick the D melody note. Release the anti-mush bar then once again press the C chord and pluck the E. You may also strum the chord again if it is appropriate; this would re-establish the bass notes. The above method works the same for any chord in the key. If the melody note is not in the chord, press one or the other of the anti-mush bars and pluck the desired melody note without plucking any strings with your thumb.

This method of playing allows the melody to come from the chord progression rather than the chord progression being determined by the melody.