

# Hey Kids, It's a Harp



The Harp is a member of the string family. Harps have a neck, a resonator and strings. Its strings may be plucked or strummed. A harp player may be referred to as a harpist.

## History

Harps date back thousands of years. Harps can be seen in Middle eastern paintings 2500 years before Christ. King David is easy to find in paintings during his reign. He is often holding a harp, and is known to have played one. Smaller harps have been played by minstrels and troubadours for hundreds of years. During the Renaissance in Europe large floor harps began to be built. Then in 1782, in France, the double-action harp was invented, allowing the player to raise and lower the pitch of the strings with foot pedals. This new double-action system allowed harpists to play a wide variety of music without having to re-tune their harp for each piece. By the middle of the 18th century the harp had become so popular that composers began to include parts for the harp in their compositions for the symphony orchestra.

## How It's Played

Harpists use all of their fingers, except for the last finger on each hand, as it is thought to be too short and weak to effectively pluck a string. Each finger is given a number, one through five, to help in the performance of printed music. To change the pitch of individual strings, either up or down, the player presses any one of seven pedals with their feet. Concert grand harps have seven pedals - one for each of the seven notes of the scale. Three pedals are controlled by the left foot, and four pedals by the right foot. The pedals shorten or lengthen the length of the strings, to provide the harpist with the ability to play sharps and flats. Each pedal has three positions. Each position is held in place by notches in the base of the harp.

## How It's Made

Pedal harps, also called concert harps, orchestral harps, or grand harps, are made



out of maple wood, with veneers or other wood finishes. Some harps even have parts covered in gold leaf! After the largest parts are assembled, including the sound board, sound box, shoulder, neck, and column/pillar, the tuning pins, strings and pedals are added. Concert Grand stand over 6 feet tall, weighs 85-90 pounds and has 47 strings. Semi-Grand harps are a little shorter, and have 46-47 strings. Some of the most respected harp makers include Salvi, Lyon & Healy, Venus, Aoyama, and Camac.

### **Fun Facts**

If you are a beginning harp student Harpsicle Harp Co. may have just the harp for you! Their brightly colored Harpsicles are affordable and lots of fun! These little harps come in a variety of "flavors," including blue (blueberry), red (cherry), purple (grape), black (licorice), pink (bubble gum), white (marshmallow), dark green, gold, silver, and natural wood finish. Made in the USA by the Harpsicle Harp Co., these simple harps are well designed, sturdily built, yet lightweight. They have a great sound for a small harp, and their light tension makes them easy to play.

