



d'Aigle Autoharps & Folk Instruments
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Diatonic autoharps

The diatonic scale is the do-re-mi scale using seven tones. An autoharp tuned to a diatonic scale (which could be in any key) does not have the sharps and flats normally available on a chromatic 'harp.

The big disadvantage is that with this 'harp you are limited to play only in the designated key. Not only that, if the song you want to play has accidentals, you must fake it, or pass it up for play on that 'harp.

The big advantage is that since there are no accidentals, you have strings 'left over'.

These extra strings are doubled with the notes in the seven-tone scale. Except for the bass and the very high notes, there are many notes which will have doubled strings.

The sound of an acoustic diatonic autoharp can be nothing short of enchanting, full, bright and loud.

Another advantage is that you have more room to find the melody notes. And the technique of 'open chording' may be employed for quick passages and wonderful effects. Open chording is accomplished in a passage by playing some of the notes with no chord bar pressed. All notes will at least be in the scale, so mistakes are less noticeable, and because of the doubled notes, accuracy is not difficult.

On two or three key diatonic autoharps, the use of "lock bars" is an option. A lock bar simply damps the note or notes that are not in the key you are currently using. The only time one needs a lock bar is for playing quick melody lines in which some notes of the melody are played with no chord bars depressed. The lock bar prevents you from plucking a string that is not in the current key. The technique is called "open chording" or "open noting". Even players new to diatonic playing may find this technique useful. However, if you do not intend to learn open chording, you may find better use of the chord bar space to add color chords such as M7s, m7s, sus4s etc.

This is the quick answer to diatonic 'harps. Many players play both diatonic and chromatic 'harps, and many have several 'harps to cover their needs. Others play strictly chromatic, and do so very well making great music. Still others are bitten by the diatonic bug and very seldom play a chromatic.

We build one, two and three key diatonic 'harps.

Remember that with each key added, a new note is added, leaving fewer doubled strings and therefore somewhat reducing the overall diatonic effect.