

We introduced the super single in early 2005, and it is really catching on well. It makes a single key autoharp much more versatile. I designed the concept we use gleaning ideas from Bob Zentz and Al Robertson.

The diatonic scale is the familiar Do Re Mi seven tone scale. An autoharp set up in one key has extra strings because the original 'harp was set to tune to a chromatic scale, all the sharps and flats, with 12 tones total. The left over strings are doubled (2 Ds, 2 Es etc.). This gives the diatonic 'harp a much more full voice. It is limited, though, to being played in the key it is tuned to.

You can get a two or three key diatonic 'harp. Each time you add a key you have fewer strings to double up. But they still sound pretty good. With the super single, it is tuned to a single key, except for two strings. In the heart of the 'harp there is one string for each adjacent key. For instance in D, there will be one string (C) for G and one (G#) for A. Because these keys are adjacent in the circle of fifths, you may now play the 'harp as a diatonic G and a diatonic A. It will not be full in those keys, but the extra needed chords will not be partial chords. All the notes are present.

I consider this setup to be a single key with added capabilities, namely that it can modulate to the two adjacent keys without using partial chords. One simply plays those added chords in the heart of the string bed where the needed notes are placed. It can be played as a three key autoharp, keeping this limitation in mind.

At Northwest Folklife, Cathy Britell and Meryle Korn dramatically demonstrated what can be done with the super single, when playing together at my booth. Cathy had a super D, Meryle had a super G. They jammed in both keys, and neither one missed a beat. The licks they were trading were awesome, and no one listening could tell at all that their autoharps did not match in keys.