

# Hangin' with the Harp - Enchanting Effects

We harpists can produce a variety of unique sounds on the harp, and this adds to both the challenge and reward of playing this fascinating instrument. These special effects, or extended techniques as they are also called, number in the hundreds. Many effects can be combined and layered with each other to create even more sonorities. The possibilities are endless.

At this time of year when the weather turns cooler and the leaves change colors (and some of us start thinking about costumes and candy), my students and I often have fun exploring the magical and sometimes creepy sounds we can produce on our instruments. Have a seat at the harp, and let's experiment with effects together!

## SPECIAL EFFECTS & EXTENDED TECHNIQUES

The following list includes some but certainly not all of the techniques and effects composers use when writing for the harp. The categories are simply my attempt to organize the myriad of possibilities. With the exception of the pedal effects category, the vast majority of effects can be created on both lever and pedal harps.

### TRADITIONAL EFFECTS

Somewhat more familiar to composers and audiences, these musical concepts are also utilized by other instruments and found in music composed prior to the twentieth century.

- Harmonics, Ornaments (Acciaccatura, Appoggiatura, Trill, Mordent, Turn), Bisbigliando, Glissando

### HARP SPECIFIC EFFECTS

These are all created using only the fingers and fingernails, are unique to the harp, and most can be used in melodic lines and/or chords.

- pres de la table (p.d.l.t.), bas dans les cordes (b.d.l.c.), haut dans les cordes (h.d.l.c.)
- Xylophonic Sounds, Banjo effect, Bartok Pizzicato or Slap-Pizzicato, Pincé or Pinched Pitch effect
- Fingernail effect, Nail Flicks
- Vibrato or pitch bend, Sizzle Muffle

### GLISSANDO EFFECTS

The glissando is a sound effect produced by many instruments, but the harp takes variations on glissandi to the next level!

- Falling Hail glissando, Aeolian chords, Falling Hail Aeolian chords, Gushing chords, Glissando Tremolo, Crashing Thunder glissando, Washboard effect

- Phantom glissando, Aeolian rustling, Rolling Surf effect
- pres de chevilles “above the bridge pins” (P.C.x) or Cricket glissando

## **PERCUSSIVE EFFECTS**

Although a topic of some debate, many consider the harp to be a member of both the string and the percussion family of instruments. These percussive sounds are created using fingers, hands, and of course the harp.

- Tapping using various parts of the hand (knuckles, single finger, multiple fingers, palms, fist, etc.) and locations on the harp (soundboard, body of the harp, etc.) also sometimes called Tympanic Sounds
- Whistle effect & Whistle variations (with nails, picks, metal plectrum, brushes, etc.)
- Gong effect & Gong variations (Dead Gong, and Gong Tremolo)
- Clap Slap

## **ACCOUTREMENT EFFECTS**

A plethora of accoutrements and accessories can be used to create effects on the harp: metal plectrum (screw driver, triangle beater, etc.), spoon, tuning key (rubber and/or wooden), mallet, bow, paint brush, cymbal brush, spatula (rubber or plastic), fly swatter, tuning fork, the list goes on and on.

- Metallic Buzz & Metallic Tremelo with metal plectrum, Metallic Chord with spoons, String Slides with metal plectrum & variations (String Slide glissando, Rocket Slide, Sliding Chromatic Scale), Quivering glissando, Single String Percussive Effect with triangle beater (and variation with mallet), Bowed Effect with bass bow, Anvil Effect with metal plectrum, tuning peg glissando

## **PREPARED EFFECTS**

These involve materials woven around the strings or inserted in the harp prior to playing.

- Prepared strings: strips of paper of various thicknesses, strips of aluminum foil, strips of felt, strips of cloth, erasers, tuning fork, safety pins, paper clips, bobby pins, plastic spirals (from spiral binding)
- Prepared pedals: Fixed Metallic Quarter-Tone effect

## **PEDAL EFFECTS**

Sounds created using the pedals on the harp.

- Pedal Slide or Pedal glissando & variations with different speeds (Jazz Slide, Grinding Slide, Filled Slide)
- Repeated pedal changes: Pedal Tremelo, Decaying Rhythmic Slide (& variation with Glissando)
- Metallic Quarter-Tone effect, Esoteric Sounds

## NOTATION & SYMBOLS

Harp notation, and in particular special effects notation, continues to evolve. While some notation and symbols are fairly standardized, others vary from composer to composer. Even the notation for something as frequently used as harmonics is not universally agreed upon. Sometimes the composer or publisher includes a helpful glossary explaining the symbols used at the beginning or end of a piece or the collection/book.

There is no single source to find the complete listing of all the harp effects and their corresponding notation. However, there are several resources with links below (including print materials and videos) that provide notation guides and more information about the effects listed above.

When in doubt, look it up or ask a trusted harp friend!

## FREE PRINT RESOURCES & VIDEOS

Bernard Andrès Notation Guide - <https://hornandharp.com/resources.html>

YouTube Video - [Extended Techniques for Harp](#) (presented by the Dallas Harp Society, it includes examples of both how the effect is produced at the harp and how it is notated)

YouTube Video - [Special Effects on the Harp: A Personal Tour with Yolanda Kondonassis](#) (a thirty-minute video with demonstrations that corresponds and acts as a companion guide to the notation symbols and explanations in her book)

## PUBLISHED RESOURCES

[Master Glossary of Symbols and Special Effects for the Harp \(Revised Edition\)](#) by Faith Carmen.

[The Composers Guide to Writing Well for the Modern Harp](#) by Yolanda Kondonassis  
Chapter 21 includes a very thorough and probably the most comprehensive list in one source with almost thirty pages devoted to notation and explanations for special effects.

[On Playing the Harp](#) by Yolanda Kondonassis  
Chapter 22 includes six pages with notation and explanations for frequently used special effects.

[Modern Study of the Harp](#) by Carlos Salzedo  
Includes eighteen pages of notation and explanations for effects used in the *Five Poetical Studies for Harp Alone* included in this book: "Flight," "Mirage," "Inquietude," "Idyllic Poem," and "Communion" as well as other works by Salzedo.

[Method for the Harp](#) by Lucile Lawrence & Carlos Salzedo  
Includes additional notation and explanations for a handful of "new effects" not found in the earlier published *Modern Study of the Harp*.