

The Harp Herald

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How to Adjust Your Pedal Brass

Your harp's pedals are designed to fold up for safer transportation. Folding them up lets you set the harp more securely on a dolly and keeps the D and A pedals from rubbing on the wheels. Folding your pedals also prevents them from being bent when you lay the harp on its side in your vehicle.



Photo #1: Old Style Pedal Brass Bolt

Ideally, the pedals – or pedal brass, as they're properly called – should fold up easily, and they should stay where you put them. In practice, this isn't always the case. For a variety of reasons, pedal brass can either become too tight or too loose.

Your options for adjusting your pedal brass depend on the brand and age of your harp. For most of pedal harp history, the brass has been riveted to the pedal lever. This system is still in use on Venus harps today.

Lyon & Healy replaced the rivet with a system of adjustable bolts in 1988. In 2000, both Lyon & Healy and Salvi began using an updated version of the same design, and both still use it today. Other harp makers, such as Camac and Aoyama, have used variations of both the bolt and rivet systems over time, but for the sake of brevity, we'll discuss these another time.

Looking at the pictures that accompany this article will help you determine which system your harp uses. If your harp has adjustable bolts, it is important to know whether they are the older or the newer style. The old-style bolts have a fairly thick steel washer on either side (see photo #1). The new-style bolts look much the same, but with a much thinner steel spring washer on either side (see photo #2). Riveted pedal brass, such as the Salvi example in photo #3, will have either a flat or rounded surface, and may or may not include a washer.



Photo #2: New Style Pedal Brass Bolt

The easiest system to adjust is the new-style bolt system. To tighten or loosen these, you need two 5/32" allen wrenches (see photo #4). Insert the wrenches into the bolts on either side of the pedal. Turn each counterclockwise to loosen, clockwise to tighten. Your wrenches will be turning in opposite directions from one another.

Old style bolts are adjusted the same way, but they are trickier to work with. They tend to be a little too long, and when they're tightened as far as they will go the brass may still be loose. If they refuse to budge when you try tightening them, stop immediately. These bolts break easily if over-tightened. The solution to this problem is to add a couple of the newer spring washers between the bolts and the old washers, compensating for the length of the bolts. Your technician probably carries a few of these.



Photo #3: Salvi Riveted Pedal Brass

Adjusting riveted pedals is best left to your technician. If they are too tight, a few drops of household oil may loosen them up a bit, but this can get messy.



Photo #4: 5/32" Allen Wrenches

The best time to do it is right before replacing the felts, as dirt and oil tend to get on them, so you may want to have it done at your next regulation.

Tightening loose pedal brass requires peening, a fancy term for whacking the pedals really hard with a hammer against an anvil or other hard surface. In many cases, the pedals are removed from the harp for this operation, so it's a job you may not want to do yourself.

If you have an older harp and want to take advantage of the new technology, you can! Older harps can be fitted with new-style bolts, but again this job is best left to a technician. If you want to consider adding this upgrade at your next regulation, contact me for details.

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About Moss Harp Service



"It is a pleasure to recommend Steve Moss for harp regulations and repairs. Steve is a perfectionist's dream! His results are incredibly thorough and accurate. His intelligence and patience are his gold star qualities. Steve has regulated my harps and the Milwaukee Symphony harp many times, and I have always been 1000% satisfied with his work."

-Danis Kelly, Principal Harpist, Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra

Steve Moss has been regulating and repairing harps for over 14 years. During eight years with Lyon & Healy, he trained and worked with Master Regulator Peter Wiley. Steve oversaw the company's lever harp production for two years before moving into pedal harp assembly and regulation. He also specialized in training new employees and visiting technicians.

As a traveling technician, Steve has serviced harps in the Midwest and across the country. Clients include the principal harpists of the Lyric Opera of Chicago, the Milwaukee Symphony, and the Milwaukee Ballet Orchestra, and The Seattle Opera, as well as Ball State University, Interlochen Arts Academy, The University of Michigan, The University of Washington, and Brigham Young University. He also makes frequent regulation trips to Lyon & Healy West in Salt Lake City.

Steve lives in Milwaukee, Wisconsin with his wife and two daughters, where he also tunes and repairs pianos.

"It is a pleasure for me to play harps worked on by Steve Moss. They are always perfectly regulated and extremely resonant since he voices for sound as well as regulates for pitch. And he's a really nice guy, too!" -Liz Cifani, Principal Harp, Lyric Opera of Chicago, Professor of Harp, Northwestern University

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