

Moss Harp Service

The Harp Herald

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The Lowdown: Getting the Most from Your Bass Wires

Have you ever felt like your harp just doesn't resonate like it used to? Let's talk about bass wires and the sonic contributions they make over the harp's entire range.

What are bass wires and why should you care about them? They are the metal strings in the lowest two octaves on your harp. On a typical pedal harp, the bass wires run from the lowest string up through 5th octave G. On some lever harps, the wires run as high as 5th octave C.

Each bass string consists of two pieces of wire. A plain steel core runs straight up from end to end. A much thinner winding coils around the core, and this is the part of the wire that you can see. Between the core and the winding a layer of silk threads keeps the core and winding from vibrating against one another.

A good set of wires will resonate sympathetically even when you're playing strings in higher registers, resulting in a richer sound and better projection across the harp's entire range.



You can demonstrate this by playing a chord in the second or third octave, then quickly dampening the strings you just played. Do you still hear the chord? That's the sound of the lower strings vibrating in sympathy with the higher ones. The bass wires act as assistants in the harp's resonance, even when they aren't being played.

Over time, dust and grime work their way in between the coils of the winding, muffling the wire's sound and dampening its sustain. Old bass wires have a tubby, plunky sound that dies quickly, while new ones ring out and hold their tone longer.

Eventually, the tight winding of the coil begins to loosen and the wires begin to rattle or sizzle loudly.

As wires age, their ability to vibrate sympathetically decreases. Tarnish on the coil's surface will cause it to lose its resonance. This happens slowly so that you may not notice the effect, but you may wonder why your harp just doesn't sound as good as it used to.

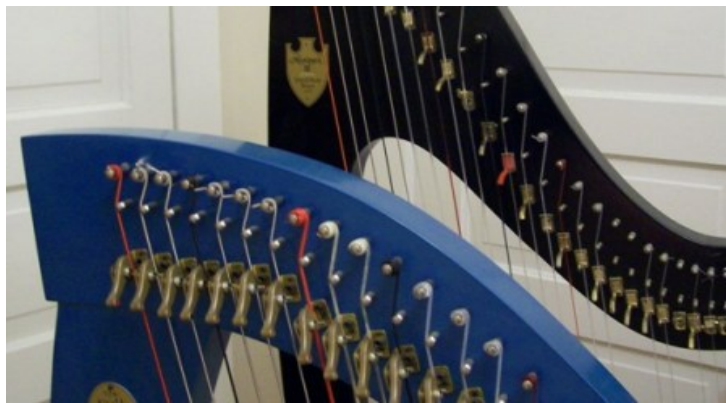
How often should you replace your wires? That depends on your playing level and your needs. Many orchestra players I know replace their bass wires once a year. They need every bit of sound the harp can produce to compete with the other instruments onstage. I would recommend that anyone who plays in

public on a regular basis change their bass wires every two years. More casual players can wait longer, perhaps as many as five years. If you haven't replaced your bass wires in a long time, try it, and you'll be pleased with the instant improvement in your harp's tone.

Lever Harp Spoken Here

People often ask me if I'm willing to work on lever harps, and the answer is yes! In addition to my extensive experience with Lyon & Healy and Salvi lever harps, I have also serviced and repaired harps by a variety of other makers including Camac, Dusty Strings, Thormahlen, Sandpiper, Triplett, and more.

While some traveling harp technicians prefer not to get involved with lever harps, I consider them a specialty. During my time at Lyon & Healy I spent two years performing final regulations on all of the Troubadours, Folk Harps, and Preludes that Lyon & Healy produced. I was a member of the R&D team that developed the Prelude. I also had a hand in the final assembly and regulation of



many of the Salvi lever harps sold in the United States in the mid-1990's.

But enough about me. Let's talk about your lever harp and its needs. How often do lever harps need service? A lot less often than pedal harps. Lever harps can go for years and years without any more maintenance than regular cleaning and string replacement. If you're starting to hear some buzzing when you play, or if the harp doesn't sound in tune anymore when you flip up some of the levers to change keys, then you're probably due for a

regulation.

I generally recommend that lever harp owners who are not having any problems with their instruments have them regulated about once every five years. This gives me a chance to perform preventative maintenance like tightening screws, replacing levers that may be wearing, and watching for any structural issues that may be developing over time.

As with pedal harps, I recommend preparing for a regulation appointment by replacing the strings in the first and second octaves if they are more than two years old. Many harpists also decide to have their bass wires changed during a regulation appointment. As we discussed on page one, new bass wires can give your whole harp's sound a big boost.

Still have questions? Check the Frequently Asked Questions pages at mossharpservice.com or feel free to contact me any time.

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 twelve 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, as well as Ball State University ,

Interlochen Arts Academy, 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

***Moss Harp Service
is your
professional
provider of:***

- Pedal and lever harp regulations
- Lyon & Healy/Salvi warranty regulations
- Field repairs
- Restringing
- Answers to your harp care questions

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