



# Harp Maintenance

Karen Gottlieb [www.kgharp.com](http://www.kgharp.com)

## **WHAT IS A REGULATION?**

Just as your car needs a tune up and oil change every 5,000 miles, a regulation is the general maintenance of your harp on a regular basis that includes a thorough inspection of your harp, a change of pedal and slot felts, oiling, adjustments of pedal rods and the discs for intonation and noise control. It can also include replacement of basic parts as needed.

Here are a few simple suggestions that will enhance and maximize the performance and enjoyment of your harp.

### **1-LEARN HOW TO STRING PROPERLY.**

There are reasons for proper stringing that will help eliminate buzzes and extend the life of your string. Do not let strings wrap on the tuning pins all the way to the neck of the harp or get so stretched that they do the same. If this happens, replace the strings. It might be time for a new string, or unwind it, pull-up most of the slack and rewrap the string and trim the end.

Know how to tie the knot properly. Do not leave any extra string at the base near the knot. Be sure when the string is on, that the string ends are not touching each other inside the body of the harp. This is a major source of buzzes.

Wire strings do not stretch so they need to be given enough slack to allow them to wrap around the pin neatly with 2-3 turns. More than that will not benefit your harp. A good rule is to thread it up through the tuning pin, allow slack so you can pull the string back 1 octave plus 1-2 strings (and no more!) then turn slowly to allow for a neat inward wrap on the tuning pin.

When I restring a harp, I do it one octave at a time. Wire strings: I remove and replace 4 at a time.

### **2-KNOW WHEN TO CHANGE STRINGS**

A new set of strings every year for professionals and every 2-3 years for non professionals. Good quality strings make for a livelier, happier resonance.

**Change wire strings-** yearly for the professional and every 2-3 years for students or non professional harpist. New wire strings give the harp a much fuller and bigger sound. It also brings clarity and better general intonation.

**Change 1st and 2nd octave strings** -every 6 months for professionals and every year or so for amateurs. Your harp is only as good as its strings. Strings stretch over time thus making the string thinner. The disk then does not grab as tightly, causing the string to sound flatter or buzz. We especially notice intonation problems in the top 2 octaves. Regular changing of 1st and 2nd octave strings will help to keep a better intonation and the strings will have a more solid sound.

### **3- TUNING: Always tune with the pedals in the flat position.**

This will make for the best tuning since the string will stretch evenly over its length and it will avoid excess wear on the string where it hits the disk. If you tune with the harp in the natural (or sharp) position, the string is dragged over the disc causing it to wear and stretch unevenly. Tune your harp daily to assure your harp stays in tune better.

**Lever Harps** - ALWAYS tune with ALL levers disengaged!! Your strings will last longer and the tuning will be more accurate.

**Tuning Keys**- recommend: Ergonomic Tuning Key: More expensive but easier on the hands they last a long time. And, Rubber coated tuning keys are less likely to damage the harp if dropped.

**Tuners**: I recommend the ClearTune App - \$4 Easy to read and it works well. Clearly registers all octaves from top to bottom. General calibration recommendations = A440 OR... A441 for orchestral harpists.

**4-BE SURE TO PUSH IN ON YOUR TUNING KEY** as you tune. This will insure that they hold firmly in place and there is no slipping. Sometimes it is necessary to back off and grind the tuning pin back and forth in towards the neck as you turn, to be sure it is tightly set in the neck.

### **5-REGULAR REGULATIONS TO KEEP MECHANISM IN ORDER.**

Yearly for the professional and every 2-3 years for the non professional. New pedal felts, new wires and 1st & 2nd octave strings will insure the best possible regulation and that everything works smoothly, free of buzzes and with good intonation.

**6-INSURANCE COVERAGE** - best to have full coverage of your harp or harps in their current condition & current value. (Most companies will ask for an appraisal from a certified technician) Professional and non-professional harp insurance - Discounted rates for AHS members through Anderson Group Insurance Co: <https://harpociety.org/resources/ahsinsurance.html>  
Non-professional/hobby harpists = consult your homeowners policy for a 'special rider' policy.

**Recommended websites** which provide excellent information about maintenance, tuning, tying string ends, troubleshooting, string breakage, cleaning and more.

### **How to Change a String - video:**

The Bow Brand website offers one of the better videos on how to change harp strings--both wires and guts and how they are made! <http://www.bowbrand.co.uk/expertise.html>

### **How Strings Are Made - a 4 min. video by Bow Brand String Co. in England**

<https://www.facebook.com/DiscoveryUK/videos/10155411789636711/>

### **For more information on String Breakage:**

<http://www.morleyharps.co.uk/general-articles/string-breakage/>

### **How to Tune Your Harp:** <https://www.franbarsbyharpist.co.uk/how-to-tune-a-harp.html>

This website is perfect for beginners with step-by-step instructions on tuning lever or pedal harps

### **Karen Gottlieb's Website on Harp Maintenance, Regulations and other info:**

<https://www.kgharp.com/harp-repair>

<https://www.kgharp.com/maintaining-ones-harp>

### **Articles on: Technicians, Harp Maintenance, Strings, Contracts for Freelancers,**

**Cleaning Your Harp** <https://www.kgharp.com/publications-c1fru>

And...recipes while sheltering in place:) <https://www.kgharp.com/recipes>

### **Other technicians websites:**

The following sites all have valuable information and detailed instruction on a number of important topics.

<http://www.harpdoc.com/faq.html> This is a favorite site that offers wonderful info. Courtesy of Peter Wiley, Master Harp Technician (& my Guru), you will find answers to frequently asked questions about regulations & maintenance. See his 'FAQs & Tips'.

<http://mossharpservice.com/faq/> A video on Harp Care: <http://mossharpservice.com/shop/> Courtesy of Steve Moss, Harp Technician, this website and video clips offers some very good instruction on maintenance, regulations, replacing strings, tuning & moving your harp.

<http://www.harptech.com>

Courtesy of Mike Lewis, HarpTech. Videos, Articles, changing strings and visual images.

### **HARP SUPPLIES:**

Local San Francisco Bay Area Harp Store: **HarpsEtc.** Walnut Creek, CA <https://www.harpsetc.com>

Other online sources: Harp.Com <https://www.harp.com>

**Karen Gottlieb**, harp technician and professional harpist, performed with the San Francisco Symphony as second harpist for more than 30 years. She toured extensively with them on their USA, European and Asian tours as well as performed on their many grammy award winning recordings and DVDs. For 20 years she served as principal harpist with the California Symphony and also as a member of the SF Symphony- 'AIM' ensembles including *4 Sounds, Strings & Things, THAT! Group* and *Silver & Gold, Plus*.

She served as principal harpist for the San Francisco Contemporary Music Players for 30 years and appeared regularly with other new music groups including Opera Parallele & Earplay. With her interest in new music, she released a CD -- 'Music For Harp' featuring 20th Century Composers of the San Francisco Bay Area, produced by Innova Records and the American Composers Forum. (available on iTunes & Amazon). She has also recorded multiple major film, TV and video game sound tracks with the Skywalker Recording Symphony orchestra and performed with both San Francisco Opera & Ballet orchestras.

Ms. Gottlieb received her Bachelors at University of Washington, Seattle and her Masters in Performance from the Cleveland Institute of Music. Her many teachers include Alice Chalifoux, Lynne Palmer, Pamela Vokolek, Marjorie Call, Linda Rollo and extra studies with Lucile Lawrence and Susann McDonald. Her teaching positions have included San Francisco State University, Mills College and a private studio.

As a certified harp technician for Lyon & Healy and Salvi Harps, she has been a member of their professional Technicians Guild since 1996. Ms Gottlieb maintains and repairs harps locally in the San Francisco Bay Area. She also services the US West Coast from California to Washington State, Nevada, Idaho, Louisiana and has worked internationally in Mexico and India.

Karen is an avid traveller, gardener and cook. You can find some of her 'favorite recipes' on her website. Contact: [kgharp@pacbell.net](mailto:kgharp@pacbell.net) <https://www.kgharp.com>  
For more info on Harp Technicians and the Guild: <http://harptechguild.com>