

My Personal List of Autoharp Techniques

by **Lucille Reilly**

I had been wondering for a while about the number of techniques I use to play the autoharp. At last, in February 2016, I compiled a list.

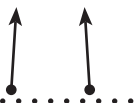

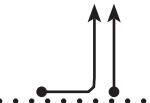
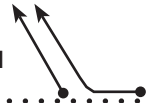

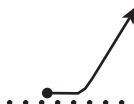


By “technique,” I mean the various

combinations of fingerings and the number of strings that enhance pulse/rhythm, harmonic texture, phrasing, dynamics, etc. These plus arm movements (more than fingers!) culminate in musical results.

The list below shows the many

ways I pinch, pluck and brush to play harmonized melodies. All employ the thumb and/or the index, middle and ring fingers (*T/t, i, m, r*) with a pick on all digits *except* the pinky.

(The text for this article concludes at the bottom of the next page.)

Pinch					Totals			
	strings “clean” (mel+bass only)	strings textured/full	strings half textured	and strings slanted				
× 7 finger combinations:	i t	m t	r t	im t	mr t	ir ² t	imr t (+ 2 w/ unequally spaced fingers)	37
Pluck					Totals			
	1/2/3 strings (as for pinch above)	2+ strings w/ 1 finger ³ (i, m, r)	2+ strings w/ 2 fingers (im, mr, ir ²)	2+ strings w/ 3 fingers (imr)				
					13			
<hr/>								
Pinch-pluck	i m i m t t	i m i m T t	i m i m t T	(3 sequences)				
× these fingerings:	r m r m im r im r	i m r m mr i mr i	r m i m ir ² m ir m		21			
Pinch-pluck-pinch	r m i t t	i m r t t	r m i t	i m r t				
(3/4 & 6/8 time)	AND T T	T T	T	T T				
× these fingerings:	rm i r	mr i mr i	ir* m i		12			
Pinch-pluck-pluck	r m i t	i m r t	r m i t	i m r t				
(3/4 & 6/8 time)	AND T	T	T	T				
× these fingerings:	rm i r	mr i mr i	ir* m i		10			

Total this page: **93**

¹ The middle finger is absent because most of the time I use *i* or *r* to sound downbeat notes.

² *ir* is possible, although I don't use it (that I know of).

³ I call this “high-to-low brush” a *half-pinch*.

Pinch-pluck-pluck-pluck⁴

(playing on 1 or more strings)

r m i m i m r m
t t

⁴I call this *rapid-fire fingering*.

Totals
2

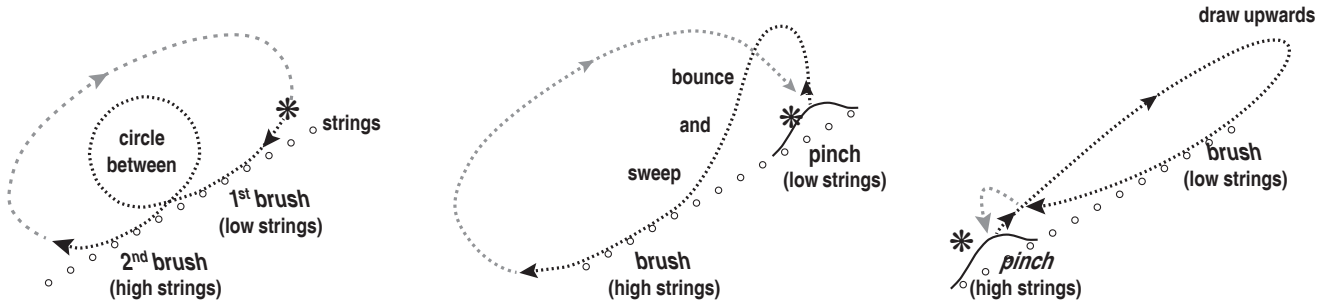
Brush

(any chord bar depressed)

filler on “silent” beats following initial attack of long notes occurs above or below melody (see count with *Pinch-brush*, below) consecutive short: rising or falling gradually, and jumping about long, at end of phrase, tune, or arrangement with fingers to play low-pitched pick-ups (called a *half-pinch*)

7+

* = start playing here



Pinch-brush

high-low
p b

low-high
p b

× 6 finger combos:

12

Pluck-brush

high-low
k b

low-high
k b

× 6 finger combos:

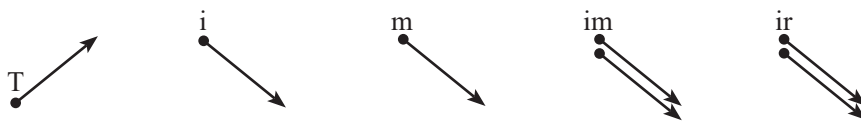
12

Glissando

(slide: all strings open; chord bar depressed—or not!—at end)

low-high

high-low



* 10 as a total assumes *all* strings are sounded, but this is not always true. Therefore, *glissandi* can be exponential in number.

10*
total this page 43
+ total first page 93

TOTAL 136

How to Use This List

You may not want to, and it's okay! Don't worry about counting up the techniques you personally use. I counted them merely for the sport of it. The only thing you need to know is that you do have options when the music needs a certain kind of sound (smooth, detached, etc.), so take the time to find out how to produce the sound the music wants. For example, with 37 ways to pinch (and that's just

for starters), that's 37 different kinds of *sounds* the pinch will produce. Find the pinch type that the music needs, and listen to your music-making soar.

The above list is by no means exhaustive, but it's certainly enough to encourage creative juices to flow. I hope it inspires all autoharpists to play the autoharp well. That would be a beautiful thing. ●

(2018 update: Existing options now exceed 200! Can you tell how?)

Aside from being three-time Mountain Laurel Autoharp Champion and three-time International Autoharp Champion, Lucille Reilly is a respected musician and instructor who teaches privately at home (out-of-townners: check out her B&B lessons), around the world via webcam and at festivals. Connect with her at the dulcimerland at junodot.com.