

## Mountain Laurel Autoharp Gathering 2025 Workshop Descriptions

We've got a great lineup of workshops on many diverse topics for MLAG 2025! Below are descriptions of all the offerings by our featured performers and other wonderful workshop leaders. You'll find plenty of topics at different levels about playing techniques, tunes and songs in varied genres, and performing – even podcasting!

**First, on Wednesday afternoon, we'll get you started right!**

### ***Boot Camp for Beginners with Rita Persing– Wednesday, June 4, 2:30-5:30***

Come join accomplished player Rita Persing for an introduction to playing the autoharp. This 3-hour workshop on Wednesday afternoon is for new players and for those who play a little and might want to brush up on the basics. Rita will cover many topics to get you started playing our great instrument, as well as some simple maintenance tips. Come with any questions. Hope to see you there!

**Now here are our workshops for Thursday through Saturday, in alphabetical order by presenter:**

### **Bay Allen (featured performer)**

***“Nuanced Embellishments”*** (all) Join Bay, a master arranger, and learn how to spruce up your repertoire!! For all levels!! All Harps!

***“The Singing Autoharp”*** (beg-int, all harps) Learning how to strum and add rhythmic nuance to accompany your voice is so much fun, and accessible to everyone!

***“Celtic Hat Trick”*** (int-adv; keys of D & G) We will learn three Celtic songs together for a musical hat trick!

***“Autoharp at the Altar”*** (all; chromatic recommended) Learning hymns of the faith for using the autoharp in worship services, hospice care, nursing home ministries, etc. Chromatic recommended as so many hymns move beyond a diatonic setup.

*\*Note from Bay: All of my workshops will also include a crash course on learning by the numbers, as that is how I generally teach. I will surely relate the chords to those reluctant to use the numbering system, of course, so that all may be comfortable in learning from me.*

### **Lynda Cohen**

***“John Sheehan/Dubliners Tunes”*** (all): Come spend an hour with Lynda to learn tunes in the vein of Marino Waltz, Among Friends, Wild Rover, and Young Roddy McCorley. You'll also learn some very interesting history of the tunes and their roots!

### **Nancy Cowan**

***“Meet Your 2024 Cohen-Grappel Recording Endowment Winner”*** (all): Nancy first came to MLAG a few years ago and ended up winning a harp in the contest, and now she was the recipient of our recording endowment last year! Her recording is now being released for you to enjoy! Come spend an hour with her, hear about her experience making her studio recording, hear some of her music, and celebrate with cake!

### **Rick Fitzgerald (featured performer)**

**“TV Theme Songs”** (all; keys of C & D) Take a trip down memory lane with songs that helped to define the culture of the 1950s, 60s, and 70s and are (no doubt) still lurking in the dusty corners of your mind. We’ll explore ways to bring these songs to life on the autoharp – even some you didn’t realize had lyrics! We’ll work primarily in the keys of C and D with something for everyone at all levels, including use of diatonic color chords and chromatic arrangements, rhythm strums, melody picking, and of course - singing!

**“Songs of Bill Staines”** (all; keys of G & D) Legendary singer/songwriter Bill Staines left us way too soon. Many of his songs, like All God’s Critters, Roseville Fair, and River, are favorites at jams and singalongs across the country. This workshop will explore some of Bill’s other songs that deserve to be sung just as much. Among them are songs like January Snow, Piney River Girl, and To Open Water. All types of ’harps and all levels are welcome. We’ll be playing mostly in the keys of G and D.

**“John Denver for Autoharp”** (all) I credit John Denver for introducing me to the autoharp through his recording of Bryan Bowers’ “Berkeley Woman.” Many of Denver’s songs fit well with the autoharp. In this session we’ll play and sing some of Denver’s most popular songs, as well as some that may be less well-known, and some songs by others that he often sang. Open to all levels and all types of ’harps. Bring your voice!

**“Hand-To-Hand with Rick Fitzgerald”** (all) This is an informal session where you can ask questions on almost any subject related to music and the autoharp. Want to know more about Rick’s right hand or left hand techniques for playing the diatonic autoharp? We can talk about that. Want some tips on preparing your tunes to stand out in the contest from the perspective of both contest winner and a judge? We can talk about that! Want to know more about Rick’s approach to songwriting? We can talk about that too! Tuning? Picks? Singing with your ’harp? All of that is fair game as time permits. Bring your ’harps and your questions!

### **Cory Goodrich (featured performer)**

**“Incorporating Modern Sounds”** (all) In this workshop, Cory will draw on her performing experience to discuss something we sometimes overlook – the benefits of using guitar pedals, reverb, and electronics with traditional autoharp. You might learn something that will broaden your outlook!

**“Johnny Cash & June Carter Singalong”** (all) Join Cory to sing a few classic Johnny Cash-June Carter songs like Wildwood Flower, Ring of Fire, Far Side Banks of Jordan... the possibilities are limitless! This will be a fun hour of song

**“Cory’s Stories”** (all) Cory was one of our first Cohen-Grappell Recording Endowment winners, and even before that, she was performing onstage both with and without the autoharp. She will relate some of her favorite stories and answer questions from you about her musical journey. She has even written a memoir, “folksong: A Ballad of Death, Discovery, and DNA.”

### **Bob Grappell**

**“Let’s Play Classical”** (int; chromatic): Autoharps aren’t just for folk music any more! This workshop will show you how to play a number of tunes from the “classical music” repertoire.

Many of these tunes have an interesting history and you might be familiar with them in other contexts. Besides, they're just fun to play on the autoharp.

### **Les Gustafson-Zook**

***“Autoharp for Newbies”*** (beg) Couldn't make it in time for the beginner pre-gathering or boot camp? Or just need a refresher as a beginning player? This Saturday morning workshop will give you a wonderful introduction to playing autoharp, whatever your starting point.

***“Everybody Polka!”*** (int) Tune your autoharp and put on your dancing shoes and enjoy the energy of these three great oompah polka tunes. They will help you improve your melody playing, soloing and stopping techniques and give you some fun new tunes to jam with your friends.

### **Cindy Harris**

***“Fiddle Tunes from the East”*** (int-adv; keys of G, D, A): An exploration of autoharp-friendly jam tunes that we play in Pittsburgh and West Virginia that might not be so common in your community.

***“The Magical Music Theory Machine”*** (beg-int; keys of C, G, D): An exploration of the autoharp in a way that moves us from pushing named buttons to understanding how tunes actually work. Let's move ourselves from "I don't know the chords" towards "I can play along by ear!"

***“Let's Drive!”*** (all): Become the most appreciated rhythm player in your local jam. Learn some techniques for creating strong rhythm and a bit about using cross-picking to drive the rhythm into the melody.

### **John Hollandsworth**

***“Set Up Your 'Harp for Success”*** (all) This is a workshop for all you do-it-yourselfers that would like to have the basic skills to change a string or cut a felt, improving your 'harp in the process. I will cover those points, plus adjusting your action, tuning tips, and pretty much anything I do daily in my shop for improving and modifying your 'harp.

### **Bob Lewis (featured performer)**

***“ii Chord Discoveries”*** (int; keys of G & D): This workshop will explore getting more character into a tune by producing the “re” note (second degree of the scale) with a ii minor chord instead of the shared note in a V chord. It will open a new door for your ears!

***“Good Luck/Pinch-Pluck”*** (beg-int; key of G): Get tired of pinching? This workshop will use various tunes to show you how to get more notes without all pinches, with or without chord changes! You can play with or without open noting here.

***“Understanding Fine Tuners”*** (beg-int; discussion): This workshop will include demonstration and analysis of individual instruments, and other tuning thoughts with or without instruments. Bring your instrument and tuning tool for this informative workshop from a tuning master!

***“Let's Play Josefin's Dopvals (aka Josefin's Waltz)”*** (int-adv, key of F): This lovely tune is originally for nyckelharpa in the key of F. Bob will teach it with diatonic open noting, because it has to flow, and all the notes are easier to get smoothly with some open noting on

your single-key or with lockbars. However, all the closed chords will be provided in the handout for your own situation.

### **Maureen Maxwell**

**“Morning Qigong Meditation”** (all): Maureen will be in the Naugle lobby for meditation at 7:00 a.m. Thursday through Sunday, and everyone is welcome to join her as you like.

**“Self-Reflexology”** (all): Maureen has been a presence at MLAG for many years, offering reflexology sessions for donations, and offers a workshop for you! Many who come to her have issues with hands, necks, backs, and shoulders, because they are playing more at the festival than usual and straining their bodies. She will teach hand reflexology techniques for self-healing, and even some partner exercises for feet that you can take with you.

**“Qigong Meditation”** (all): This hour-long workshop will give you more Qigong reflexology tips complementing what you get in the morning sessions.

*Maureen will also be available for appointments for Reflexology Treatments at her table in the room off the vendor area, from Thursday afternoon through Saturday, for \$1 a minute for MLAG attendees.*

### **Michael Poole**

**“Pedagogy for Autoharp”** (all) Michael will offer some valuable exercises for developing strength, equality, and independent movement of the picking fingers.

**“Differentiating Your Picking Technique”** (all) MLAG Champions usually demonstrate a variety of techniques in their tunes. Michael is a master at this. He’ll take you through some tips on developing diversity in picking technique to achieve greater range of expression and to create the musical effects you really want.

### **Charles Whitmer (featured performer)**

**“How to Play Autoharp by Ear”** (beg, keys of G & C) Explore how to get started playing autoharp by ear. We will focus mainly on learning how to play melodies. A few accompaniment techniques will also be utilized.

**“Work and Protest Songs”** (int, keys of G & D): Examine several songs from this often overlooked genre by learning to play them on your autoharp, adding another “voice” to your playing.

**“Playing Modal Songs”** (beg, keys of G & C): Discover how to play songs that are in other hauntingly beautiful modes that will be a challenge for your chording hand.

**“Songs of the Ozarks”** (early int; keys of C, G, & D): Experience playing some of the unique songs from the musical traditions of this beautiful southern mountain region.