

Playing the Lyre With Your Child

The first thing to remember is that playing a lyre or harp with your child is an exciting new adventure for both of you – that it is fun and bonding and special. If you are apprehensive about playing an instrument for the first time, that's perfectly OK and you will be fine. You will soon be enjoying the experience. It is something for both of you to look forward to.

It is best to familiarize yourself with the instrument, if possible, before you play with the child. Find a comfortable way to hold it and get used to the tuning. I will give you some suggestions below, but the instrument itself will show you, as you work with it. There are no “right” or “wrong” ways to do things with the Kinder Lyre. The tuning is D E G A B d e, starting from the longest string, and going up higher with each note towards the left. This is the Penta-tonic (meaning 5-note) scale. The longest strings are to the right of you and if you are right handed, you will tend to hold or cradle the lyre with your left hand and play with your right, plucking the strings towards the heart. When the instrument is in tune, almost any combination of notes will sound harmonious.

Tuning the lyre: If you have a piano or keyboard available, play around on only the black keys. That will give you a feel for the sound of this pentatonic scale. It sounds Oriental and simple. This is the same relationship of notes as on the Lyre, but in a different key. To begin tuning, play a D note with your piano, pitch pipe, recorder or whatever and then match the sound of the lowest D string to that pitch. Pluck, pluck, pluck on the string while you turn the tuning key until you hear the similarity. It may take some getting used to, and you may have someone help you identify whether you are low or high and need to tune the string up or down. Usually the string needs to be tuned up higher as it stretches and drops in pitch. Take it very slowly, as the slightest turn can make quite a difference and strings do break when they are tuned too tight.

Once you have the D string tuned to D, move up to the next string and match it to an E, and continue going up the scale, moving from string to string, right to left. A clockwise turn tightens the string and makes it higher (or sharper), a counterclockwise turn lowers the pitch and slackens the tension. Once you have tuned them all, play the notes one by one going up, then down the scale, checking that they sound like they are making a pleasant transition. If one sounds out, you will notice that it is not quite in sync with the rest.

To help familiarize yourself with the scale, there are 3 songs I am going to share with you that have their first five notes, the same as the first five notes of the Lyre, the 5 notes of the Pentatonic scale. If you are familiar with one of these songs, you can use that as your guide to how the lyre should sound. After the first 5, notes 6 and 7 are a repeat of the first two, an octave higher.

LOUISE:

EV – ERY LIT – TLE BREEZE seems to whisper Louise

D E G A B

<http://members.tripod.com/~compmast/chevalie/louise.html>

ALWAYS:

I'LL BE LO – VING YOU AL – WAYS, with a love that's true, always

D E G A B

<http://deenotes.homestead.com/lovingyou.html>

A more upbeat version I know is on *Leonard Cohen Live*

MOTHER EARTH

MO – THER EARTH, MO – THER EARTH, take this seed and give it birth

D E G A B d

This song is one of the first songs in Elizabeth Lebet's *Pentatonic Songs*, a collection of songs used in Waldorf Schools.

Holding the Lyre:

Always show and encourage respect for the instrument, as it is fragile. Also be aware of any sharp end of strings or areas at the top and bottom of the instrument that should be avoided. Remember to bring this awareness to your child.

Most people who are right handed will hold the Lyre in the left hand or cradle it in the left arm against the chest while plucking or strumming the strings with the fingers of the right hand. You can also hold the Lyre by its longest arm with your left hand, or even hold it in the palm of your left hand, between the thumb and ring finger. You can use the flesh of the fingers or the nail. It will not hurt. If you have case, playing it on its case will amplify the sound a bit. You can also do that by playing it on a tabletop (make sure the surface is smooth). If you are left-handed, you can do it all in reverse.

Playing:

Here are some suggestions when playing **(on your own)**:

- Play around for a bit without trying to play anything specific.
- Still playing around, use more than one finger; usually a good sound is achieved by playing the outside two notes of three consecutive strings with the one in between not being plucked, what would be called an interval of a third. You can really play almost any two notes and get a harmonious sound. Usually you will use the thumb and another finger
- Try different interval combinations, using two or more strings
- Do some strums, running your finger across a number of strings together, up and down
- Now try mixing playing single, double and strummed notes
- Try some of the songs in the songbook “Familiar pentatonic Songs” by Tina Wells that comes with the Kinder Lyre. If you do not have the songbook, try playing some of the following songs:

Amazing Grace

Taps (Day is done, gone the sun)

Tom Dooley

Auld Lang’s Syne

Playing with your child:

- Take turns to play a single note and listen. Aim for a clear, rounded tone.
- Play all the notes of the instrument, slowly, going up and then down the scale. If your child is able to comfortably hold the Lyre, help them choose their best position and let them also play up and down the scale. Aim for a focused sound. You are both familiarizing yourselves with the sound of the notes of the scale while you do this
- Hum, or make up a song to the notes as you play them, saying the name of the note as you play it, or substitute Do, Re Mi etc
- Use and encourage listening, taking time between notes to allow the sound vibration to resonate.
- If you use(d) one of the three tuning songs given earlier, teach the song to your child and play it, taking turns, also working out what are the notes beyond the first 5.
- At this point, you and your child might decide to play some familiar songs, either from the book or ones you know. If it is not in the same pentatonic scale, you can change the melody slightly to make it work.
- Or you can make up songs of your own, putting your own words to your own melody.
- Begin to introduce and add some of the intervals and strumming you played around with on your own. When you play a song, try and use a second note together with the note of the melody every once in a while, and add a little strum between phrases, or leading up to a part of a phrase, depending on the song
- If your child is very young or a little hyperkinetic, hold the lyre firmly while you direct them to pluck strings with one finger at a time initially, listening carefully to the notes. Spend more time playing **to** them, but give them opportunities to pluck strings as well, perhaps certain repeated notes of a song, playing becoming a “reward” for their attention.
- Remember to explain about avoiding the areas near the bridge and tuning pins where there may be a sharp end of a string.
- End the session with returning the Lyre to its case or bag and thanking it. Some people like to wrap the Lyre in silk or a nice fabric when putting it in its case or bag. Playing the Lyre with you will become an experience your child (and you) will remember and look forward to.

Once you become more familiar with the Lyre, and your first joint ventures, build up a repertoire of songs you can play and expand your ability to improvise and experiment. Try out different rhythms and combinations and make up your own songs. Sing along when you can. Vary what and how you do things.

Ending the day with the Lyre at bedtime is a great way to put your child to sleep, after a story, with a story, just on its own or with singing to accompany it. The “other” parent can do bedtime with the Lyre if the one parent already did a session during the day

As your child and you become more familiar with the sound of the scale, you will notice more easily when it is getting out of tune. Depending on the age and ability of your child, have them help you identify the out-of-tune note and suggest whether it needs to go sharper (higher) or flatter (lower). Tune until they say *stop*, or, if they are old enough and can control their grip, let them feel what tuning the string feels like, making sure they only turn a small amount at a time as the string will break if turned too tight. Have spare strings available and you will soon learn how to change them.

Enjoy, enjoy, enjoy. No one is watching and there is nothing to worry about if you make mistakes and get notes of songs wrong. That's how we learn and enjoy. It happens to everyone. Your child will always cherish the time you spend with them.

Raphael Weisman