

How to Find that Perfect Harp

When you start harp lessons – whether it may be private one on one with a harp teacher or in school as part of a music class where you are learning an instrument and whether the lessons are in person or online – you will want to find a harp that will best suit your needs as well as a harp that is dependable and reliable for years to come. Here I will show you how to find a good harp that will last you for many years and that you will enjoy playing it as well.

First you want to evaluate how a particular harp sounds. When you start learning to play the harp, your harp teacher can help you point out the tone and clarity of the individual notes.

Next, should you consider a lever or pedal harp? If you are just getting your feet wet in learning to play the harp, a lever harp would be more ideal. Besides, a lever harp is much more affordable than a pedal harp as a pedal harp requires maintenance done every few years which adds to the total ownership cost.

Lever harps have levers that are on the top of the strings. When you raise or lower the levers, you are changing the pitch on that particular string. Lever harps are more portable than the pedal harps as the pedals change the pitch on a particular string similar to the levers.

Also consider your personal preferences when choosing a harp. Harps come in a variety of styles and you want to choose a style that is in line with your preferences. If you happen to live anywhere near a harp dealer I would consider visiting to see which harps are out there and to try them out.

At the same time choose a reputable harp manufacturer. A harp crafted by a reputable manufacturer¹ should last you many years of practice and performance. Ask questions: Does the harp manufacturer carry replacement strings in stock? How about replacement parts and accessories such as a tuning key?

Making the Investment in a Harp

I know, harps are not cheap. Especially when it comes to a good yet reliable harp that will serve you with many years of practice and performance.

A good beginner lever harp will set you back around \$2,500 to \$3,500. This depends on many variables such as the number of strings – the more strings you get

¹ Examples of reputable well-known harp manufacturers are Dusty Strings, Lyon & Healy, Camac and Salvi. I consider them the gold standard when it comes to looking for a harp that will last you a long time.

the better you can play your music. By comparison, a pedal harp will set you back around \$15,000 if not more. (Similar to buying a compact car!) Harps sold on consignment tend to be a little more affordable.

Make sure that you are given the opportunity to test drive the harp especially if it is used. Ask how recent the harp strings were changed and examine the harp for any visible signs of defects. Does it come with a tuning key and a spare set of strings?

You will also want to invest in a harp gig bag. A harp gig bag enables you to take your harp anywhere you go, especially to a harp performance. Not only a gig bag provides protection for your harp, it also has pockets for carrying your accessories including a tuner, a base with legs that can be attached easily and your sheet music.

What I would do when you begin harp lessons is consider renting a harp first so that you can get acquainted with your instrument. Harps can be rented from various sources such as harp dealers and harp teachers – it doesn't hurt to ask around. Some harp dealers offer harp rentals and rent to own harps where your rental fee is applied towards the cost of purchase should you decide to purchase a harp later down the road.²

A Word on Harps Found on eBay and Amazon

I know, a good harp is expensive! However, caution should be exercised when looking at harps on eBay as well as Amazon.

I'm not saying that the harps you see on eBay or Amazon are not of superior quality as you can find a good harp on these sites. It's the harps you see on eBay or Amazon that are priced around \$200 give or take that you should be concerned about.

Finances may be of a concern when you go looking for a harp and that is understandable. However, here are some factors you should consider if you decide to purchase a harp from eBay or Amazon based on my personal experiences:

Amazon harps tend to be manufactured in China; once you unpack that harp from the shipping box you will find that trying to tune a harp to C major can be quite a challenge. On the other hand, eBay harps tend to be manufactured in Pakistan; try replacing the strings on a Celtic lever harp you find on eBay with the replacement strings you are given only to find out that you cannot get a string through the sound board and you have to drill a wider hole through the sound board.

² Both Atlanta Harp Center in Alpharetta (a suburb of Atlanta) and Virginia Harp Center in Midlothian (a suburb of Richmond) have wonderful harp rent-to-own programs where the rental cost is applied towards the purchase price of the harp.

Moreover, trying to find replacement strings for a harp bought from Amazon or eBay can be a challenge. You can find a set of harp strings but when you have to put a replacement string on you never know what the sound quality is when the strings are replaced.

The sound produced from a harp purchased on Amazon or eBay, in my opinion, is not of the same quality as you would expect from a well-known and respected harp maker such as Dusty Strings. If you practice on a harp with your harp teacher it is more than likely your harp that you are practicing on is of a better quality and the sound is much better and superior.

***Edward's verdict on harps found on Amazon and eBay:
SAVE YOUR HARD EARNED MONEY!***

If you want to buy a harp on Amazon or eBay it's your choice and I respect that. However, I would consider paying extra for a quality harp such as a Dusty Strings harp that will last you a long time. If finances are a concern, both Atlanta Harp Center in Alpharetta, Georgia (which is a suburb of Atlanta) and Virginia Harp Center (with locations in Midlothian, Virginia (a suburb of Richmond) and Haddonfield, New Jersey (a suburb of Philadelphia)) have wonderful harp rent to own programs where you can pay a monthly amount and that same monthly amount goes toward the purchase of a harp should you decide to purchase when the rental period ends. Besides, if you live a considerable distance from any of these harp centers rental harps can be shipped to your home.

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