

Old Man Markley

Annie DeTemple of Old Man Markley talks about playing the autoharp in a Punk-Bluegrass band, tricks for performing with the autoharp on stage and maintaining her instrument while she is on the road.



By Keith Daigle

Old Man Markley is a band that likes to do things a little differently. They describe their sound as punk-bluegrass and they have an autoharp and a drummer; two things likely to give any bluegrass purist a heart attack. They play all acoustic instruments, but with their sound and energy they are anything but stripped back and bare.

All of these things combine to give them a sound that is distinctly theirs. They mostly play original music, but also occasionally mix in a cover, such as the old jazz song "Do Me Like You Do," giving the tune the Old Man

Markley treatment to make it their own.

AQ: How long you've been playing autoharp?

AD: I have to say that even though I had fooled around with the autoharp when I was younger, I have only been taking the autoharp seriously since 2007. Prior to that, I had been familiar with it, and even had an old CythaHarp around the house. When I picked up an actual autoharp, I realized that the CythaHarp is built backwards - with the bass strings where, typically, the high octave strings would be.

AQ: What drew you to the autoharp?

AD: My dad won the CythaHarp in the Topanga Canyon Banjo Fiddle contest in the mid 70's as a prize for winning Best Professional Banjo playing. He let me toy around with the harp, and I thought it was such a neat instrument. The autoharp is perfect for a beginner, and that's just what I was. It was an instrument that allowed me to learn and play fundamentals like the I-IV-V progression easily. I was playing very quickly with friends and family, and that was my main goal!

When OMM began back in 2007, I recalled the CythaHarp that my dad had. I told my husband Johnny that I wanted to get an electric autoharp and learn to play it for the band. The next thing I knew, he had one delivered to our front porch!

AQ: How long have you been with the band?

AD: When our band started in 2007, I told my husband, Johnny, that I wanted to get an autoharp. I told him that if he got me one, I would learn to play it.

The next week, a box from an Oscar Schmidt showed up at our house, and I was hooked. The first song I started practicing was "Do Me Like You Do," which is a song that we perform with the band. It is a song that I became familiar with from an old recording of my Dad's old jug band called The Lydia E. Pinkham Superior Orchestra. They also performed "Do

Me Like You Do." That song was written in 1924 by the vaudeville duo Gene Austin and Roy Bergere, and has since become a jazz standard. It is still one of my favorites to play.

Old Man Markley played it at our first show in January of 2008 which, coincidentally, was the first time I ever played in front of an audience.

AQ: How does OMM mix the autoharp with the rest of the music? It is normally a solo instrument, and not a traditional punk or bluegrass instrument, what does the autoharp give to the sound of the band?

AD: The autoharp is definitely something that is usually played on its own or with minimal accompaniment.

For OMM songs, the autoharp is a rhythm instrument. Since it has to blend with seven other instruments, we make sure that the rhythms and strum patterns I play complement the other things going on. When we record a new song, I often try a few different patterns of strums or plucks before we find just the right sound.

As a little trick to add something unique to our sound, once in a while when everyone else in the band is playing a B-minor, I will strum a D chord. I've found that the sound of the autoharp playing a relative major over the band playing a minor chord actually produces a really unique sound.

To make sure the autoharp stands out when we play live, I also have a few EQing tricks. I always make sure that the "presence" is high and that the "bass" is low. When playing with so many other instruments, the autoharp stands out the best this way.

Another trick is to always play like I'm turned up to eleven and to stomp my boots a lot; somehow, that makes everything better!

AQ: What else do you play? Do you play anything else for the band besides the autoharp?

AD: On stage, I play several fun instruments in addition to autoharp! They're mostly quirky things. There are a few songs we play that feature

the melodica, which looks like a miniature keyboard with a tube on one end that I blow into. It works in much the same way an accordion does, and is considered a reed instrument. Some of the other fun things I play on stage include spirit flute, cow bell, and a couple whistles.

AQ: What are some of the concerts/countries you've played in?

AD: From 2008-2010, OMM played mostly in California and only occasionally ventured up through the Pacific Northwest. But all that changed when we began our relationship with the independent record label Fat Wreck Chords.

Once we released our first full length album "Guts N Teeth" in January of 2011, tour life became our whole life. Since then, we have toured across the US half a dozen times and twice through Canada. We have also twice flown to Europe, where we have toured throughout Europe and the UK. In March/April of 2013, we even flew to Tokyo, Japan, where we played a huge festival called Punkspring and performed in front of our largest audience to date: about 12,000 people.

AQ: Where have you met other autoharp enthusiasts around the world?

AD: In May of 2013, we were in Cologne, Germany at a venue called Live Music Hall where we shared the bill with two prominent punk bands called Pennywise and Strung Out. After our set, I was greeted at our merch table by a gentleman who introduced himself to me as Ziggy Harpdust.

Ziggy is a fellow 'harper and friend of Bill Bryant. Bill had recently given my autoharp an overhaul, and Ziggy had learned of our band via an online posting by Bill. This was the first time that my connections to the autoharp community had brought someone new to see our band!

Usually the audience that our performance attracts is from a punk rock background.

AQ: How have you customized your



Photo by Keith Daigle

Old Man Markley performing at the Showbox in Seattle

autoharp? How might other people do it also? What do you do for work, and has it helped you gain confidence in working on your autoharp yourself?

AD: With our heavy tour schedule, I found that autoharp maintenance is almost as important to learn as playing the darn thing. I have to replace my chord bars very often and have also had to change out my pickups and preamps while on the road. When we're not touring, my husband Johnny and I work for my family's company called DeTemple Guitars, where we handcraft some of the best custom electric guitars in the world.

My dad, Michael DeTemple, has been working on instruments since he was a kid and has perfected his craft over the years. Although our shop had never worked on autoharps, I knew that I would be able to figure out how to, especially with help from my dad and Johnny who are skilled luthiers. So when it came time to experiment on changing felts and wiring a new jack, I felt confident that I could do it.

At one point I was having to change

my felts so often that I experimented with alternate materials. A material that I found to work extremely well that was also long-lasting was linoleum, in the form of blocks used for print making. I cut the blocks into strips and covered them with very thin pieces of craft felt. This proved to last three times as long as my traditional all-felt chord bars, and still gave me the beautiful sound of the felt dampening the strings. The downfall was that it made my autoharp much heavier, and with the way I perform, the lighter the better. I tend to jump and dance and move around too much for added weight.

Another logistical difficulty I faced on the road was having switch between two differently tuned autoharps during a set, sometimes three or four times! Since our stage show is so fast-paced and action-packed, sometimes it would waste too much time to switch harps, and we would have to adjust our set list accordingly. All of that changed when I came across Bill Bryant's amazing Chromaslide. Around the beginning of 2013, I began

communication with Bill via email, and in the following months he was able to "Chromafy" my gold autoharp the "Anniemal" to my specific requests.

The project began at the DeTemple Guitars workshop with a total overhaul on one of my 21 chord Oscar Schmidt harps that I didn't play very often. I refinished it to be a gold top and even did some fancy binding along the sides. Then I shipped it off to Bill to get "Chromafied." I believe that I have the very first Chromaslide with a pickup! It is awesome. Having a two-in-one autoharp has been a total game changer for my stage show!

AQ: Can you talk more about DeTemple guitars?

AD: DeTemple Guitars is a business started by my father, Michael DeTemple. He began repairing and building instruments when he was just a teenager, but officially began his own line of instruments in 1991.

DeTemple Guitars makes custom electric guitars, pickups and titanium

parts. All our instruments are handcrafted and custom-painted. We have five different models of electric guitars. Three of the models are part of the DTG Spirit Series, and include the Spirit Series '52, '56, and P-55. We also make a custom hybrid model called the Stellacasta, which is a cross between a Spirit Series '52 and '56. The DTG Industry Standard is the newest addition to our line.

When we are not touring, Johnny (my husband and OMM's guitarist and lead singer), Ryan (OMM's washboard player), and I work at the guitar shop. We are so fortunate to be able to go out on the road and play music for weeks at a time and come home and still have jobs waiting for us. I also do some DTG work while we tour: website updates, facebook postings, and the like.

More information about all of our guitars can be found at www.detempleguitars.com.

When I first came across the d'Aigle site, I was really excited. It was a family run operation, much like DTG. D'Aigle makes amazing, high-quality handcrafted instruments, which is the same thing that our little guitar company prides ourselves on doing. It was a relationship that was meant to be!

AQ: How do you keep your autoharp in good shape on the road? What tools do you always have with you, and what have you used when you've had to improvise?

AD: Our band has many homespun instruments, and the fact that we have the knowledge and ability to keep them playing perfectly has really put us at the top of the pack on the road. Johnny and our washboard player Ryan, who also works at DeTempleGuitars, have even been called upon by other musicians on the road for help fixing their guitars, basses, and amplifiers.

Touring has also allowed me to visit the Oscar Schmidt headquarters in Illinois. We stopped in on a tour and I had my preamp repaired in the workshop. I've been fortunate to have a great deal of support from Oscar Schmidt over the past couple of years.

AQ: How do you amplify your autoharp?

AD: I use the standard OS pickup (without the preamp) and use the LR Baggs Venue DI pedal as my "amp" which runs directly to the PA. The LR Baggs Venue DI has proven to be the best way to amplify without having to travel with a large amp. Our entire front line of instruments use them!

AQ: Tell me about life on the road, while you are touring.

AD: When our band decided that we were going to start embarking on big tours, we knew that transportation would be a hurdle. We knew that we would need a vehicle to accommodate all of our members plus all our instruments and gear. Luckily, all our front line instruments (banjo, washboard, autoharp, guitar, and fiddle) are amplified using LR Baggs Venue DI pedals. The use of the pedals has made touring with big amps completely unnecessary. The only big gear we have is our bass cabinet and drum set.

The vehicle we settled on--and have literally made into our home away from home--is a former Seattle King County City bus! It is a Ford E350 diesel and originally seated 21 passengers. Now it sleeps nine and has a generator which powers a mini fridge and two air conditioners, for the bus itself and our trailer. Before I began playing the autoharp, I considered myself a seamstress. I'm very proud to say that all of the cozy accommodations including the curtains, cushions, and benches on the bus were handcrafted by yours truly. I've also hemmed pants for everyone in the band!

AQ: Do you get people coming up to you after a show and asking you what the heck your instrument is?

AD: ALL THE TIME! After every show, people come up to me and ask "What was that instrument you were playing?" Some people call it a zither, some call it a harpsichord, and some even call it an accordion! On a few occasions, the question "What was that instrument?" even has even resulted in

someone losing a bet! After I tell them "It's called an autoharp," one friend will look to the other and say "SEE, I was right; now you owe me a beer!"

Interesting facts: In 1994 I met Joey Garibaldi via his neighbor, my brief junior high boyfriend, Jacob. Joey and I became fast friends, and he invited me to his band practice. I agreed to go, and that's where I met my future husband, John Carey. In fact, the day I met Joey, he said to me "My friend John is going to love you."

The rest is not so much history as it is the foundation of my life as a musician in a punk bluegrass band called Old Man Markley.

About OMM's genre:

Here are a couple links to articles that have described our sound very well: <http://www.musicnewsnashville.com/old-man-markley-downside-up>

<http://www.musicnewsnashville.com/old-man-markleys-down-side-up-debuts-at-1-on-bluegrass-chart>

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Music and Healing

Music, Death and the Journey Cass Jendurski discusses her journey

By Muriel Powers

Greetings everyone! Here's an interview I truly stumbled upon on the way to the MLAG festival last summer. For the fun of it, I made arrangements to meet a therapeutic musician who played autoharp, and we met at a campground in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. You can even hear the roller coaster over the tent in the recording! Before the night was over, we had resided in the concrete pavilion during the windy period of the official tornado warning!

I hope you are as inspired as I was after you read her story.

June 25, 2013 at campsite #335, Old Mill Stream Campground, at Lancaster, PA

MP: Hi everybody! Well, this is Muriel on the day of June 25. I'm here at a campsite below this incredible roller coaster and monorail, in the presence of Cass Jendurski, a most inspiring Certified Music Practitioner (CMP) who plays the Autoharp as well as Folk Harp. She has been telling me the history of how she got involved with music and healing. And I could hear a wonderful story unfolding, so I thought I'd record this, so I could share it with the readers of the Autoharp Quarterly!

CJ: I was basically telling Muriel that I had spent 10 years on stage, as a professional performer, prior to being a music practitioner. So I'm an actual member of a professional actor's union. The last gig that I did was on stage with Gary Burghoff. Remember Radar O'Reilly of the MASH TV show?

MP: Oh yes! WOW!

CJ: And this is how I helped put my boys through college, until I had a life-
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changing experience.

MP: So you were 49 years old in 1999, and...

CJ: I was between professional shows, and whenever I was between professional shows, I would volunteer to sing at the local nursing home or whatever. One of the places I volunteered was the Monastery. Well, one way Lancaster County is blessed, is to have a cloistered Monastery here. It is the "Monastery of the Immaculate Heart of Mary," and the Dominican Nuns of the Perpetual Rosary (<http://www.opnunslancaster.org>) live in this monastery. Their Order is an offshoot of the Dominican Nuns founded in the 13th Century. They are a gift to the entire community of Lancaster County, whether you are Catholic, Protestant, or Jewish. The saying here in Lancaster is, "if you have to dial 911, the next number you call is the nuns." And you ask for their prayers, because that's what they do all day long -- they have ongoing prayers.

I had heard that these nuns did not drive. The only time they came out of that Monastery after they entered, (and some of these women entered when they were 15, and they were in their 80's at the time), was to go to a doctor or hospital, if they had to be hospitalized, or visit the nuns of their community who were hospitalized. So I began to volunteer for them as a driver and got to know them. They are very normal women who were each profoundly called by God to leave the world and live a contemplative life of prayer, meditation, religious study, and the daily communal work within the confines of their monastery.

MP: It sounds like they don't carry that stereotype that you see in the movies.

CJ: Oh no, these are happy, joy-filled, loving women who come from wonderful families but have left the world behind, so to speak, in order to follow their calling to the cloistered religious life. I would love it when I would take them out. I always felt very blessed. I would ask them to pray for my family or for my individual needs. They prayed for my boys through their teen years... And prayed for us through them too! (Laughter)

At one point, I had gotten a job on stage in Ohio on two occasions. So before I left, I told the sisters that I would be out of town and they wouldn't hear from me for six months. They asked me why, and I said I was working. And they asked, "Oh, what do you do?"

I told them, "I'm a professional performer. And they said, "Professional performer, like a singer?"

"Yeah, I sing, act, do some movement, dance, that kind of thing." Their question to me was, "Can you help us with our chantresses (one who chants)? They sure could use some tips on their sound." I could coach them along, but I wasn't a voice teacher. However, I was really glad to do what I could to help them.

So that began my wonderful association with them. I taught them to play the Autoharp. They had this Autoharp that hadn't been tuned in 20 years.

They asked if I could tune it, and then teach some of them how to play it for recreation purposes -- they have two periods of recreation each day when they can sing together, play games and things like that.

So I took this old Autoharp home, tuned it by ear, and then began to teach them how to play the Autoharp. They were able then to use it for liturgy, recreation, and fun, whatever. And I became something of a "music technician" for them.