

## Mouth Music Instruction Sheet – How to Play – Starting Tips

Thank you for your purchase of these Mouth Music products. We are proud to offer a fine selection of mouth resonated instruments from around the world for your enjoyment and musical adventures.

The following instructions are intended to get you started. More detailed instructions can be found at our website ([mouthmusic.com](http://mouthmusic.com)), or by reading Wayland Harman's "Mouthing Off" columns on the Jew's Harp Guild website ([www.jewsharpguild.org](http://www.jewsharpguild.org)).

**CAUTION:** When playing mouth resonated instruments (especially the steel trumps), great care should be taken to prevent injury to teeth or lips. Start slowly and become comfortable holding and plucking the instrument before trying to make strong plucks. The best volume of a trump will be achieved with air control and accurate resonance matching, not powerful plucking!

### TRUMP PARTS

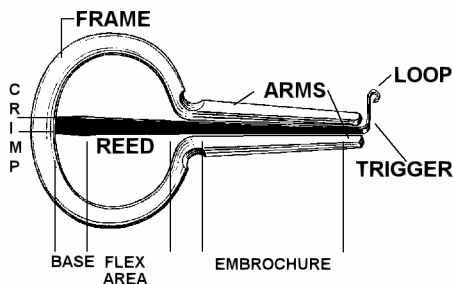


Figure 1

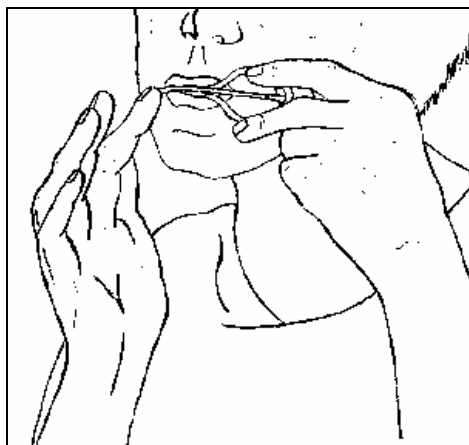


Figure 2

### STEEL TRUMPS (Jew's harps)

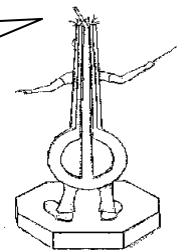
Typically held in the left hand by right handed people, and plucked with the extended fingers of the right hand. The instrument is held firmly to the players front teeth (no rattling allowed), with the trigger (refer to Figure 1) pointing away from the player. When holding the steel frame it is important not to squeeze the frame together reducing the space where the reed passes through the frame, thus causing the reed to hit the frame. Try to hold the frame on its front and back rather than it's sides.

The players teeth should rest on the frame, (refer to Figure 2) with the instrument pressed against them. Do not bite down on the outside of the frame. Your front teeth need to be spaced somewhat apart to allow the reed to pass in and out without hitting the teeth. Until you are comfortable with this hold, **PLUCK VERY LIGHTLY**. When plucking, keep the pluck in a plane with the flexing of the reed. The idea here is to not "tweak" the reed to the side while plucking which will cause the reed to hit the frame. Sometimes we all hit the frame, it won't ruin the trump. It's the annoying clinks that break up the music that need to be avoided.

The direction which you pluck is determined by the instruments and personal preference. In Europe an inward pull is used almost exclusively and some of the trumps reflect this in the shape of the triggers tip. Many non European trumps have a full loop bent at the tip and can be plucked on the outward push stroke. If your instrument does not have a loop be careful with outward plucks as the underside of these trigger tips are not always smooth enough to play this way. The loop can usually be added by heating just the tip and rolling the end into a loop with very fine needle nose pliers. There is a possibility that slight retuning may be required, or even that the tip could break in the process, forcing major retuning. Be careful, but don't be afraid to try this if you feel it is necessary for your playing style.

To play a variety of pitches and tones the player must alter the size and shape of the mouth, and vary the air flow across the reed. Try "mouthing" vowel sounds while plucking, or silently say the letter "K" with a big air push. Try the whole alphabet. Try going from as big as you can get; tongue down, throat open; to as small as possible with the tongue almost touching the reed. The mouth size is your pitch range while the vowel sounds are more of a tone quality palette.

Experiment to find the song within the instrument- and within you!



*Your Source for Mouth Resonated Instruments*

**Mouth Music.com**

c/o 25600 Union Hill Dr. Sun City, CA 92586-4121

**Order by phone:**

**208.841.8780** (10am-6pm Pacific Time USA)

**[www.mouthmusic.com](http://www.mouthmusic.com) & [www.jewsharp.com](http://www.jewsharp.com)**

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### KUBINGS (Bamboo Trumps)

**Kubings are played** with the pretty side facing the audience. The holding hand **FIRMLY** holds the instrument with thumb and forefinger opposing each other, very near but not interfering with the free end of the reed. This firm clamping of the bamboo adds the mass. Holding the instrument more loosely will diminish its volume.

**The embouchure (best playing spot)** generally occurs at the free end of the reed, the last inch or so. This is where the reed is moving the most and the fastest. Your thumb should be close to this area and may well rest against your cheek.

**The plucking hand produces sharp plucks, not necessarily strong ones.** The action is nearly percussive. A sharp release of the frame produces the strongest tone, usually but not always pulling the frame toward the player. Rapid forward and backward plucking is possible but difficult. The very straight pluck (in line with the reed's flexing) as required with steel Trumps is not as critical. Plucking can occur at some angle to the end, and the reed will not be driven to click against the frame. This characteristic of the Kubing allows multiple finger plucks more easily than steel. Spreading the fingers of the plucking hand and raking them across the end yields a rapid succession of plucks.

While the volume of Kubings is less than a good steel Trump, the tone is unique and satisfying, though the sound decays rapidly.

### BRASS TRUMPS

**Brass trumps are like small, brass Kubings**, and are produced in a wide range of styles in many countries such as Laos, Vietnam and Tuva. Some may be double or triple tongued. Most are small... even tiny, but the sound can be big, or ethereal, or anywhere in between.

**Holding and playing a brass trump** is similar to that of a Kubing, but with consideration of the reduced size and unique quality of the individual instrument. The embouchure's "sweet spot" can be quite small. Once found, purse your lips around that area. This will enable you to use small amounts of air to alter the sound of the trump. It may even be possible to "blow start" the reed or keep the vibration "alive" for long periods. The mere act of flipping the tip of your tongue will result in a large tremolo effect.

**Plucking should be much softer** than with a bamboo trump. Many instruments may be designed to be plucked in a specific direction, usually inward. Hold the wrist and elbow of the plucking arm in the same plane as the instrument and use the index or middle fingers to softly stroke the trigger inward. More dexterous players may be able to use several fingers in this way to produce multiple, fast plucks.

### KOU XIANG (AKA HOHOs) CHINESE BRASS HARP SETS SAME FOR THE DAN MOI SETS

**Spread the individual leaves apart into a fan.** Be sure the reeds don't hit the other trumps when plucked. It's OK for the frame areas to overlap a bit.

**Hold the group very firmly at the base** where the wire ties the leaves together. Keep thumb and finger from touching the moving reeds.

**Hold the group lightly to your lips**, or just off the lips, and gently pluck inwards with your free hand. The flat side of the trumps should face the audience. Beware of getting facial hair caught in the reed.

**Open the mouth wide to play the group** or less wide to play the individual trumps. The four leaf set may be fanned into two sets of two, allowing the pairs to be played.

**When moving between trumps** it is good to pull the group slightly off of the lips, then reposition. Avoid sliding the instruments across the lips.

**Forcing air across the trumps** will increase volume and accent the fundamental, much like a steel frame trump.



### CLACKAMORE (Percussive Trump – Same for Mo Nhip)

**Hold the Clackamore as shown**, resting your thumb and forefinger against your cheek while grasping opposing sides of the instrument neck. With the instrument lightly touching your lips, tap the reed with the extended fingers of your free hand. To play different notes, change the size and shape of your mouth cavity by silently mouthing the letter "O" and "E". With a little practice, these pitch variations can be controlled to permit the playing of melodies. Experimentation will reveal the many different sounds and rhythms you can play with your Clackamore.

### Trumps from around the World

**Hörzing** from Austria from \$22

Classic India **Morsing & Morchang**

German **Schlütter** \$35

**Szilágyi** of Hungary from \$17

**Chromatic Sets starting at \$220**

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**MouthBows \$195 - \$225**  
Built by MMP Partner Dan Gossi

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