

HARP GUITARS - NOT JUST FOR ANGELS

If you are bored with your six string or even your 12 string guitars and want a completely new challenge in the world of guitar playing, why not try out a Harp Guitar? They are not specifically reserved for Angels, even though some amazing angelic like sounds can be re-produced from them. We are not talking about a new instrument here, but one that is over two hundred years old. Experts describe it as "A guitar, in any of its accepted forms, with any number of additional unstopped strings that can accommodate individual plucking". There are many variations of Harp guitars and as many different configurations. Unfretted strings that lie off the main fret board are generally played as open strings in sympathy with the normal fretted guitar neck." There are however some vastly different constructions in this unique world.



John Doan is a master of the 20 string harp guitar and is widely known for his playing in this genre. He has worked with the likes of Donovan, Burl Ives, Larry Carlton, Mason Williams of Classical Gas fame and a host of other notable guitarists. He has some beautiful CD's available including Emmy nominated "A Victorian Christmas with John Doan" and his latest recordings for Hearts O' Space Records have been nominated for Best Celtic Album of the Year. You can check out John's playing on www.johndoan.com

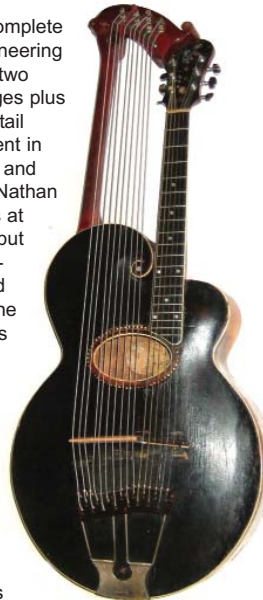
Another fascinating creation, The Seraph Harp Guitar, designed by UK guitarist Tony Seeger is well worth checking out. In Tony's own words, "The basic idea for this Harp Guitar was conceived in November 2005 whilst sitting in an aircraft in Cologne, listening to Michael Hedges playing a Dyer harp guitar on my MP3 player. After making initial sketches and approximations, there followed 3 months of revisions, detail sketches, an MDF ergonomic test model



Tony Seeger playing his Harp Seraph Guitar

and eventually a complete set of full size engineering drawings covering two 1200 x 900mm pages plus some additional detail drawings. I then went in search of a Luthier and was introduced to Nathan Sheppard who was at first very sceptical but was eventually persuaded that it could work. At this point he suggested revisions to some of the joints, in particular the method of attaching the neck and headstock to the body. It was agreed that I would supply him with a detailed set of revised drawings and a complete body mould. Nathan was also responsible for the design of the internal bracing (a major exercise for this instrument). It was to be above all, an acoustic instrument and components and construction would be kept as light as possible. I obtained Engelmann spruce for the soundboards from Canada as they were able to supply the very large boards required with fine and even grain spacing across the width in superb quality (and they were also very helpful !). It was like watching a butterfly emerging from the chrysalis of the body mould in the workshop. Once it was complete it was strung up to test its strength, to hear how it sounded and to feel how it played. To be fair, I had actually done stress calculations and Nathan had used his own and other Luthiers' advice and experience so that the machine was structurally very secure. The sound however was a revelation, exceeding both of our expectations. The bass is louder and fuller than any normal acoustic bass, the treble harp is loud and clear with a tone reminiscent of a Dulcimer whilst the guitar is loud, sweet and balanced. "This is a great design and concept instrument and here's a clip of Tony playing his Seraph Harp Guitar. www.youtube.com/watch?v=cqeyvKQKEq0 Early pioneers of the Harp Guitar included Frank Andrei who played Gibson instruments. Roberto Beccuti, Beccuti who played a one-arm Mozzani chitarra lyra ("lyre" harp guitar). Walter Boehm is known as the harp guitarist who suggested the sub-bass configuration that Gibson adopted around 1906: 10 strings covering a low A# up to G# (matching the 4th fret on the low string) - the E being omitted, as the open 5th and 6th strings filled in the full chromatic scale.

Two of the more heralded makers in the vintage era were Knutsen and Dyer. The former having a distribution deal with the later before linking up with the brilliant Larson Brothers. Larson's may it be believed, started to build the "Type 1" Dyer Harp Guitars around 1902. From then till now, the Harp Guitar has survived, progressed



Early Gibson Harp guitar

and been developed by many fine and brilliant players and luthiers. There is a dedicated website where extensive information and photographs can be seen and it's well worth a visit. www.harpguitars.net. Here's a nice little 1906, three quarter size Knutsen Harp guitar, full restored and for sale at <http://www.harpguitarmusic.com/listings/hg-knutsen-t-11-07.htm>. There is also a 1915 example of a Larson Bros. made Dyer Harp guitar for sale from <http://www.harpguitarmusic.com/listings/hg-dyer-11-08.htm>.

If you search the internet and especially the pages of YouTube for Harp guitarists, you will be amazed at some of the brilliant players that practise the art these days. It really is a genre all of its own, yet does attract hundreds of thousands of interested parties, whether to appreciate the amazing sounds produced by the heaven sent instruments or by players who want something other than standard guitars. YouTube it's fair to say, is a great vehicle for many of us to put our music online and for free. Imagine how much bandwidth you would require from your own site to accommodate even half a dozen videos. There is one player



that is well worth a listen and that's **Andy McKee**. His clips (not just of Harp Guitar) attract millions of viewers and rightly so as he is a brilliant and sensitive all round guitarist. Here's a clip of him playing his own composition "Into the Ocean" on a Harp Guitar. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cvar4ZsqsEo&feature=channel>

Paul Brett



Knutsen Harp Guitar three quarter size



Dyer style 51915 harp guitar