

THE PLUCK-N-POST



Volume 3 Issue 1

PO Box 92 Sumpter, OR. 97877

Winter / Spring 1999

A Word from the Executive Director by Janet Gohring

Happy New Year to everyone!

This past year has been very full and rewarding, for me personally, and for the **Jew's Harp Guild**. Because the highlight of my year was attending the 3rd International Jew's Harp Congress in Molln, Austria, that will be the main topic of my column for this issue.

Molln Memories

I know many of you have been waiting for some kind of "report" from one of us who attended the Congress and I hope my version here will be informative for you. I'm sorry I don't have the room to tell you about all the personal things that we experienced. I encourage the others who attended to submit their own "edition" of Molln Memories to the newsletter.

My husband, Bill, and I flew to Vienna, Austria on June 14th, one week before the Congress began. We were met at the airport by a Congress volunteer and driven to Molln (which was about a 3-hour drive from Vienna).

I could write a book ... but I will try to be concise! We spent the first week helping the Congress organizers for a few hours each day ... and sightseeing, touring, eating and drinking with some of the local citizens. We had a blast and in two days felt like long-time members of the community!

The week of the Congress was very full ... there was hardly a spare waking moment for any of us! Our official motto had become, "We'll sleep when we're dead!" There were, literally, 2 weeks of events crammed into one!

The Congress began on Monday morning with registration at 10:00am. There were over 90 performers plus 30 historians, makers, etc. Many people who had just arrived spent the rest of the morning touring the new Jew's Harp Museum in Molln. Monday afternoon was full with the "Symposium" of speakers: Professor Dr. Franz Födermayr (Institute for Musical Science, Vienna), Moderator; Dr. Tran Quang Hai (Vietnam/France) spoke on "Overtones Used in Various Aspects of Music"; Hr. Moya Malamusi (Malawi) spoke on "Concepts and Methods of the Southeast-African Mouthbow". Afterwards, the International Jew's Harp Board

had a Round Table while some of the Jew's Harp Makers met to share and discuss their different harps.

Monday evening was the "Opening Ceremony" under the huge tent that served as the Concert Headquarters. The audience was treated to the Molln Brass Orchestra and Costume group, welcome from all public officials, and finally the presentation of participating nations and ethnic groups.

Tuesday was a full day of symposiums: A.O. Univ. Prof. Dr. Hannsjörg (Ube, Austria) "Jew's Harp Production in Enns, Upper Austria"; Mag. Angela Mohr (Austria) "History of Jew's Harp Production in Molln"; Dr. Frederick Crane (USA) "Production and Import of Jew's Harps in and to America"; Leo Tadagawa (Japan) "The Jew's Harp In Japan"; Banay Mulu (Taiwan) "The Jew's Harp Culture in Taiwan"; Ivan Alexeyev (Sakha-Yakutia, Russian Federation) "Opening Speech: The Jew's Harp in Sakha-Yakutia"; Rimma Madvarova (Kyrgyzstan) "From Congress To Congress"; Anon Egeland (Norway) "Norwegian Techniques of Playing the Jew's Harp"; Tran Quang Hai (Vietnam/France) "Playing techniques on Various Jew's Harps". Tuesday evening was "Concert Alpine Style - Jew's Harp In The Pocket" followed by the speaking Khomus in Sakha-Yakutia, and performers from Germany, Austria, and South Tyrol.

Wednesday's symposiums were: Dr. Gerlinde Haid (Institute For Research in Folk Music, Vienna) "Jew's Harp and Erotism"; Semyon Ivanov (Sakha-Yakutia, Russian Federation) "Jew's Harp and Lyrics"; Spiridon Shishigin (Sakha-Yakutia, RF) "Jew's Harp Therapy in Sakha-Yakutia - Report About Experiences"; Robert Zagretdinov (Bashkortostan, RF) "Jew's Harp Music therapy in Bashkortostan - Report About Experiences"; Kiyoshi Iwasaki (Japan) "The Jew's Harp Therapy"; Dr. Tucek (School for pre-Oriental Music therapy,

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Austria) "Pre-Oriental Music therapy"; Tran Quang Hai (Vietnam/France) "The Jew's Harp in Popular and Contemporary Music"; Fred Crane (USA) "The Jew's Harp in Art Music"; Rudolph Henning (Germany) "The Jew's Harp in German Prose" and Anton Bruhin (Switzerland) "The Headless Jew's Harp Player".

Thursday was a more relaxed day ... Nature Excursion to Austria's newest national park, Kalkalpen ... complete with relaxed jam session and a wonderful catered banquet buffet in the middle of the Alps! In the evening we all attended the community Summer Solstice celebration.

Friday: Concert for the Children by all the performers in the morning ... all the local school children were let out of school to attend. Concerts started in mid-afternoon and continued to well after midnight. Friday was the night the American's performed and Bill and I didn't go on stage until 1:15 AM!! Performers that night were from Austria, Germany, Slovakia, Italy, Hungary, Switzerland, Poland and the USA (American performers were Gordon Frazier, Larry Hanks, Bill and Janet Gohring, Wayne Hankins, Fred Crane, David Holt and Mike Seeger.)

Saturday morning was open and concerts from Finland, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Netherlands, Norway, Bashkortostan, Altai, Tuva and Sakha-Yakutia continued late into the night.

Sunday morning all attendees gathered in the huge "Food Tent" for the traditional Morning Pint of beer. It was a relaxing time enjoying the music from Molln's Brass (Marching) Band. Concerts began again in mid-afternoon, performers were from Vietnam, Japan, India ... with special presentations of Jew's Harp and Poems as well as Jew's Harp and Dance.

I wish I could share with you all of the wonderful people, places and things we experienced on this trip ... it was a wonderful personal opportunity as well as the perfect chance to let the world know about North America's own Jew's Harp Guild. We are definitely the "new kids on the block" when it comes to the international scene. But, at the same time, I also

think we are bringing fresh new ideas and concepts to an ancient and ceremonial instrument.

Fred Crane said it quite nicely in the festival Program, "The North American Jew's Harp Festival has been thriving every summer since 1992; it has been the impetus for bringing together and fostering trumpists in the northwest, to the point where they form the largest school of trumping in the whole hemisphere. The Jew's Harp guild is associated with the festival. Notable among its accomplishments is its website, full of information on the trump and the Guild and the Festival." So, thanks to the many volunteers who help make all of this possible.

And thanks to all of you Guild Members who support the Guild. We couldn't do it without YOU! Happy Holidays ... see you next time! Janet *

1999 Election of Guild Officers

23 of 78 Guild Members cast their ballots to elect the Board Members of the Jew's Harp Guild for 1999. The voting results follow:

CANDIDATE - # OF VOTES

Gordon Frazier 23 Bill Gohring 22

Bart Wood 18 Janet Gohring 23

Kathi Vinson 23 Denise Harrington 22

Jim Nelson 21

WRITE IN's:

John Weir 2 Larry Hanks 2

Donna Weir 1 Fred Crane 1

I Heard That!

Recently heard Trump soundbites

Several current Microsoft TV commercials include trumping in the background music. We wonder if this is synthesized or real? Does anyone know?

Microsoft also includes a Jew's Harp sound as one of about 50 sounds packaged with Windows 98. It sounds like the same clip included with their Encarta encyclopedia.

A short, snappy, trumpety clip was heard during the fried chicken segment of The History Channel production of *America Eats*. Can you identify the cut?

The movie *Bound* (recently seen on Showtime) truly features the Jew's harp as a plot enhancement and tension builder. The 'harp used looks and sounds like a Whitlow. Though this R-rated movie is not for everyone, (somewhat risqué subject matter) it's good to see the instrument used in such a powerful way to express the personal emotions of the character.

Legacy, a new series on UPN (Friday nights), occasionally uses Jew's harp riffs in horse romping and action scenes.

Anton Bruhin's new CD, *Electric Eel*, (Tzadik TZ 7216) is now out! It features his Electric Trump (see VIM #5-1996) and Water jaw harp. Vocalist Makigami Koichi and Trumpist Leo Tadagawa join Anton on this eclectic recording



TRUMP TECHNIQUES

I have had requests for more about the playing of trumpets, specifically tricks and tips. Given my somewhat limited experience, I welcome others to add their own tricks and will incorporate them into the next **Mouthing Off**. I'll give a couple of addresses at the end of the article.

The Quick Tongue

I consider this a trick because I am amazed at how fast some folks can move the tip of their tongue. A quick up and down movement of the tongue's tip can trill between several high harmonics. This works well on a sustained pluck as the energy fades. Move the tongue as if saying "T" or "D" or "LA", each producing a slight variation on this theme.

Slap Tongue

The Jew's harp reed can be muted in several ways, including contact with the tongue. Place the tongue's tip behind the lower front teeth and push the top of your tongue forward to the upper front teeth. Time the pluck and tongue push to create a muted pop.

Big Throat vs. No Throat

Two distinct note ranges are available with the trumpet, though making them distinctly different takes practice. The most used range is with air pushing across the reed. This open throat technique can be expanded upon by opening as big as you can and not using air. A cavernous sound is available. Practice pitch control by changing throat size. Conversely, if you close off the throat with the very back of your tongue, a very different sound is produced. Pitch control is much easier with the tongue than the throat, and the highest harmonics can be reached. Rhythmic alterations between these two modes offers unlimited possibilities. Switching between a variety of techniques in a measured way greatly adds interest to a trumpet performance.

Sing Along

Vocalizing either with or against the frequency of a trumpet adds another palette of sound textures. Singing a falsetto note sympathetic with the low pitched Jew's harp is hauntingly beautiful. Singing the same note as the trumpet is powerful. With sensitive reeds, great interactions can be heard as the two vibrating systems "flavor" each other. The results of phasing the voice slightly out of tune with the trumpet can be startling. Since air must eventually be inhaled, vocal techniques are a natural to combine with a non-vocal accent.

Change the Reed

Alterations in the sound of the reed occur depending on how it is plucked. A pluck which pushes or pulls the reed at the end (perpendicular to the length of the reed) has a slightly less brilliant tone than a pluck which grabs the tip of the trigger and pulls it away from the crimp (parallel to the reed's length). In the latter, the reed is flexing toward the middle which excites the higher harmonics more. The difference between these two plucks varies from instrument to instrument, and may be quite subtle.

Muting the reed can shift its pitch upward or can highlight a specific overtone similar to muting a guitar string. The effect, however, is not clear like the guitar's harmonics. This mute is accomplished with a finger tip or the thumb being placed into contact with the reed. Try different points moving away from the crimp to find different effects.

Don't Forget to Breathe

Air is a powerful tool, which can gently coax the reed or can completely overwhelm the instrument. While the strong blast of air is loud and powerful, the subtle control of lesser amounts of this precious gas defines the beauty of a Jew's harp. Support your breathing from as low as you can, not just the diaphragm, but this whole region of muscles, much like a singer does.

Plucking

I will only suggest a few of the many variations of this all important aspect of playing a Jew's harp. Which finger or body part you use to pluck the reed is up to you. There doesn't seem to be a wrong way. Many people pluck forward and/or backward with the index finger, some the thumb, some the heel of the hand. Others pluck by bringing a finger around and "scratching" at the tip of the reed, thus getting that slightly different reed brightness. This technique is sometimes expanded to multiple fingers, each taking turns "scratching" the reed. A rapid back and forth pluck can be quite impressive, while interspersing double plucking with a single plucked rhythm allows for wide rhythmic possibilities, and is particularly useful in playing melodies.

(Continued on Page 4)

Check out the **NEW**
Jew's Harp Guild Website at:
www.jewsharpguild.org

Thanks to JHG member dues and contributions,
we're finally able to rid ourselves of the previous
ungainly website address.

PLUCK-N-POST

(Mouthing Off – Continued from page 3)

Take It Off Your Teeth

Playing a steel harp like a bamboo instrument (touching lips only) brings out a muted tone with little resonance. Air can still be very effective and tongue mutes are fun. Be careful of your lips in doing this; it is easy to get them pinched between reed and frame. I prefer a fast plucking tempo to offset the shorter sustain, further enhancing the lip problem.

One Real Trick

Bill Gohring brought back a wonderful trick from the Molln Congress. He was shown this by a young Austrian girl who apparently was astonished that he didn't already know how to make a trump whinny like a horse. The sound is really quite easy as Bill showed us at the Jew's Harp Festival last summer. Holding the harp to your teeth as you normally would, place your plucking finger on the trigger and push the reed forward and backward while blowing like crazy. Do not release the reed, just go in and out with it. Trumps with tight tolerances work best.

Experiment

Perhaps the best tip I can think of is simply to experiment, relentlessly. Moving seamlessly from one unique sound to another, and the simultaneous pitch control to render a song's melody clearly, combine for great playing. Developing individual skills that can be combined into melodic soundscapes brings out one of the trump's marvels, that being a voice which can sing different pitches in a wide array of timbres.

I'm sure there are many techniques I have overlooked and for this I apologize. If you can help with other tips and tricks, please let me know. Any feedback would be appreciated.

E-mail: harman@cyberhighway.net

Or PO Box 6444, Boise ID 83707.

Wayland *



E-mail, News & Correspondence

Post Your Notes

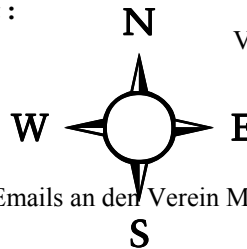
Mark,

Many thanks for your kind e-mail. Would it be possible for you to "hook" me up with other Bay Area members? I live in San Jose (the South Bay) but go up to San Francisco at least once per week for a band practice. I would love to get a lesson from someone, so I could improve my technique and find out what is possible. If you could forward my e-mail address to these folks or give me their addresses, it would be greatly appreciated.

Peace, Diane Diane.Solomon@kla-tencor.com

(Please contact me if you can help Diane and don't have e-mail. Ed.)

Manfred's addresses have changed. You can contact him at :



Verein Mollner Maultrommelfreunde
Rußmann Manfred
Postfach 53
A-4591 Molln

Emails an den Verein Mollner Maultrommelfreunde bitte ab sofort an die neue Adresse: H.Anzinger@stn.at

Emails to Mollner Maultrommelfreunde please send to the following address:
H.Anzinger@stn.at

New Szilagyi Website

Dear Mark,

We would like to inform you that our new Web-site is updated and available. If you would like to visit it now you can do that at the following address:

[Http://members.xoom.com/jewsharp](http://members.xoom.com/jewsharp)

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All the best.

Zoltan Szilagyi

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The *PLUCK-N-POST* needs more contributors!

If you have ideas for articles, sketches or Pictures, etc. Please query the editor, Mark Poss, at (208) 466-6614 (10am-10pm MST) or 924 10th. Ave. N.– Nampa, ID. 83687

On the Next International Congress and a New International Society

by Frederick Crane

Ten of us (Ivan Alexeyev, Phons Bakx, Anon Egeland, Franz Kumpl, Rimma Madvarova, Manfred Rußmann, Leo Tadagawa, Trân Quang Hai, Robert Zagretdinov, with myself as chairperson) met at Molln on June 22 and 28, 1998 for a total of about four hours. Our goal was to establish some guidelines for future international trump congresses/festivals.

I began by reviewing the past and present gatherings. There has been a seven-year interval between "official" international congresses (1984, 1991, 1998). And since 1988, there have been quite a few national and local meets, most of which, in fact, have had international participation. Some of these have been meeting annually.

It was felt that no precedent has been set for the seven-year interval, and that three or perhaps four years would be a better interval. Phons Bakx passed on an invitation to have the Fourth Congress in Amsterdam in 2001, which met with general approval, subject to the finalizing of the plans to host the event. Serious proposals were also made for congresses in Bashkortostan in 1999, and Norway in 2000.

The idea was favored that any local or national or regional festival could feel entirely free to welcome international participants at any time.

Another major matter followed naturally from these deliberations. The board agreed that an international organization was needed, and established the basis for one. The organization will be called International Jew's Harp Society, Internationale Maultrommelgesellschaft, Mezhdunarodnoye Obshchestvo Vargana [and we would like to suggest that the equivalent of these names in any language be considered official as well]. Official communications will be in English, Russian, and German. As much as possible, the Internet and e-mail will be used for communications; a special Web site will be set up when possible; in the meantime, Web sites of the present organizations can carry communications. The present Board will continue to oversee the new society, until a membership is established, and regular voting can take place. We chose Franz Kumpl as President, and Ivan Alexeyev as General Secretary, with the Secretariat /Headquarters to be under his charge at the International Center of Khomus (Jew's harp) Music in Yakutsk. Alexeyev stated that the Center could handle all the business and membership rolls; it was decided therefore to do without dues or a treasurer for the present. [In the meantime, the worsening economic situation in Russia has led to a cutback in the Center's funds, which may make dues necessary after all.] E-mail: Ivan Alexeyev guminst.sakha@rex.iasnet.ru It was further decided that the initial membership would be offered to all the members of present trump societies (The Jew's Harp Guild,

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Nihon Koukin Kyoukai, Österreichischer Maultrommelverein) subject to their withdrawal. [To these lists, we have since proposed to add the subscribers to the various trump journals and newsletters.]

Tentative invitations for a Fifth Congress, probably in the year 2004, should be addressed to Dr. Franz Kumpl, President, Internationale Maultrommelgesellschaft, Eggerthg. 10/15, A-1060 Wien, Austria; e-mail:

fkumpl@ibm.net <<mailto:fkumpl@ibm.net>> .

Fred Crane *

Memorize This

by Frederick Crane



Over the years I have read pretty near everything ever written about the trump (I prefer the old English name for our instrument), with much pleasure, but also with quite a bit of pain. For I have had to read again and again the same old collection of misinformation. I do understand how it happens: one has something to say about the instrument, and fills out one's observations with material found in previous publications. Even if the researcher is careful enough to apply the rule that information should be verified in more than one source, some of the errors are so persistent that it's easy to "verify" them in many places. So here are a half dozen of the assertions that cause me the most torment.

1. The trump is played by gripping it between the teeth. No player would ever say this, but a lot of nonplayers think that's what they have seen. For total novices, I'll spell it out: opening your jaw just a few millimeters, you hold the trump against your teeth, with the upper arm touching the front of the upper teeth, and the lower arm touching the lower teeth.

2. The original term was "jaw's harp" or "jaw harp," which then got corrupted into "Jew's harp." This assertion has been around for 200 years, but there is no evidence for it at all. The instrument was originally called "trump" in English, but by 1545, it was being called "Jew's trump," and a little later "Jew's harp." The "jaw's" or "jaw" was never in use until someone theorized that it was the original form, in the late 18th century. These are absurd terms, in my opinion, as the trump has nothing more to do with the jaw than do other mouth instruments, such as the trumpet, clarinet, or harmonica.

3. One still reads that the three trumps excavated in the ruins of Tannenberg Castle, near Darmstadt, Germany, are the oldest ones ever excavated in Europe. They date from some time between 1200 and 1399; in other words, they are not precisely datable, but could be from the late 14th century. However, trumps from many parts of Europe have been excavated under conditions that allow precise dating as early as 1200, and it seems likely that some are much earlier even than that.

4. One of the most persistent untruths is that there is a sculptured figure in Exeter Cathedral, one of an orchestra of angels dating probably from 1353, who is playing a trump.

The angel's hands are indeed near its mouth, nearly in the position of a trump-player's hands. But as long ago as 1972, Hubert Boone published the first clear photo of this angel, on which one can clearly see the mouthpiece of a trumpet, whose tube has long since been lost. I'm sorry about this, too, but there's no doubt whatever that the angel was playing a trumpet.

5. In 1914, Erich von Hornbostel and Curt Sachs published the system of classifying musical instruments that has been taken ever since as the authoritative one. To put it briefly, they divided all instruments into four classes according to how they produce sounds: aerophones (or wind instruments), chordophones (strings), membranophones (drums, etc.), and idiophones, in which the sounds originate in solid bodies that aren't stretched (for example, wood-blocks, xylophones, music boxes). Hornbostel and Sachs assigned the trump to the idiophones, evidently because its solid, unstretched vibrator has to be plucked to put it into motion. I won't go into the reasoning here, but three articles on the acoustics and classification of the trump, all published independently between 1968 and 1974, prove that it is an aerophone. But conservatism prevails, and the trump is still usually wrongly grouped with the idiophones.

6. A little more subtly, erroneous is the notion that the reason for playing on two trumps tuned a fourth apart is to make it possible to play a full scale. For instance, a trump in g has only the tones g, b, and d in the middle range, but adding a trump in d makes it possible also to play f sharp, a, and e. So there is a point. But in the higher range, the whole scale is available on one trump alone, if you don't mind the fourth and sixth scale steps being out of tune with other instruments. And even in the middle range, the missing tones can be faked pretty effectively on just one trump. The reason for playing on two trumps tuned to tonic and dominant is something essentially different: the practice has its traditional home in Austria, Switzerland, and southern Germany, an area in which traditional tunes are strongly rooted in the alternation of tonic and dominant, in both melody and harmony. The two trumps provide both of these—the basic pitch of the instrument provides the harmony, while the oral cavity of the player picks out the tones of the tonic triad on the one instrument, and of the dominant triad on the other. The tunes often call for subdominant as well, which is accomplished by adding a third trump; a piece in G calls for trumps in g, d, and c.

- Fred Crane *

**Don't forget
to renew your JHG membership
Your dues keep the Guild alive!!**

**North American
Jews Harp Festival
1998**

A report by Jack Roberts

Friday and Saturday, August 14, 15, Richland, Oregon. I have had the good fortune to be a part of this festival for the past five years and must report that this year's festival was as special as any in the past. Each year seems to produce just a little something special and I must say the Jews harp players bring on even more talents and new sounds than the year before. Maybe my ear is getting use to the twangs and rhythms and off beat sounds that ring from these extraordinary little instruments. I observed some of the newer players and have decided that there are new and better sounding players coming up through the ranks far surpassing the beginner status.

The usual gang of top players continue to come back each year and show us all what they have spent all year working out. More surprises and more astonishing sounds that continue to razzle and dazzle the ears of the beholder. Need I name them, I would except I fear I might leave just one out and that just isn't fair. Each Jew's harp player from beginner to the best are really equal at this festival. For that reason it must go on record as being one of the greatest festivals in the northwest. I have not yet experienced where anyone thought their music or playing ability was any more or any less special than others. Ranked beginners and intermediate and the most proficient player all come and join in together and jam together, sharing the stage in music and wildly and pleasantly produce sounds that captivate the audiences throughout the entire weekend. I don't consider myself an accomplished player since I play guitar, banjo, mandolin and sing and feel comfortable doing that. Harping a Jew's harp for me is pain staking and requires many hours of practice to achieve a status of being a real player. I make attempts at it so I have to respect anyone who can sustain the pain and agony of becoming proficient at this little steel jewel.

The weekend was hot, but to festival goers, no big deal. The music is foremost and weather of any kind is not going to interfere with us die-hard lovers of music. The sound folks and equipment was the best I can ever remember, the food the Grange folks served was extremely good and well worth the price they charged. (Real reasonable)

Friday night was reserved primarily for harpers and provided an entire evening of great music. Around 10 PM, the open jam began and more great music flourished and filled the night. I think the audience size was larger than in the past.



Saturday morning the band scramble was drawn and the bands formed and began their practice and not one band fell short of being fantastic. The bands came on at noon and simply amazed me with their sights and sounds. Everyone had fun and it seems the band scramble is growing and more folks step right up to center stage and strut their stuff. There was music the rest of the day and evening and featured some really nice harping and a variety of kinds of music. Through the evening the songs continued and again we came to that time where a grand jam finalized the night and everyone exploded with contributions of song and fest.

I have refrained from stating anyone's name or crediting anyone's special performance because each and everyone who participates deserve credits and recognition for a job well done. But most of all to those special folks who are part of the board and all the volunteers who made this week end possible. THANK YOU SO VERY MUCH FOR ANOTHER GREAT JEW'S HARP FESTIVAL. Submitted by request, your roving reporter Jack" mostly folk" Roberts *

NOTICE

EMI - Experimental Musical Instruments - will cease publication with the June 1999 issue. Other facets of EMI's operations will continue, including EMI's own web-site at:

<http://www.windworld.com/emi>

Back issues and other EMI publications are still available.



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Kathi Vinson - Secretary JHG
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Wayland Harman - Contributor
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1 Harp \$2.⁰⁰ 2 Harps \$3.⁰⁰
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*Join us at the
North American Jew's Harp Festival
August 20th 21st 1999*

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