

THE PLUCK-N-POST



Volume 3 Issue 2

PO Box 92 Sumpter, OR. 97877

Spring / Summer 1999

A Word from the Executive Director

Happy Spring! I don't know about you, but I am very glad to have the winter of 98/99 over!! We had the most snow in 20 years ... and even as I write this, there is still another 4 feet in the yard waiting to melt!

We still have wonderful memories of the 3rd International Jew's Harp Congress in Molln, Austria. The Austrian Jew's Harp Association's Web Page is quite good ... there are several articles in English, plus they've just recently added many wonderful color photos of Congress Participants. Check them out at: <http://www.stn.at/homes/maultrommel>. Bill and I hope to have all of our "Molln Memories" in a scrapbook at the festival this year.

The Guild has added many new international members this past winter. And its so thrilling that many of these were folks we met in Molln last summer. We have a new sister Guild in Norway. Its so encouraging to see these organizations popping up, world-wide. I think the Yakutian's are right ... the Jew's Harp will be the instrument of the 21st century.

So, with Molln still lingering, our minds are turning to our own **North American Jew's Harp Festival**... only 4 months away! Its hard to believe this will be our 8th festival.

We have begun making plans and would appreciate any comments or input you'd like to contribute. WE VERY MUCH NEED more active volunteers to work at the festival. Special needs are a **WORKSHOP COORDINATOR** and a **KID'S EVENT COORDINATOR** for Saturday. These are hard positions to fill because they require someone who is not overly involved musically in the festival. The coordinator doesn't actually conduct the workshops, they only make sure everyone is prepared and that the workshops run smoothly. Let us know if you're interested.

It looks like this year's festival will be an **INTERNATIONAL EVENT**. We've already received tentative confirmation that we'll have folks from Norway and The Netherlands ... and we're still hoping to have Austrians and Russians in attendance, too.

Press Packets and Performer Registration Packets are now complete. Please remember to send a SASE with your inquiries. Hope to see you at the festival.

Some Jew's Harp tidbits of late ... We received word that **Neal Stulberg**, an American conductor living in Amsterdam, conducted Charles Ives' "Washington's Birthday" (which features a Jew's Harp solo) with the Netherlands Radio Chamber Orchestra.

David Wilke's print "The Jew's Harp" recently was auctioned off through the website "ebay.com". Guild member **Pat Chappelle** of England was high bidder. **Dr. Fred Crane** was able to obtain the original sheet music to "Jew's Harp Bill," written in 1930 by Arthur Fields and Fred Hall. The Guild's thanks go out to both Fred and Pat for sending the Guild copies of these! The copies will be on display at this year's festival.

That's all for this time! Take care and keep "twangin"!! Janetw



*Be surprised
at the North
American Jew's
Harp Festival
August 20th, 21st,
1999 in Richland
Oregon*

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Recap of the Minutes The Jew's Harp Guild Board Meeting

February 13, 1999

- (1) By-laws were amended to allow more flexibility with the number and titles of Board Members
- (2) Approval of an official stand on the term "Jew's Harp". The term "Jew's Harp" will be used in all Guild publications and materials ... unless a direct quote is being used or a specific product is mentioned.
- (3) Approval of creating a new Guild logo while still using the cricket as the official Festival logo.

Recap of the Minutes The Jew's Harp Guild Membership Meeting

February 13, 1999

- (1) Approval to begin selling advertising in both Pluck and Pluck'N'Post.
- (2) Discussion began on the T-shirt design for this year's festival. Final decision will be made at the next meeting.
- (3) Pre-festival planning
- (4) Guild Newsletter Publications will now be:
PLUCK - Winter issue
PLUCK 'N' POST Spring; Summer, Fall issues

I Heard That!

Soundbites & Stuff

Some older movies that have Jew's Harp music in them:

"Buck and The Preacher"

"Blazing Saddles"

"Summer of 42"

Magazine article in the March 1997 issue of NATURAL HISTORY, page 39

Books with references to Jew's Harps:

"Second Generation" by Howard Fast - Page 302 - reference to "geegaws"

"Two Roads to Guadeloupe" by Robert Lewis Taylor pages 36 & 58

"A Journey to Matecombe" by Robert Lewis Taylor - pages 107, 116, 157

"Niagara" by Robert Lewis Taylor - page 248

"Panther In The Sky" by James A. Thom (the life story of Tecumseh) - page 651

"Bridget's Grace" - page 174

"The Power Of One" by Bryce Courtney - page 55



What's the Idioglot?

Two distinctly different types of instruments exist in the world of trumps (Jew's harps). The design most familiar to Western and European musicians is a steel frame into which a second piece of steel is set. The technical term for this type is heteroglot - made from two or more parts. The idioglot is made of a single part and is, as a matter of fact, the topic of this column.

The first idioglot I saw was the Philippine Kubing. These wonderful instruments are hand cut from a straight grained bamboo stick, approximately 10" x 5/8" x 1/8". The exterior surface of the large culm (4-5") is present on one side. This is decorated by scratching away the smooth and blackening the resulting patterns. This artwork includes a family mark which identifies the maker. Keep in mind the Kubing is one of a very broad range of similar bamboo instruments. It is, however, the one with which I am most familiar. I will return to the Kubing after a look at the engineering of the idioglots, which can also be constructed of brass.

With a steel trump, a rigid frame holds a flexible reed that is plucked directly. The reed must be strong enough to withstand the plucking many, many times. The whole assembly requires contact with the player's teeth to achieve its full volume.

With idioglots, a flexible frame holds an even more flexible reed that is never plucked directly. The frame must be rigid enough to withstand many plucks, yet flexible to allow the pluck to transfer to the reed. As the frame snaps back straight, the reed cannot keep up and is left to catch up, which is the start of its vibration cycle. The reed must be very flexible to allow this.

No Contact Sport

No contact with the teeth is required to achieve full volume, just a little air. These instruments rest lightly on the lips, this being the most apparent difference to a steel harp player.

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, which is missing in this light and flexible idioglot. 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 instrument will rest on the lips or it will mute the sound a bit.

(Continued on page 3)

PLUCK-N-POST

(Continued from page 2)

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.

Due to the closed frame design inherent with this harp, the very straight pluck (in line with the reed's flexing) required with steel harps 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. Finger plucks like those of a strung concert harp player, a scratching type movement, work well if the intensity and sharpness of the pluck is maintained.

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

Big Brass

Akin to the Kubing, is the brass Hmong harp. These are powerful instruments and may have volume which rivals all but very loud steel harps. The sustain is long and true with air flow being extremely effective. Smaller than their bamboo cousins, a firm clamping of the frame is still essential. Some practice at supplying the necessary thumb and finger pressure will be needed. The flat side faces the audience and it is recommended that they be plucked toward the player only. Back and forth plucking may damage these somewhat fragile instruments.

Brass harps are great for singing with. The very flexible and relatively light reeds are so sensitive to air flow that even that of a sung note has effect. Matching the vocal frequency to the harp's lowest pitch creates a powerful note. Some mismatches will yield three notes; the voice, the harp and the beats between the two. Singing the harp's low note while producing the high harmonics with mouth movement is easy and beautiful. These same techniques are available with steel trumpets but take on especially silky attributes with Hmong harps.

While the mouth and throat manipulations used in playing the idioglots are very similar to those used in playing steel harps, there are a few differences. If a lot of air flow is used, the reed can be overdriven and lose its sustain, growling to a stop. Conversely, the air which can be forced through with a tongue thrust is enough to mimic a short blast of diaphragm air on a steel harp. When playing higher harmonics, the drone of the open reed is not as pronounced as that of the steel harp. This is especially true of the Hmong harp and may be due to the lack of contact with the players teeth.

Idioglots, being cut from one piece, have very tight tolerances. Steel harps must make more allowance for deflection in the reed's path due to direct plucking of the reed. In the construction of a Kubing, the parallel fibers of bamboo are

pealed up between crosswise stop cuts, creating V shaped troughs with just penetrate the smooth side of the bamboo blank. With the complete outline of the reed just cut through a free flexing reed which is permanently aligned with the frame is created.

Hmong harps are cut from a brass blank approximately 3" x 1/2" x .025 thousands thick. The reed's shape may have a single long point or can be double-tongued (two long points) or may have an extra couple of short points at the base of 1 long point.

These reeds are carved from 1 side of the blank by cutting or scraping the metal until the outline of the reed is visible on the flat side without cutting through brass being fairly soft will distort before it cuts through. This distortion can be sanded off the flat side that completes the cut.

Once the reed is free to flex within its frame, adjustments are made to maximize playability. Both frame and reed are thinned in the area where they are joined. This increases flexibility and lowers the harp's pitch and increases sustain. The reed's thickness may also be reduced to reduce mass and raise the pitch. Balancing these adjustments to bring out the best tone takes experience. Making an idioglot is a challenge and these instruments are cultural works of art. No trumpeter's kit is complete without an idioglot, a wonderful alternative to steel harps. – Wayland ψ

IDIOTLOTS from the Pictorial Archive



↑ PA94 – The Wayland Harman Collection – Brass Trumpets
The Jew's Harp Guild Pictorial Archive

↓ PA58 – The Larry Hanks Collection – Hmong Harps





E-mail, News & Correspondence

Post Your Notes

JHG on CBC Radio One

Wednesday, April 28, 1999 2:29 PM

"Dear Mark,

Thought you would like to know that this morning I did a 25 minute radio interview with CBC out of Vancouver, BC on the Jew's Harp Guild. It will be aired sometime tomorrow (Thursday, April 29th) in the afternoon."

Janet Gohring

And from CBC Radio One's website on April 28:

RICHARDSON'S ROUNDUP

is two lively hours of stories and music heard Monday through Friday at 14:06 on CBC Radio One, and in RealAudio at 14:06 EST (19:06 GMT). Host **Bill Richardson** corrals selections from the best of Radio One and Radio Two, and features your stories and music requests.

Thursday's Highlights:

Everything you ever wanted to know about the jew's harp and more. A conversation with none less than the executive director of the American Jew's Harp Guild...

Then

Romanian Folkdance

Name: roger

Date: 4/29/99



HI. I heard about this web site by listening to the cbc today. There is a Romanian Folkdance called, Floricica Olteneasca- a fast complicated dance- with only the jew's harp. I thought you should know. It's a very popular dance throughout the folkdance community. thanks, bye.

If anyone had a chance to record this interview, please contact the JHG. We'd love to have a copy!

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

The Austrian Jew's Harp Association will organize an annual international meeting of Jew's Harp Players, makers, scientists, and other people interested in the field of the Jew's Harp. The aims of such meetings are encouraging international know-how-transfer, scientific work and a general promotion for Jew's Harp music. Because of the big success of the International Jew's Harp Festival 1998 and the 3rd International Jew's Harp Congress the Austrian Jew's Harp Association is animated to take initiatives for further international contacts. Please take this chance - we hope to see you in Moln. You will find further information in our Homepage <http://www.stn.at/maultrommel> (Link: Treffen 99)!



Manfred Rußmann

Heinz Anzinger

Jew's harp of the Bukidnon people

At 10:25 AM 3/30/99 -0500, you wrote:

Name: Hans Brandeis

Email: brandeis.hans@berlin.de

Hi,

Regarding the jew's harp of the Bukidnon people, Mindanao, Philippines, there is an updated version on my website now, including a new photograph:

<http://freehosting.at.webjump.com/br/brandeis-webjump/bukid1.html>

Regards, Hans Brandeis

Check out the new ODD Music website at:

<http://www.oddmusic.com>

The Early Music Network website is at:

<http://www.earlymusic.net/>

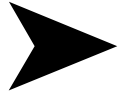
The Dutch Jew's Harp Newsletter website is at:

<http://www.zeelandnet.nl/paclax/jewsharp>

**Don't forget
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Playing Tips

Keep your 'harp clean and dry...

Wipe it off after EVERY use. Store it in a dry place.

Use a "burnishing wheel" to clean it often.

Take Notes

Carry a small notebook in your kit! Keep notes on neat 'harp combinations, song ideas or lyrics, types of 'harps your friends have... etc. etc.

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The Jew's Harp Guild Pictorial Archive needs photos of your favorite 'harps. Send (*non-returnable*) pics and info to: The Jew's Harp Guild Pictorial Archive: c/o Mark D. Poss 924 10th. Ave. N. - Nampa, Idaho 83687

New JHG Website Features



Several months ago

we announced the switch to the www.jewsharpguild.org website address, and mentioned some of the new features that would be forthcoming. Well, at long last, I have nearly completed the full update!

I am aware that not everyone is internet ready... but I feel compelled to inform our readers of the new website features so they may pass the info along to friends and cohorts. Also I view the *PLUCK-N-POST* as a vehicle to disseminate information gathered on the internet... and the website, to pass along info gathered by more traditional methods.

New website features include: the first 100 records of the **JHG Pictorial Archive**; site search engine; archives of past on-line newsletters, and Guest Book. The old "Harpist on the Web" page has been replaced by the Guest Book. Please sign in!! A on-line discussion group is in the troubleshooting stage and should be operational soon as well.

The website has become a wonderful resource for the Guild and its members. Nary a week goes by that we don't hear from someone new. This includes contacts with folks like the CBC (see the Bulletin Board), museums, and an array of music organizations.

Newsletter Changes

Some policy changes are evident in this issue of *PLUCK-N-POST*. The "mailer" section has been removed to provide more space... and we've opened the door for outside advertising in the hope additional revenue will enable us to provide you with a better newsletter.

As always, we are looking for new contributors of tidbits, articles, cartoons, and pictures for JHG publications.

Farewell to EMI

Bart Hopkin's *Experimental Musical Instruments* has ceased publication after a fantastic run of 14 years. *EMI* will continue many facets of business on it's website at: <http://www.windworld.com/emi>. I cannot express the gratitude I feel for the influence this publication has had on me personally. Not only for introducing me to new concepts and interesting people, but also for Bart's editorial example of what a musical periodical should be.

Bart and *EMI* have supported the NAJHF since its birth, and have been a source of Jew's Harp information for many years. We extend our thanks for a job well done and best wishes for future endeavors.

Happy 'Harpin' ! - Mark w

PLUCK-N-POST

NOTICE

EMI - Experimental Musical Instruments - has ceased 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.

VIM

601 N. White St.
Mt. Pleasant, IA 52641 U.S.A.
Seven back issues of VIM US\$ 9.⁰⁰ each.
Subscriptions are invited to nos. 8 and 9 at US\$18.⁰⁰ for the two issues. Payment may be by a check on a U.S. bank, domestic money order, or international postal money order. Prices include postage anywhere in the world.

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Information in this newsletter is also posted on the Jew's Harp Guild Website at: <http://www.jewsharpguild.org>

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1/4 page ads: US\$10.⁰⁰ per issue (US\$30.⁰⁰ per year)

1/2 page ads US\$20.⁰⁰ per issue (US\$60.⁰⁰ per year)

We hope that the additional revenue will enable us to produce a better newsletter.

Join us at the
North American Jew's Harp Festival
August 20th 21st 1999