

PLUCK-N-POST

508 Second Street, Cove, Oregon 97824 USA

The official newsletter
of the Jew's Harp Guild



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SPRING 2006

International Jew's Harp Congress Summer twang fests in Amsterdam...

Amsterdam's newest music hall, the Muziekgebouw aan 'tIj, will host the Fifth International Jew's Harp Congress July 28-30, 2006, in association with the International Jew's Harp Society. Hundreds of players, makers, and researchers from around the world will acquaint the Dutch audience with the astounding versatility of the instrument.

The core of the congress is the participation of scores of accomplished instrumentalists and their ensembles representing diverse musical traditions. In addition to a series of concerts highlighting the Jew's harp, the congress will include cinematography, lectures, demonstrations, and a market.

Jew's harp players from Asia, with their electrifying and idiomatic sound, represent traditional musical cultures that have remained almost unchanged over the centuries. In Europe and America there are remnants of original folk music traditions associated with the instrument, and modern experimentation takes place as well.

In addition, there will undoubtedly be impromptu performances by players from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds. These ad hoc ensembles highlight what is most remarkable about these international gatherings: how mutual ties and fascination for a tiny instrument can literally bring together the people of the world. ■

(The above was freely adapted from the website www.muzeikgebouw.nl. Check the site periodically for further updates.)



The Muziekgebouw aan 'tIj [Music Building on the IJ] in its stunning setting in the Oosterdok Region on the River IJ.



A high note of the 2005 festival: Musical saw players Squish, Rick Meyers, and Curtis Chamberlain. PHOTO BY JONATHAN LEY

North American Jew's Harp Festival ...and in Bay City, Oregon

The 14th North American Jew's Harp Festival will take place August 4-6, 2006, in Bay City, on the northern Oregon coast. Watch for the next issue of *PNP*, or visit our website at www.jewsharpguild.org for updates. If you have other questions, see the Pluck-N-Post box on page 2 for contact information.

Last year's festival attracted the talents of photographer Jonathan Ley; at left is his whimsical treatment of an all-saw rendition of "Ghost Chickens in the Sky" at the Saturday evening concert.

You can view more of Mr. Ley's work on his website: www.leyphotography.com ■

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A Word from the Executive Director

Hello Harpers,

As your new executive director, I thought I'd introduce myself. My name is Gordon Frazier. I learned to play the Jew's harp at the age of 11, or 36 (!) years ago. Holy cow, how time does fly.

In my early 20s I did a library search and discovered the instrument's intriguing history and widespread global popularity. I had no idea. About ten years later I read *The Jew's Harp: A Comprehensive Anthology*, by Leonard Fox. There I found a reference to *VIM*, published by Frederick Crane. I subscribed.

And then, in 1990, Fred sent his subscribers postcards telling about an international gathering of enthusiasts in faraway eastern Siberia, taking place the next year. I decided I couldn't afford to go, but at the urging of a friend I was convinced I couldn't afford not to. And so I did. Whole 'nother story.

Upon my return my dad (Marvin Frazier) insisted on taking me to meet fellow enthusiast Bill Gohring, son-in-law of dad's friends in Arlington, Oregon. Bill and Janet lived, at the time, in the foothills of the Blue Mountains in northeastern Oregon. We all hit it off,

so Bill and Janet, their friend Bart Wood, and I decided then and there to start our own festival. The North American Jew's Harp Festival was the result.

Dad attended most of the earlier festivals, and when he did we had a virtuoso rattlebones player on stage. His health finally prevented him from traveling, and he passed on a few years back. But his spirit is alive and well at the NAJHF; I can still hear him rattling them bones up on stage.

International news

- Watch PNP for updates on fests in Amsterdam the last weekend of July, and Oregon the first weekend of August. I'm going to be *so* jetlagged! (See page 1.)
- A double DVD and a CD of the Fourth International Jew's Harp Congress, held in Norway in 2002, are now available online at <http://www.munnharpe.no>

Board changes

We had a few changes in the makeup of the Guild board this year.

Janet Gohring stepped down as Executive Director last year but will stay on as Secretary/Treasurer, and Kathi Vinson stepped down as Secretary.

Gene "Eldorado" Ralph also stepped down from his position on the board. Gene's enthusiasm and energy have been appreciated by all over the years. We wish him good luck in all his endeavors, and look forward to seeing him and his guitar at the next festival.

New to the board are John Palmes, from Juneau, Alaska, and Ingrid Berkhout, from Seattle, Washington. (See page 7.) Both have been festival regulars for a number of years. Welcome aboard!

A special note of thanks

In her farewell column, Janet did not begin to convey her role in the origins and growth of the festival and the Guild. The first festival came about due to lots of work from many folks, but Janet and Kathi were key players. Mailings, flyers, organizing volunteers, getting folks checked in at the info booth, playing in the house band...seems like they were everywhere.

The two were also instrumental in the formation of the Guild, and between the two of them the organization became – well, organized.

Janet and Kathi are True Friends of the Jew's Harp. We owe them a huge debt of gratitude and in the coming months we will surely learn the hard way just how much work they've been doing all these years. ■

Gordon Frazier

PLUCK-N-POST

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Executive Director: Gordon Frazier
Secretary/Treasurer: Janet Gohring
Webmaster: Mark D. Poss
Newsletter Editor: Gordon Frazier

Jew's Harp Guild Board members:
Ingrid Berkhout, Gordon Frazier, Janet Gohring, Larry Hanks, Denise Harrington, John Palmes, Mike Stiles

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BULLETIN BOARD

Questions? Answers?
Write to PNP at:
508 2nd St, Cove, OR 97824 USA
or e-mail us at:
newsletter@jewsharpguild.org

GROUP PLAY: I have always had a jews harp of some description, since I was about 13 years old—and that was in 1965. I love having a twang when the mood takes me. Your site is excellent and I am amazed by the amount of following there obviously is for these instruments in the United States... ¶ I am thinking of starting up Jews Harp Workshops for a string of village festivals in my part of England. I have got some ideas buzzing around my head, but wondered if you might have some clues. About the sort of things a **group of learning players** could do together for example. I have some ideas, but they sort of depend on harps of different tones to get a rhythm going and I think both the large and the very small ones are the most difficult to play. ¶ Also—where can I get instruments at wholesale prices for resale, just to add another angle. I hope you are able to help.
Cheers, Peter Embling

At the North American Jew's Harp Festival we have tried various key combinations with sometimes surprising results. Even combinations that are not "pretty" can be interesting; for example, two harps tuned a half-step apart (like F and F#) produce enharmonic, unearthly tones. ¶ It's also fun to get a good-sized group playing in the same key... ideally, in different registers. The resultant thrumming drone can be rhythmic and hypnotic. On the other hand, the Kyrghyz of Central Asia put together choruses of perhaps a dozen players, each switching between several keyed khomuses during a single song. ¶ It might be fun to add a backup instrument to your choir, such as a flute, didgeridu, or a drum or other percussion. ¶ The only makers I know of who sell wholesale are Whitlow, Schwarz, and Wimmer. ¶ This is an interesting topic! Readers: What are your thoughts? Have you tried similar experiments? — PNP

I am a member of Rowley Regis Online England (www.rowleyregis.com). On that website there is a lot of interest about Jews Harps. A lot of people on our website have **ancestors who made Jews Harps** in our area. Two names that made Jews Harps are Jones and Tromans. We have a lot of visitors on RRO from the USA. Thank you for a very interesting site.

Brian Hall
England

Hi all. Please go on my website www.bjoc.com (go to the BJOC page and look for the words Discover BJOC tracks), and you'll get some of my sounds **playing jharp with my band**.

dj Blond Boche
Vibes.provider@blondboche.com
Switzerland

Cool sounds! Thanks for the link. —PNP

I really like what you guys have gotten started. I began playing the jew's harp about five years ago, I'm now 25 and trying to get my friends and local community involved in either playing instruments along with, or playing the jew's harp themselves. I will be ordering from your site and selling to these folks at the price I buy them at just to get a crew together. When I have more money I will join your guild as well, but for now, just a **friendly hello from a fellow enthusiast**.

Mikey Miller
Olga, WA

(cont. on next page)

WELCOME to our new Jew's Harp Guild members
Bruce Salamandir—Auburn, WA
John James—Aurora, CA
Jerry Grulkey—Scotts Mills, OR

NEW Board Members
Guild board election results:
Executive Director: Gordon
Frazier; Secretary/Treasurer:
Janet Gohring; Board Members:
Ingrid Berkhout, Larry Hanks,
Denise Harrington, John Palmes,
Mike Stiles

THANKS to renewing Guild members...

and a reminder to those who haven't renewed that the Membership Renewal enclosed in your newsletter is the last reminder you will get. Better just pop it in the mail—you don't want to risk missing the next copy of Pluck-N-Post!

BULLETIN BOARD (cont. from page 3)

I played the jew's harp as a child with part of **my father's jug band**. (including but not limited to banjo, fiddle, string drum, washboard, etc.) My earliest memories of playing on stage are from about 7 years of age. (I started earlier) I would like to say hi to someone that knows what I am speaking about. When I pull out my current harp I don't get much respect. (I should mention that I am female and this doesn't help the situation). Thanks,

Jennifer
Albuquerque, NM

Jug band music is not unknown at the North American Jew's Harp Festival—we have a house "gut bucket" and we often have washboard, musical saw, and other kitchen band instruments. We might have even had jug! You should come up and join us some year. We know what you mean by a lack of respect for the Jew's harp, but we are working to change that. Out of curiosity: where did you grow up? And where and when did your father play jug band music? — PNP

I'm a bluegrass banjo player and I want to play some jew's harp. I bought one a while back but it didn't sound like I thought it should. **What type should I get** and where can I get one?

Scott Wiggins
Wichita, KS

I have a question (thinking out loud). **Are you able to acquire a certain trump** if I order it or are you limited in what you can get? There are some trumps I'm interested in but, for one I'm not really wanting to deal with overseas transactions. Second I'd rather buy it from you if possible. Anyway let me know. Thanks,

Tony

Scott and Tony: The Jew's Harp Guild does not sell instruments, but several of our members do. See page 8 for contact and other information. Which kind to get? That depends on what type of music you are playing as well as your personal preference. If you have a question about a particular trump feel free to write or e-mail; maybe we can help. —PNP

I was looking at the date for the annual get together over at Garibaldi [Bay City] and I see that it is the same weekend as a major Cowboy Action shooting match that I compete in each year

so I won't make it. I'd sure like to know when any of the Guild members are shown on TV. The way I found out about you was channel surfing and **on one of the cable channels** was the beautiful & melodious boinging of multiple jews harps and I went nuts. My wife was rolling her eyes. Hopefully someone lets fellow harpers know when the others will be on TV.

Tye Wood
Portland, Oregon

That melodious boinging is "Minor Third" from the 1998-2000 Festival Highlights CD, used with permission by Bob Nisbet to accompany a short video of flowing water that is being used as "filler" between programs on Portland public access. Mr. Nisbet also produced a video of the 2005 North American Jew's Harp Festival which was also slated to air on Portland public access TV.

Hi, I my name is Heather, and my cousin and other family members have been playing the Jew's harp for as long as I can remember, but I never knew the name of it (my cousin always called it **the humdinger!!**) Whenever I tried to explain it to other people, they never knew what I was talking about, and I really wanted to find out its name! I tried searching it on Google and eBay for quite a while, and finally found your site. I just want to say thank you for dedicating an entire guild to this amazing instrument that holds so much sentimental value to me! If it were not for this site, I probably would never know its name, and would not have been able to tell other people about this great instrument.

Heather Adams
Ontario, Canada

"Humdinger" is a great name—we'll have to add it to the list. Do you know the origins of the Jew's harp playing in your family? —PNP

I am not sure where the jew's harp playing began in my family. We all live in the Eastern Ontario region, but I think my uncle (who married into my family) had ancestors who were French and Ukrainian. I think he might have just picked one up at an auction sale or something, and it just kind of carried on, and I am not sure if he bought it because his family had played it. I think he may have started a little tradition in my family. Thanks for your help!

Heather

The Twain-Twang Connection *by Gordon Frazier*

Not long ago I came across a website devoted to Mark Twain (the nom de plume of Samuel Clemens; one of the two is my favorite writer, but I can never recall which one). In the course of perusing the site I found a photograph of some Twain-related items from the collection of Dave Thomson (the webmaster), and there on the wall behind them was mounted a Jew's harp. What's this? I thought, and so I wrote to Mr. Thomson asking about the connection. I was familiar with the "painful music" quote, I told him, but did he know of others? And did Mr. Clemens himself play?

We corresponded; following are excerpts from some of Mr. Thomson's responses, reprinted with permission.

The primary connection I have always made with the Jew's harp was from *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* in which one of the items Tom received in return for letting other boys whitewash the fence was "part of a Jew's harp" which suggests that this was perhaps only the harp without the twanger which would be typical Twain irony for a "useless" trophy that only a boy would count as a treasure. From Chapter 2, 1876:

... when the middle of the afternoon came, from

being a poor poverty-stricken boy in the morning, Tom was literally rolling in wealth. He had besides the things before mentioned, twelve marbles, part of a Jew's-harp, a piece of blue bottle glass to look through, a spool cannon, a key that wouldn't unlock anything, a fragment of chalk, a glass stopper of a decanter, a tin soldier, a couple of tadpoles, six firecrackers, a kitten with only one eye, a brass doorknob, a dog collar – but no dog – the handle of a knife, four pieces of orange peel, and a dilapidated old window sash.

In "About Play Acting" 1898, Twain compared the act of reading Shakespeare to oneself as being as frustrating as attempting to play "*an organ solo on a Jew's harp*" in comparison to hearing the great acting family of the Booths speak the words of the bard on stage:

Nowadays, when a mood comes which only Shakespeare can set to music, what must we do? Read Shakespeare ourselves! Isn't it pitiful? It is playing an organ solo on a Jew's-harp. We can't read. None but the Booths can do it.

(cont. on page 6)

A plucked chicken

"Show-N-Tell" is a new feature of Pluck-N-Post. Please submit your own photographs and stories. Do you have an unusual Jew's harp, or one with an unusual history? Tell us about your favorite one to play, or show us the first one you owned. All of them have histories. We'd love to hear them.

Recently spotted on eBay (and no, we don't know who placed the winning bid): a homemade wooden-and-steel Jew's harp in the form of a chicken. The tip of the lamella can be seen just peeping out from the back of the chicken's feet. According to the seller, the instrument "was made around 1905 and according to my husband's grandfather it was made in Western North Carolina for him by his father, William Debruhl."

This is a wonderful example of a homemade Jew's harp, and a fine piece of folk art to boot. We would love to get a closer look at it... perhaps it will show up at the festival one year. ■

The "striker" or tip of the lamella can just be seen at the bottom of the photograph. The embouchure, or playing area, appears to be in back, between the chicken's feet, but it's hard to tell from the photo.



Exploring an acoustic polyphonic synthesizer

In the previous issue of Pluck-N-Post, webmaster Mark Poss introduced a new feature of the Guild website, "Member Submitted Audio Files." Check it out yourself on the Guild's home page at www.jewsharpguild.org. Soundings will take a closer look at individual audio files, with comments from the performer.

SOUNDINGS

Vladiswar Nadishana (www.nadishana.nm.ru or www.nadishana.de) from Berlin, Germany, submitted an impressive solo on the Chinese tri-harp called *kou xiang* [or *kou ksiang*; it is also known as a *hoho*].

The *kou xiang* consists of three small brass idiophones, connected with wire at the base. Each is tuned to a different note, and may be played separately or in tandem. Mark asked Nadishana for a description of his playing technique. He wrote:

"About my style in playing the Kou Ksiang. This is the mixture of traditional technique of Kuzhebarian people in the South of Krasnoyarsk re-



The kou xiang. Image is from the website www.danmoi.de.

gion (Russia), where I am from, with my own inventions. The way of fast rhythmical breathing is from Ancient Kuzhebar culture. And the theme of this song is in 13/8, which is very characteristic to this culture too, because kuzhebarians liked the odd signatures. Of course they played a different kind of jaw's harp, similar to the one-tongue Altaian *khomus*. I apply this technique to the *kou ksiang*. This is a great instrument with a lot of possibilities and it's a pity that there are no *kou xiang* with 5 or 6 tongues. :)

I have also added the "envelope effect" and "fast doubling" method, when the forefinger is quickly switching from one tongue to another. To do this you must always change the angle and position of the *kou xiang* near your mouth by your left hand while you are picking the tongues with the right hand. As a result you get the pocket acoustic polyphonic synthesizer that needs no electricity and you can play it in remote Taiga for example." ■

Twain (cont. from previous page)

So I think he was using the limitations of the instrument as ironic counterpoint rather as he did in the great phrase "The difference between the almost right word and the right word is really a large matter – it's the difference between the lightning bug and the lightning."*

I'm not familiar with a passage where Twain used the word "painful" in conjunction with the jew's harp [see next column – ed.] but I wouldn't put it past him to do so, since he made fine humor at the expense of the accordion in "A Touching Story of George Washington's Boyhood," 1867:

... I must have been gifted with a sort of inspiration to be enabled, in the state of ignorance in which I then was, to select out of the whole range of musical composition the one solitary tune (Auld Land Syne) that sounds vilest and most distressing on the accordion. . .

I recall that the musical of Huck Finn (Big River) used a [jew's] harp as part of the ensemble.

Plumb overlooked the passage in Chapter 38 of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* where the slave Jim is being held prisoner and Tom Sawyer persuades him to go "by the book" and perform all the absurd rituals of prisoners in fiction:

"But, Jim, you GOT to have 'em – they all do. So don't make no more fuss about it. Prisoners ain't ever without rats. There ain't no instance of it. And they train them, and pet them, and learn them tricks, and they get to be as sociable as flies. But you got to play music to them. You got anything to play music on?"

"I ain' got nuffn but a coase comb en a piece o' paper, en a juice-harp;** but I reck'n dey wouldn' take no stock in a juice-harp."

"Yes they would. THEY don't care what kind of music 'tis. A jews-harp's plenty good enough

(cont. on next page)

* From a letter to George Bainton, October 15, 1888. – PNP

** Twain had a sensitive ear for dialect. Note Tom and Jim's pronunciations (jooz and joos, respectively). Jim's pronunciation was – and is – a common one, and seems likely to be the origin of the spelling "juice harp." – PNP

Twain (cont. from previous page)

for a rat. All animals like music—in a prison they dote on it. Specially, painful music; and you can't get no other kind out of a jews-harp. It always interests them; they come out to see what's the matter with you. Yes, you're all right; you're fixed very well. You want to set on your bed nights before you go to sleep, and early in the mornings, and play your jewsharp; play 'The Last Link is Broken'—that's the thing that'll scoop a rat quicker 'n anything else; and when you've played about two minutes you'll see all the rats, and the snakes, and spiders, and things begin to feel worried about you, and come. And they'll just fairly swarm over you, and have a noble good time."

As far as Clemens actually playing the instrument I think it's likely that as a boy and young steamboat pilot and Western adventurer he did. Part of the "culture" . . . he played the guitar and loved the sound of the "glory beaming" banjo.

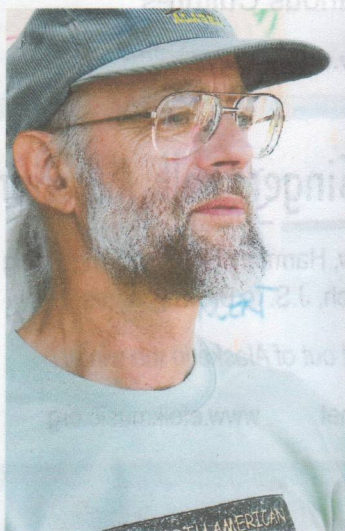
Best, Dave Thomson

<http://futureboy.homeip.net/twain/>

Addendum

A few years ago Frederick Crane wrote an article on the Twain connection for *VIM* (Vol. 7) which focused on the historical placement of the trump in the times and places of Mark Twain's books. He quotes the passages from *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn* above, but also notes a passage from Chapter 23 of *A Tramp Abroad* (1880). I will let you look that one up yourself, as it will expose you to *VIM* or Mark Twain, either of which will enrich your life. ■

The Jew's Harp Guild has been around for just over ten years, and has a constantly changing membership made up of players and other interested parties from around the world. But who, exactly, are they? In an attempt to address that question, this column will feature a Guild member or two each issue. As always, your contributions and suggestions are welcome. To kick things off, this seemed a handy place to introduce our two newest board members, John Palmes and Ingrid Berkhout. Note: These photos were taken at the 2005 festival by Jonathan Ley (www.leyphotography.com). We will feature more of Mr. Ley's photographs in future issues.

GUIDE TO THE GUILD

John Palmes is a folk musician and fisherman from Juneau, Alaska. John writes and sings his own songs while accompanying himself on guitar, and is also widely known for his mouthbow expertise. He has been invited to Australia (twice!) to teach workshops, and has also given them in his home state and

other parts of the Northwest. His latest claim to fame is an interview on NPR upon the release of his recording "Mouthbow: Small Voices." He has several recordings out; check them out at efolkmusic.org.

John first attended the NAJHF in Richland, WA, in 2000, and has made the annual pilgrimage from Juneau ever since.



Ingrid Berkhout is Dutch by birth but has lived in the United States for many years; she currently resides in Seattle. She is a musician and big fan of the Jew's harp since being introduced to the instrument by her friend Des van Dijk.

In Seattle Ingrid is well known in certain circles for the "Space Aliens" performance she and a friend presented a while back. (Yes, it involved the Jew's harp.)

Ingrid is also a sculptor, painter, and photographer; one of her photographs is featured on the 2005 festival T-shirt.

Ingrid first attended the festival in 1993, when it was the Sumpter Valley Jew's Harp Festival. She has been a regular since; ah, the tales she could tell. ■