The Paul Gardie Harmony Orchestral Harp Guitar

Gregg Miner

I know what you're thinking…did someone really *build* this?

Yes. *Eight* of them actually.

Some say it is the strangest harp guitar (or guitar of *any* type) that they have ever seen.

One therefore has to ask; were the inventor and builder *serious?!*

Yes, very.

This is the story.

Decades ago, I remember seeing a small black & white photo of the very instrument above in a guitar book. In 2000, I saw its duplicate in the book *Dangerous Curves* – the catalog of the famed BMFA exhibit put on by then-curator Darcy Kuronen, forever afterward to be known as "a guitar guy." The instrument was then so obscure that Darcy never knew at the time that it had been *patented.*

Darcy's exhibit was the first time the modern public ever saw this unbelievable creation, loaned by the owners.[1] Theirs was the first of two specimens to thus come to light.

The second – the one in the book which only a few had ever seen - was rumored to be secreted away in a storage unit in Maine.

More were later unearthed. The third specimen was seen by my friend Michael Schreiner, who related that "it was in a Wurlitzer music store window in Chicago about 1982. I was in town for the NAMM show and the store was located next to the 'L' (elevated train)." Another – possibly this same one, then "in pieces" – was spotted by a different person a long time ago in a Chicago music store.

A fourth (the third intact specimen with a known location) next appeared out of the woodwork in 2020.[2]

Family lore records that *eight* were built, that family being relatives of William Schultz, the founder and president-turned-shop-foreman of Chicago's Harmony Company. They were said to have been built under Schultz's personal supervision in Harmony's high end custom shop by its master craftsmen with the finest materials. Interestingly, their construction and introduction coincided with the purchase of the company by Sears, after which Schultz remained on as "foreman."[3]

None were believed to have been ever marketed or sold. Instead, they may have remained in the possession of Schultz (especially if Sears soon came in and said, "uh, no to that!"). The ex-company president then presumably gave them to special friends and relatives, after giving the first to its inventor, blind virtuoso multi-instrumentalist Paul Gardie.

It's amazing, frankly, that more than one of these was ever made. I mean, seriously! It's equally mind-boggling to me that it was ever dreamt up, designed *and* patented! Perhaps it had something to do with the fact that the inventor was *blind?* True!

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[1] Alex and David Usher, who's story will follow.

[2] These three instruments will all be seen and discussed below.

[3] The precise timing of all this would be very interesting to know. The month of Sears' buyout is unknown, while we *do* know that at least one of the special instruments was built for inventor Paul Gardie by his appearance with it at the May 1915 Guild convention, detailed below.

PAUL GARDIE
A New Guilder and a New Guitar

The instrument's patentee was one Paul Gardie, who became somewhat infamous from an appearance in *The Cadenza* magazine (at left). But this photo had been floating around for ages with no one really knowing the circumstances.

Gardie's first mention was in the June, 1915 Cadenza journal, in their coverage about the Guild Convention held the previous month. This is where his photo appeared. The multi-page minutes and activities of the convention mention him being admitted as a new Professional Member, and include a short speech he made to the group about a Chicago mandolin club he had recently taken over leadership of. He is later pictured with his harp guitar, a specimen identical to the surviving fancy instruments. Nothing is said about the exceedingly strange "new instrument"!

A month later (July), the competing *Crescendo* journal does their report of the convention:

There were fewer exhibits this year than at any previous convention but they were interesting and well attended. Those exhibiting and the representatives present were, Fred J. Bacon, (New London, Conn.), Mr. and Mrs. Fred Bacon, Lyon & Healy, (Chicago, Ill.), J. C. Freeman; Vega & Fairbanks Co., (Boston, Mass.), Carl Nelson, D. L. Day, Julius Nelson, Bert Fandel; Gibson Mandolin-Guitar Co., (Kalamazoo, Mich.), L. A. Williams and A. J. Reams; The Harmony Mfg. Co., (Chicago, Ill.), Paul Gardie; Tom Carey, (Chicago, Ill.), Rhode Island Music Co., (Providence, R. I.), Giuseppe Pettine.

One of the especially interesting features of the exhibit rooms was the playing of Mr. Paul Gardie, the blind guitarist from Chicago, Ill., who has invented the Gardie Orchestral Harp-Guitar, different in shape from any other make we have seen but with a particularly fine quality of tone and tremendous carrying power. The instrument is very light in weight also, considering its size. It has 8 sub bass strings in addition to the regular 6 strings. Mr. Gardie is an excellent player, one of the finest we have heard, and the way he plays this instrument is marvelous. Not being able to see the fingerboard, he plays by the sense of touch and position and he not only plays the better class of music but effectively plays a number of ragtime pieces which are unusual on the guitar. He takes the most difficult chord positions and runs with ease. He is really a wonderful man and his new guitar is certainly a fine instrument. Mr. Gardie also played solos at the banquet and a duet with Mr. Tom Carey of Chicago.

Interestingly, they list Paul Gardie and his Chicago musical partner Tom Carey as exhibitors following the Harmony Mfg Co.; surely, they were featured in Harmony's room. The Crescendo editor highlighted Gardie as "one of the especially interesting features," describing him as "the blind guitarist from Chicago" and the "inventor of the Gardie Orchestral Harp-Guitar." They praise his instrument very highly, now noting the unusual shape, but without being disparaging. No mention is made as to the manufacturer. They describe him as an excellent player ("one of the finest we have heard"), despite the fact that he was unable to see the fingerboard. He played both the "better class" of music but also several ragtime pieces ("unusual on the guitar"). What a sight (and sound) *that* must have been! I can't tell from the photo what his strings were – the top strings seem to be very thin, indicating steel, but these old images are always misleading. Guild members played their "better class" of music almost exclusively on gut strings, and Gardie may have done the same – even with the ragtime repertoire.[4]

A month later in the August Crescendo a presumably different reviewer gives an even better review of Gardie's performance at the Convention banquet. Clearly, he was the hit of the convention!

The speeches and remarks were freely interspersed with the usual musical numbers, affording relief and variety to the tedium of too continuous and uninterrupted speaking, and a sitting of nearly four hours passed with the swiftness of thought—or rather not thought. The varying numbers were fully appreciated and generously applauded. Space will not permit of detailed mention of the performers, excepting with one instance. A new member of the Guild, and a new guitarist to the East must be accorded some notice because of his wonderful exposition on a most remarkable instrument.

If toastmaster Buttelman dropped unexpected bombs into the verbal ranks, Mr. Paul Gardie of Chicago certainly threw one into the musical camp that was equally surprising when he unloosed the tonal secrets and musical power of his own invented double guitar. For the Gardie Orchestral Harp-Guitar is to the ordinary guitar, almost as a big Krupp siege gun to a cannon of Revolutionary type in range, volume, surety and carrying power.

Some idea of the appearance of this instrument may be gathered from the illustration of both instrument and performer, which appeared on page 36 in the June issue of THE CADENZA, yet the picture does not convey even the most vague idea of what the instrument is capable under Mr. Gardie's wonderful manipulating. The instrument appears to be big, heavy and cumbersome, but on the contrary, it is light in weight and easily handled and controlled when once learned. In addition to the 6 strings of the standard guitar, the new orchestral harp-guitar also has 8 sub bass strings, which furnish a splendid tonal foundation and make the instrument almost a portable piano.

Sometimes a seeming ill fortune, in reality is providential good fortune. Mr. Gardie, being deprived of eyesight, plays entirely through the sense of touch, thus giving intellect full sway to concentrate upon technic, tone and interpretation, and his playing is nothing short of marvelous. His fingers are at once both eyes and fingers that see and produce at the same instant. In straight guitar effects he is unapproachable, while his rhythm, snap and verve in ragtime playing is an astonishing performance never before heard on the guitar by the writer. Mr. Gardie played solo numbers of his own composition, and accompaniments to Mr. "Tom" Carey's banjo.

[4] Silk & steel strings might have been equally likely.

Several months later (January 1916) Crescendo ran the same Cadenza photo, now calling Gardie "the phenomenal harp-guitarist" (spelling his name wrong).

Later that year (September 1916) Cadenza mentions an upcoming November recital concert with Gardie as one of two soloists and "orchestra assisting" (below left).

September, 1, 1916

Dear Friend: You are most cordially invited to become a member of the Kalamazoo Y.M.C.A. Mandolin Orchestra—Kalamazoo Chapter, American Guild of B. M. & G. Rehearsals will be held at the Y.M.C.A. every Thursday evening at 8 o'clock, starting September 7th.

A Recital-Concert will be given in November, with Tom Carey, Banjoist and Paul Gardie, Guitarist, as the Soloists, with the Orchestra assisting.

In the spring, a Festival Concert, with from 50 to 75 players, will be given, Grand Rapids, Jackson and Battle Creek assisting us. Such a concert was successfully given this past season. Numerous entertainments and socials will help make the season very musical and entertaining.

The rehearsals are very instructive, and are especially beneficial to beginners.

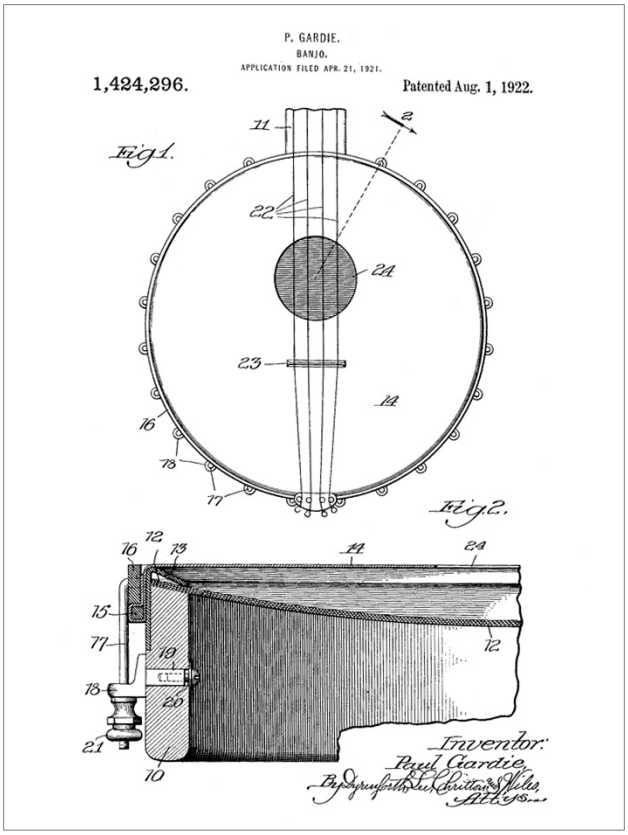
Hoping to have you with us this season and with the best of good wishes, I am,

Very truly yours,

JAS. H. JOHNSTONE,
Director—Chapter Secretary

The above is a Johnstone snap shot of the phenomenal harp-guitarist, Paul Gardy. The instrument shown in the picture is a new harp-guitar of Mr. Gardy's own invention. It is a wonderful instrument with a powerful, resonating tone. Mr. Gardy is one of the greatest players we have ever heard and it is all the more wonderful because he is blind but his skill in handling the instrument is marvelous.

He seems to have kept himself busy after this, as there is next a 1922 patent for a new banjo head he invented (at right).



But 1924 was perhaps his biggest year in Chicago, when the "famous blind banjo player" seemed to be everywhere. His biggest gig was as the sole demonstrator for the entire Illinois Products Exposition. Fretted instrument companies included Slingerland (banjos), Regal (ukuleles) and Harmony (everything). The famous "blind man who is a marvel on every form of string instrument(s)" would also broadcast several numbers over the radio.[5]

[5] *Music Trade Review*, September 27 1924.

At the annual meeting of the Chicago Piano Club in October of that year, the varied entertainment included "Paul Gardy (sic) and Rudolph Johnson, banjoists," and in November, drum manufacturer Ludwig & Ludwig announced a prestigious new banjo line, supervised by Gardie.[6]

Ludwig & Ludwig Bring Out New Banjo Line

Well-known Chicago Drum Manufacturers Announce New Line Ranging in Price From $95 to $1,000

During the past year an entirely new corps of workmen have been added to the Ludwig plant specializing in banjo production. All are highly skilled men and most of them are banjo players themselves. The testing and assembly department has two banjo artists and the supervision of the production is by Paul Gardy, the prominent blind banjoist of this city.

Harmony Co., Chicago, Celebrates Its Thirty-Sixth Anniversary With Dinner

Many Leading Trade Figures Join With Firm in Event—Jay Kraus, President of Company, Acts as Toastmaster at Dinner Held January 6

CHICAGO, ILL., January 14.—Executives of Chicago and out of town musical merchandise wholesalers were the guests of the Harmony Co., Chicago, at an anniversary dinner held at the Standard Club, Chicago, Friday evening, January 6. The occasion was the thirty-sixth anniversary of the founding of the Harmony Co., January, 1892.

The celebration was made the occasion of introducing three new instruments known as the Roy Smeck Vita guitar, tenor guitar, and Plectrum guitar. Experimental work on these instruments has been carried on at the Harmony plant for the past six months, following the success made by the Roy Smeck Vita Uke when it was introduced last year. The new instruments are distinguished by novelty of design and tonal quality.

Roy Smeck, who has assisted in the design of the new instruments, was unable to be present personally to demonstrate them on account of previous theatrical engagements. Demonstrations were made by Paul Gardie, the stringed instrument artist who has become noted for his perfection of touch and tone in spite of the handicap of total blindness, and the demonstration aroused a great deal of attention among those present. It was announced that the instruments would be ready for distribution to the dealer about February 1.

Jay Kraus, president, and members of the Harmony Co. organization, acted as hosts for the occasion, and the following guests were present: Charles Sonfield, of C. Bruno & Son, Inc.; Felix Bauer, of Buegeleisen & Jacobson; M. H. Berlin, Chicago Musical Instrument Co.; Joseph Dunas and L. H. Glassman, of Cole & Dunas Music Co.; John Luellen, of Continental Music Co.; Henry Gerson, of Carl Fischer, Inc.; M. M. Cole, of the Illinois Musical Supply Co.; Frank C. Howard, of the J. W. Jenkins Sons Music Co.; R. H. Roberts, of Lyon & Healy; Max Targ and Sol Dinner, of Targ & Dinner Music Co.; Paul Moennig, of Tonk Bros. Co., and J. Tieman and M. Farny, of the Rudolph Wurlitzer Co.

When the Harmony Co. first ventured into the instrument field, its initial products were guitars, mandolins and violins. The ukulele, the banjo ukulele, the Taropatch, the tiple, and the tenor banjo, which now form so large a portion of its output, were then unknown. A number of years ago the manufacture of violins was discontinued, but the other original products, guitars and mandolins, together with the recently developed instruments, form its present output.

James A. Markley With C. F. Martin & Co.

Among the new faces on the road this month will be noted the pleasant smile of James A. Markley, who is now on his maiden trip for C. F. Martin & Co., guitar makers, at Nazareth, Pa. Mr. Markley's previous experience has been outside of the music trade, but a six weeks' course of instruction at the factory has given him first-hand knowledge of the fine points of the Martin line; and as a talented amateur musician he understands string instruments from the player's side. After calling on the trade in New York State, Mr. Markley will visit New England.

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Four years later, at Harmony's Anniversary party attended by all the industry's bigwigs, Gardie even pinch-hit for the great vaudeville virtuoso Roy Smeck.[7]

Wouldn't it be something to discover footage of the remarkable performer?!

Alas, today Gardie's memory and claim to fame is entirely wrapped up in his unique 1915 harp guitar design: the "Gardie Orchestral Harp Guitar."

Let's take a look.

[6] *Music Trade Review*, October 11 1924 and November 22 1924.

[7] *Music Trade Review*, January 21 1928.

P. GARDIE.

GUITAR.

APPLICATION FILED MAY 24, 1915.

1,183,369.

Patented May 16, 1916.

2 SHEETS—SHEET 1.

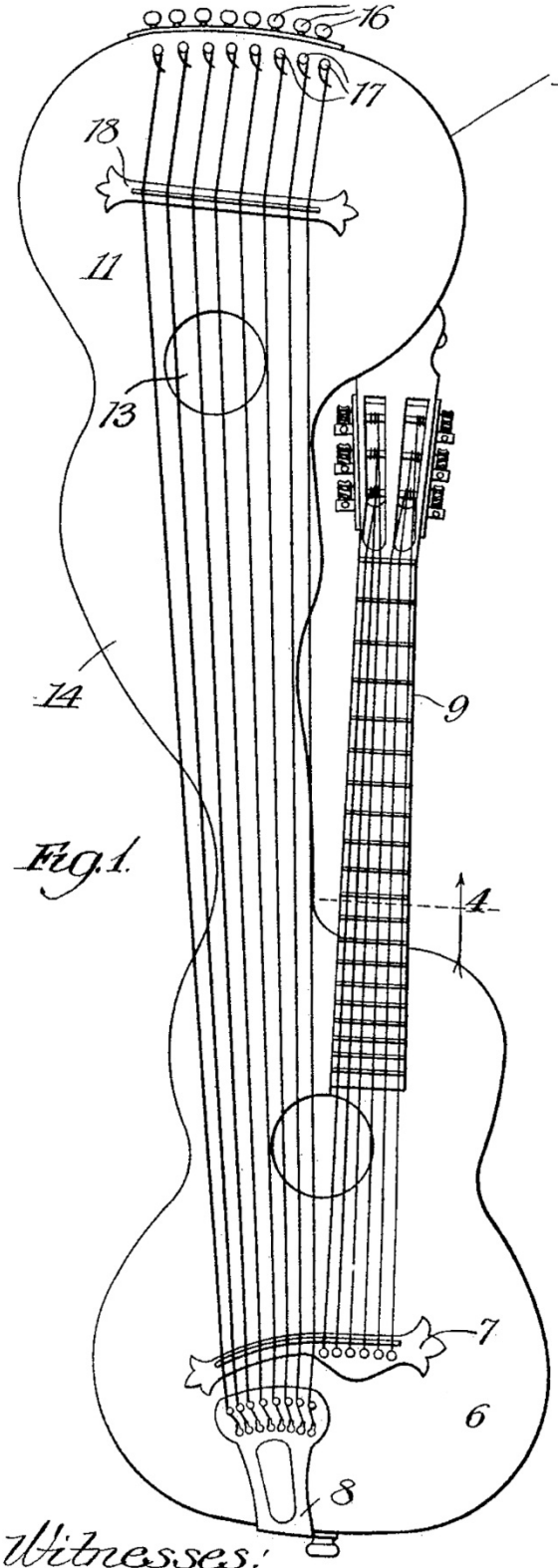


Fig. 1.

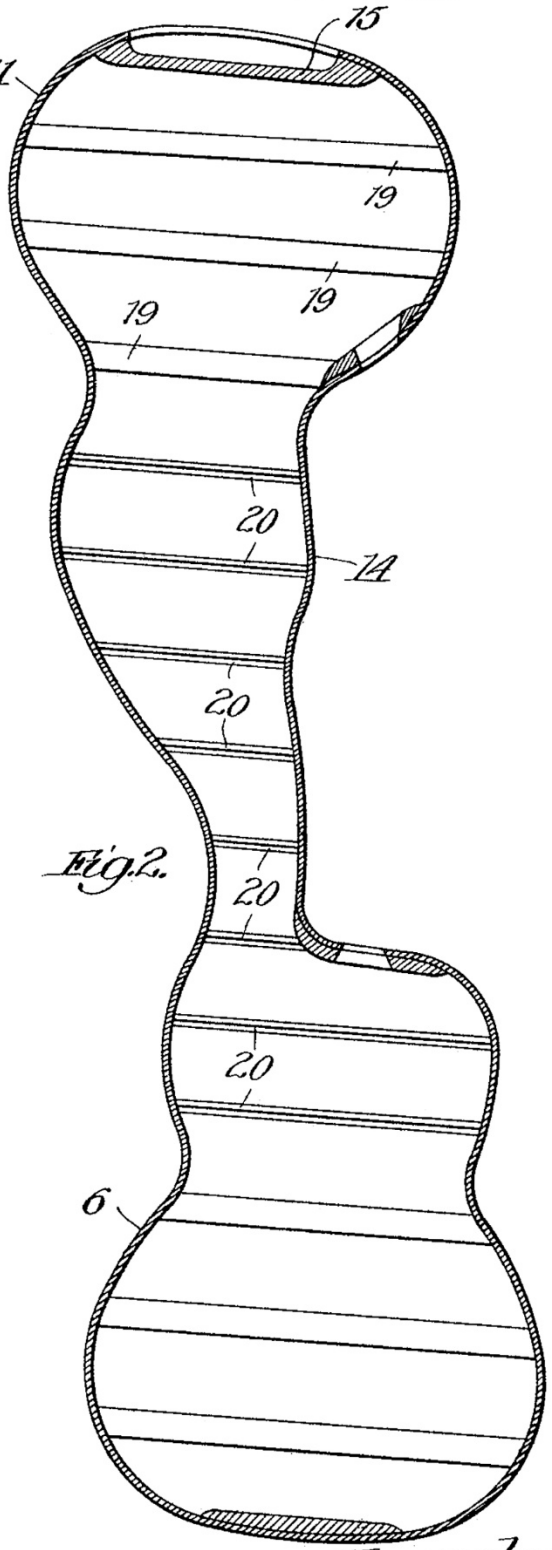


Fig. 2.

Witnesses:
C. C. Gaylord.
Irwin C. Bowman.

Inventor:
Paul Gardie,
By Dyrenforth, Lee, Chritton & Wiles
Attys.

THE COLUMBIA PLANOGRAPH CO., WASHINGTON, D. C.

P. GARDIE.

GUITAR.

APPLICATION FILED MAY 24, 1915.

1,183,369.

Patented May 16, 1916.

2 SHEETS—SHEET 2.

Fig. 3.

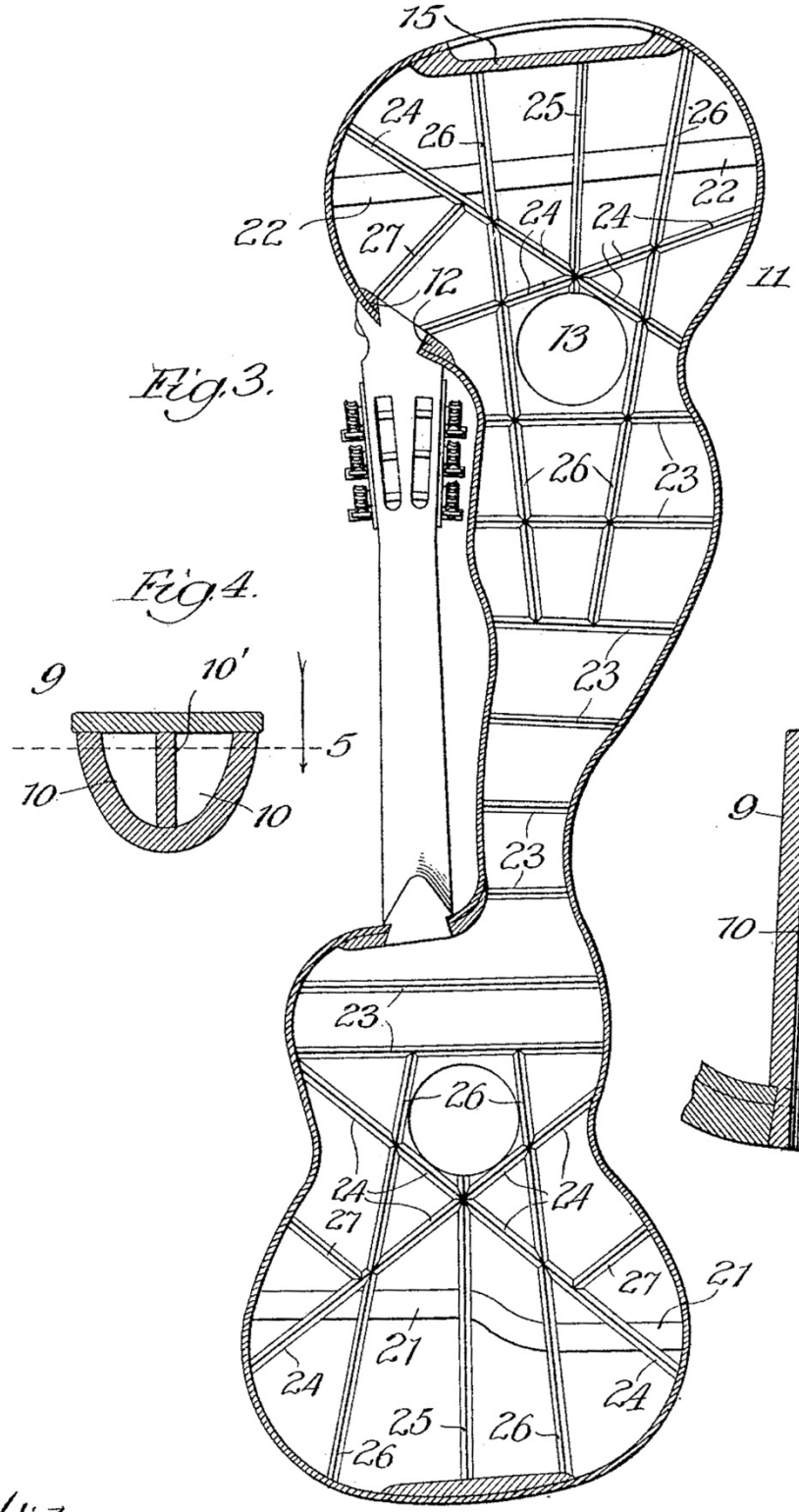
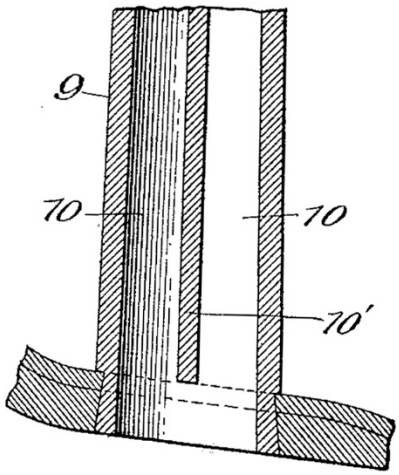


Fig. 4.

Fig. 5.



Witnesses:

E. E. Saylord.

Irwin C. Bowman.

Inventor:

Paul Gardie.

By Dyrenforth, Lee, Critton & Miles,

Atty's.

UNITED STATES PATENT OFFICE.

PAUL GARDIE, OF CHICAGO, ILLINOIS.

GUITAR.

1,183,369. Specification of Letters Patent. Patented May 16, 1916.

Application filed May 24, 1915. Serial No. 30,157.

To all whom it may concern:

Be it known that I, PAUL GARDIE, a citizen of the United States, residing at Chicago, in the county of Cook and State of Illinois, have invented a new and useful Improvement in Guitars, of which the following is a specification.

My invention relates to certain new and useful improvements in guitars and is fully described and explained in the specification and shown in the accompanying drawings, in which:

Figure 1 is a plan view of my improved guitar; Fig. 2 is a section parallel to the sounding-board showing the back of the instrument from the interior; Fig. 3 is a similar section looking in the opposite direction, showing the interior of the front or sounding-board; Fig. 4 is a section on the line 4 of Fig. 1, and Fig. 5 is a section on the line 5 of Fig. 4.

Referring to the drawings, it will be seen that my guitar is of the contrabass type. At one end is a main body 6 whose contour is generally similar to that employed in ordinary guitar construction. The sounding-board on its upper surface carries a bridge 7 to which are attached the treble strings, the bass strings running over the bridge and being attached to a tail-piece 8.

9 is the neck provided with the usual frets and at its head with the usual keys to which the treble strings are attached and by which their tension can be adjusted for tuning purposes. The position and general arrangement of the neck does not differ essentially from that commonly employed. However, with a view to securing additional sounding space and an improved tone, the neck is made hollow as shown in Fig. 4, the rear or lower piece of the neck being hollowed out to form a space 10, which is inclosed by the finger-board. The finger-board is supported by a longitudinal brace, or rib, 10′, and both ends of the treble strings thus rest on thin wooden walls inclosing the sounding-chamber.

Located above the end of the finger-board, is an auxiliary body 11 to one side of which the head is fastened, a block 12 within the auxiliary body being engaged by a dovetailed part on the head of the neck. The auxiliary body 11 is of a form generally similar to that of the body and the same sounding-board is common to both bodies, an opening 13 being provided in the auxiliary body. The two bodies are connected by a long sounding space of irregular form, indicated in the drawings by 14, the two bodies and connecting space thus inclosing a very large chamber. At the upper end of the auxiliary body is a block 15 which carries keys 16 operating upon pins 17 by any suitable means as by the familiar worm and gear connection. To the pins 17 are connected the upper ends of the bass strings, these strings passing over a bridge 18 on the auxiliary body. The bass strings are therefore supported at both ends on the sounding-board.

It will be manifest that the strain upon the sounding-board of this type of guitar is very great, and the whole instrument is under severe strains, yet, owing to the large size of the instrument, a very light mode of construction must be devised in order to bring the weight of the instrument within limits that can be conveniently handled. As a matter of fact an instrument which has been built and used, and which is exactly as shown in the drawings, weighs between six and seven pounds. To attain the desired lightness and strength, I have devised the bracing system shown. The back-board is braced with transverse braces 19 and 20 parallel to each other. The braces 19 are flat and of about the proportional width illustrated. The braces 20 are much narrower and are in the form of triangular ribs, such as are commonly employed in this art. It is the front or sounding-board of the instrument which is subjected to the greatest strains and is provided with the strongest bracing, this bracing being illustrated in Fig. 3. Broad braces 21 and 22 run underneath the bridges in the body 6 and auxiliary body 11, respectively. The intermediate part, practically from one sounding hole to the other, is braced by transverse braces 23. Each body also has two diagonal braces crossing each other adjacent to the sounding holes in the two bodies, and on the sides of said holes which are farthest removed from each other. Each body also has a central longitudinal brace 25 running from its end over the intersection of the braces 24 and to the edge of the sounding hole. Each body also has two lateral longitudinal braces 26, which start at the ends of the instrument and incline toward each other as they approach the center of the instrument, these braces passing close

by the two sides of the respective sounding holes and the braces 26 in the auxiliary body being longer, so as to continue well down into the intermediate part 14 of the instrument. There are, in addition, short angular braces 27 running from the sides of the instrument to the diagonal braces 24. I find that this system of bracing produces an exceedingly light and strong construction.

In use the present guitar is a very great improvement upon any of the similar instruments heretofore produced, particularly in the matter of volume of sound. The guitar heretofore has been greatly limited in its application because of the small volume of sound which it produced and it has been confined to use in orchestras or in relatively small rooms where a very large volume of sound was not required. The present instrument, without sacrificing the sweetness of the guitar tone in any way, attains a very large volume of sound, not only from the bass strings but from the treble strings. The volume of tone from the treble strings is enhanced, as compared with the ordinary guitar, first, by the hollow in the neck, and, second, by the presence of the large auxiliary body which is rigidly attached to the upper end of the treble neck and forms with the body portion a single very large sounding space. It is perfectly manifest, of course, that the bass strings must produce a very unusual volume of sound because of the fact that they rest at both ends on the sounding board, which covers and forms one side of the very large sounding space. It is a fact that the present guitar produces a volume of sound which is believed to be fully equal to that produced by a harp, thus fitting this guitar for a wide field of usefulness for which ordinary guitars are not suited.

I realize that considerable variation is possible in the details of the construction herein shown, and I do not intend to limit myself thereto, except as pointed out in the following claims, in which it is my intention to claim all the novelty inherent in the device as broadly as is permitted by the state of the art.

I claim as new and desire to secure by Letters Patent:—

1. A guitar having a hollow body, a neck connected therewith, a second body attached to the opposite end of the neck, and strings extending from one body to the other.

2. A guitar having a hollow body, a neck connected therewith and an auxiliary body attached to the head of the neck, said two bodies being connected by an intermediate portion and the sounding-board of both bodies being integral.

3. A guitar having two hollow bodies at opposite ends and an intermediate resonant space connecting the bodies, the sounding-boards of both bodies being integral, bass strings stretched over bridges on the two bodies, a neck to one side of the intermediate space which connects the bodies and connected at its opposite ends to the bodies respectively, and treble strings running from a bridge on one body to the head of the neck.

4. In a guitar a hollow body, a bridge thereon, a hollow neck communicating with the space within the body, treble strings running from the bridge to the end of the neck, an auxiliary body connected to the opposite end of the neck from the body, an intermediate resonant-chamber connecting the two bodies, both bodies and the intermediate space being provided with a common sounding-board and bass strings supported at both their ends on the bodies, respectively.

5. A guitar provided with two hollow bodies and an intermediate resonant space, a single sounding-board common to both bodies and the intermediate space, a neck to one side of the intermediate space and a bracing system for the sounding-board comprising transverse, diagonally disposed braces, in the intermediate portion, and longitudinal braces in the bodies.

6. A guitar provided with two hollow bodies and an intermediate resonant space, a single sounding-board common to both bodies and the intermediate space, a neck to one side of the intermediate space, a bracing system on the sounding-board comprising a pair of diagonally disposed generally transverse braces in each body, a pair of converging generally longitudinal braces in each body, a single central longitudinal brace in each body and transverse braces in the intermediate portion.

In testimony whereof I have hereunto set my hand this 17th day of May, 1915.

his
PAUL × GARDIE.
mark

In presence of subscribing witnesses:
E. D. STEELE,
A. C. FISCHER,
D. C. THORSEN.

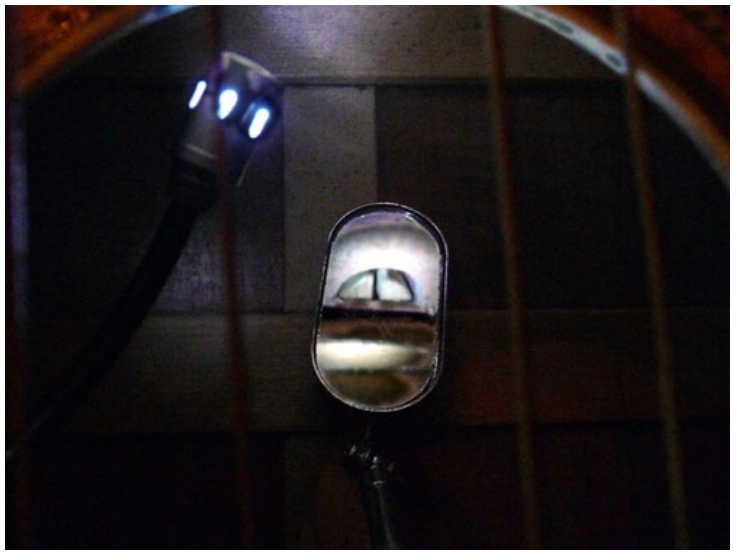
To this day, I find it inexplicable that the patent was unknown to me until 2009.[8] Curiously, William Schultz was not an assignee, nor listed in any capacity. Witnesses included a C. (?) Gaylord, Irwin Bowman, E. D. Steele, A. C. Fischer, and D. C. Thorsen – were any of these Harmony employees? The detailed patent drawing must surely have patterned on an actual finished instrument, which means one must have been designed and built before May 1915. We can assume that this first "prototype" – in actuality, a fully-fledged professional masterpiece – went to Gardie himself. Indeed, I wonder if one of the surviving examples might be Gardie's own?! Surely, as the patentee, the concept was Gardie's. But what about its specific design details, especially the "double body"? All joking aside, *just how blind was he?*[9]

When I discovered the patent, I was also highly intrigued by the neck's hollow "resonant" air chamber. Apparently, none of the owners nor Darcy had ever spotted it, and wouldn't have even thought to *look* (as the patent was then unknown). Though the patent shows a second continuous airway between the bodies via the neck (!), it does not seem to go all the way through.

Owner Dave Usher kindly offered to investigate his instrument with a dental mirror and camera, and explains:

I looked around in there and see the following. It's definitely a weird guitar (of course, we already knew that)! I used to do a lot of musical instrument repair back in the 70's and know one or two things about this stuff.

1. It appears that the neck and neck end block might be one piece, the rest of the body built onto the neck block/neck. However, since I don't see end grain facing me at the end block that is probably not the case. It could be that the neck block has a nose that is inserted into the neck. There is a hole in the neck block that looks like a traditional cartoon floorboard mouse hole, perhaps 1" wide and nearly as tall. There is a little 1/8" diameter pin just inside the hole, and perhaps a couple of shims. The pin comes into the hole from the back side of the instrument and does not extend all the way through the hole.



[8] It was at that time it was submitted by my colleague Paul Fox. It was listed subsequently in the late Michael Holmes' 2011 patent index – though, with no image and only the entry "guitar," no one could have located it easily.

[9] As a scholar and historian, I'm of course fascinated and seriously interested in this aspect. But the devil in me can't resist the obvious jokes about whether it turned out like this because Gardie couldn't see what his collaborators were drawing...

This suggests that the neck block inserts into the neck and is pinned from the back? I can't say how far the hole goes up the neck, but I can't see very far into it with my little inspection mirror.

2. The neck block extends (in one piece) downwards and ends shortly after the beginning of the lower body curve (which would be the lower part of the instrument if you were holding it).

3. The neck block extends upwards and ends shortly after the curve heading into the upper body extension. So, there is a large attachment area bonding the neck block to the body.

4. I did not see any markings or stamps indicating "Harmony" or any other manufacturer (I cannot see much of anything between the top bracing though).[10]

5. On the inside of the back there are several small thin wood pieces like one would use to repair a crack. They are distributed at uneven intervals and orientations around the perimeter of the back and perhaps 2" in from the sides of the instrument. They are numbered. But they are not oriented perpendicular to the grain, so I don't think they were put there as a repair. The numbers appear to have been written in blue ball point pen so I don't think they were original.

6. I did look at the soundboard bracing. I'm not an expert at guitar bracing, but it sure looks pretty wild to me.

7. The perimeter of the body is bonded to the top and back with serrated wood blocks. It is a very light eggshell construction. I do not see any heavy duty bracing in there.

8. The top is one-piece spruce construction. This blows people away. The back is also one piece – it appears to be mahogany.

9. The sides are two pieces joined at each tail block. At one time the curved area at the top of the instrument near the bass end was damaged and a 4" x 3" portion of the side replaced. Looks like she got dropped once – not bad for an instrument of this age.

I wish I had one of those inspection video cams. It would need about 4' of extension and be steerable to get into the other end of the instrument. It would be a trip to take a tour of the inside of this thing. If you can borrow one and send it to me I'll be happy to shoot it.

Great analysis, Dave – especially the "traditional cartoon floorboard mouse hole"!

Unfortunately, after poking around in there some more, Dave does not think the hole goes through the neck at all. He explains:

I took another look at the mouse hole, and did some jockeying to get a better view. I need to revise the description. What I thought was a pin is actually glue.

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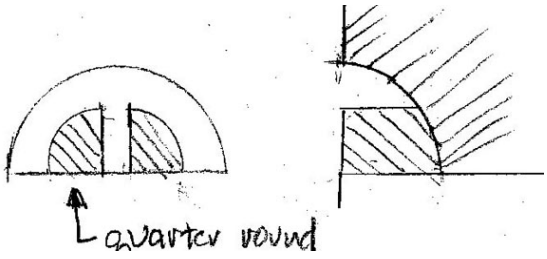
[10] Dave later *did* find the stamp!

It does not appear that the hole goes back into the neck. It appears to be a domed cut-out. There is a fair amount of glue in there complicating things (the glue appears to be original – I do not see signs of rework). Since I can't get a good shot of it given my equipment, here is a drawing of what it appears to be. The flat side towards the bottom of the drawing is facing the fingerboard. It could be that the quarter-round extends into the neck, but I cannot tell.



So, if the neck is hollow, it is internal and cannot be seen short of removing the finger board. It is not a thick neck, so my guess is that it could not be hollowed-out without significantly weakening the neck.

Meanwhile, though none of the extant specimens appear to ever have had a Harmony label, they *did* get a factory stamp! Darcy's notes for his exhibit specifically state that the neck block was stamped Harmony, yet its owner Dave Usher originally couldn't find any such stamp. After more urging on our behalf, he found it. It turned out to be on the tail block of the bass side. So, Darcy was correct. Dave cannot get an image of it, but describes it as "a faint stamp in black ink and small text as follows: The Harmony Co. Chicago, Il."[11]

More important than even the stamp, Darcy's old notes also stated that another instrument "came down through the family of Stew Hart, and was supposedly made (along with "7 others") by a relative named Schultz, who was a stepfather to his aunt. Schultz was reportedly the foreman at the Harmony guitar shop." As we now know, Schultz was not only the foreman, but originally the founder of the Harmony Company.

Darcy also pointed me to an entry in the Sept, 1986 Guitar Player, which included this image of Stew and his harp guitar (at left).[12] Plucking the bass strings is luthier Dana Bourgeois, who snapped the picture after doing some work on the instrument.[13]

An interesting comment in the *GP* caption is that the harp guitar "can be played by one or two people" as demonstrated by Stew and Dana (!). My bet is that the two weren't joking, as the thing does indeed look

[11] I have yet to obtain a good snake light/camera to examine my own.
[12] This is the same image I had seen long ago in the old guitar book.
[13] Some decades years later, Dana says that he kept no photos or notes on the project.

like a giant “courting dulcimer” – as if one paramour played the neck while the date played the sub-basses. Of course, we know that this wasn’t the plan, and that inventor Paul Gardie imagined it as a serious solo instrument. Undeniably, in its most basic form, it is simply another style of *hollow arm harp guitar*, like a Knutsen, Dyer and so many others. It was specifically shaping that "arm" into a second full "guitar body" that makes it so visually unusual!

In 2014, Stewart Hart (seen then at right) sent this image around to several vintage guitar stores looking for more information on it.[14]

Eventually, I leaned that the instrument was still in storage in Maine, and that Stew was the acting custodian for its owner Jeff Hart, his cousin. After some discussion, the family graciously agreed that the best home for it was my own growing museum, and in August 2014 I took possession of it.[15]

At right is the delivery – almost like the infamous leg lamp from *A Christmas Story* (I *did* feel like I won a “major award”)! Heart in my throat, I took it inside to open it (careful with that crowbar – you’ll poke your eye out!).

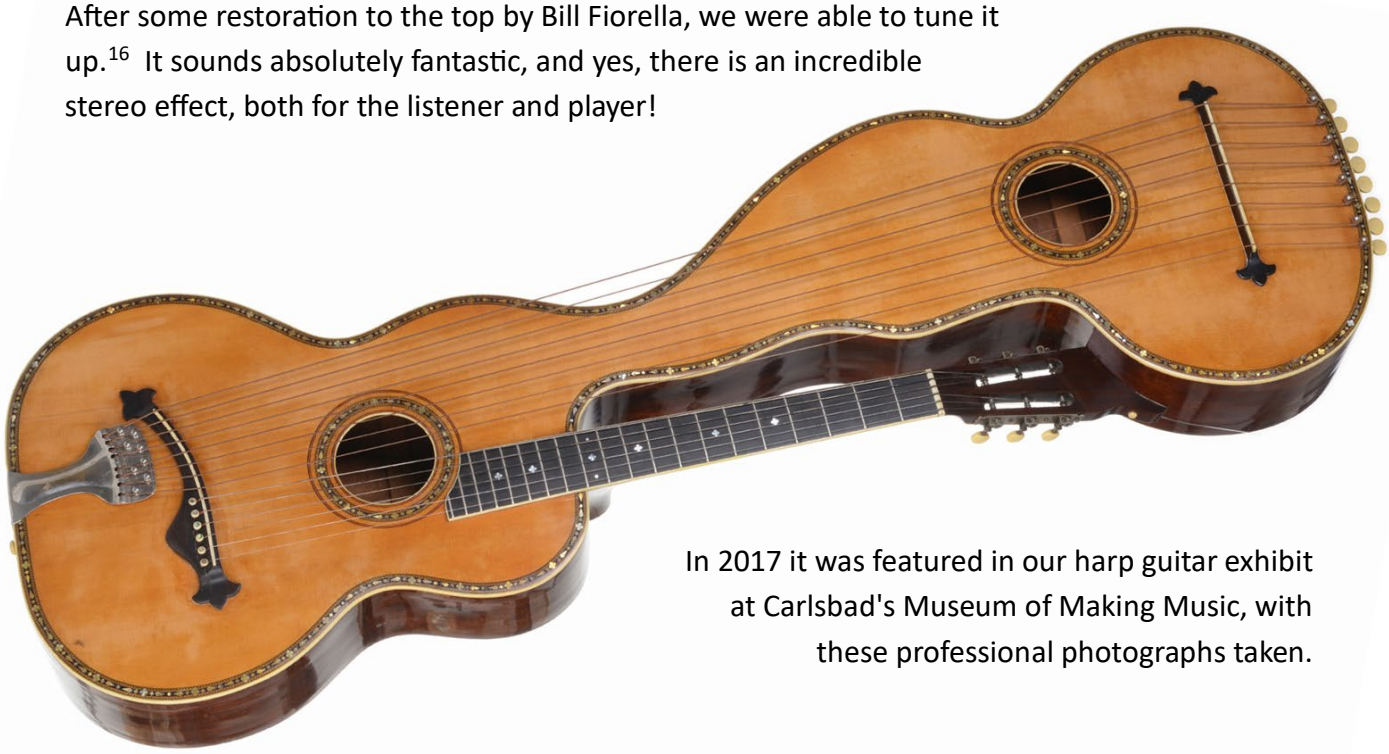
…revealing the incredible original hardshell case.

Opening that revealed 50 inches of pure wonder:

[14] I obtained the image from friends at Gryphon Music.

[15] The the sale and crating of the priceless treasure was handled by Jeff’s old Caribbean sailing buddy Dennis Mortimer, director of the Alberts-Langdon Asian Arts Gallery in Boston.

After some restoration to the top by Bill Fiorella, we were able to tune it up.[16] It sounds absolutely fantastic, and yes, there is an incredible stereo effect, both for the listener and player!



In 2017 it was featured in our harp guitar exhibit at Carlsbad's Museum of Making Music, with these professional photographs taken.

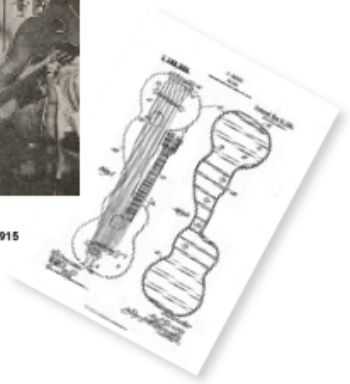
[16] Bill was then my California neighbor. Though I sourced extra-long sub-bass strings from a hammered dulcimer string maker, they are still buried somewhere in my piles of supplies.

Here's the writeup we did for the Exhibition book, *Floating Strings: The Remarkable Story of the Harp Guitar in America.*[17]

Orchestral Harp Guitar c. 1915

Harmony Co., Chicago, Illinois
Patented by Paul Gardie

This seemingly bizarre harp guitar was intended as a serious instrument. A 1916 design patent for it was granted to Paul Gardie of Chicago, whose achievement was all the more remarkable in that he was blind. William Schultz, founder and president of Chicago's Harmony Company, took it seriously enough to oversee the construction of the instrument for Gardie in Harmony's specialty department. Gardie debuted the instrument at the 1915 convention of the American Guild of Banjoists, Mandolinists and Guitarists, where by all accounts he was the hit of the weekend, performing both classical and ragtime. Gardie would pinch-hit for no less than the virtuoso Roy Smeck to debut Harmony's new line of Smeck instruments a dozen years later. Though ungainly in the extreme, no expense was spared by Schultz to create these fantastic sounding harp guitars. A treat for the audience, they are a revelation for the player, whose ears are centered within a personal zone of stereophonic notes emanating from both sound holes, the two banks of strings in a subtly shifting field of glorious three-dimensional sound. Just two of these incredible instruments survive intact, family lore suggesting that eight specimens were built. Apparently never marketed, this one was given by Schultz to a relative, whose descendants preserved it for the last hundred years.



Paul Gardie, from *The Cadenza*, June 1915

[17] http://www.harpguitarmusic.com/listings/listing_book_mmm.htm

Let's return now to the very first instrument to come to the attention of modern eyes, the Usher specimen, loaned to the BMFA for the Dangerous Curves exhibition and book. Once I started blogging about these instruments, owner Alex Usher and her son Dave both wrote me about theirs.

Alex Usher with her Harmony harp guitar, with her husband on banjo.

Here's Alex's story:

"Many years ago (in the 1960's, perhaps) I got a telephone call from a lady at our church who knew I was a folk singer. She said that she and her husband were leaving town to retire in Wisconsin and she had a guitar that had been given to her by a Chicago man named Campbell who had worked earlier in the century for the railroads encouraging people to tour the great Northwest by rail. He would give programs singing with the guitar. He used it to sing to groups of children in summer camps in Michigan, too. She started to describe the guitar on the telephone and I thought maybe she had downed one drink too many! She said she would like me to have it if I was interested. I went over and took a look and, gee whiz, it was just as she described. It was in its custom case which has just as many outrageous curves as the guitar itself. Of course I took it off her hands. I told her I couldn't afford to pay her what it was worth …. that I could only pay $300 for it, which, thank heavens, she accepted.[18] *Soon after we had an unveiling at a folksingers' party at our house and various people offered monikers for her; The Goitar, the Push-me-pull you, and the Two-Seater. When Darcy Kuronen borrowed her for the Boston Museum show he was kind enough to have bass strings custom-made, and Steve Howe of Yes had a good time trying it out. There was also a track of someone playing it on the exhibit recording."*

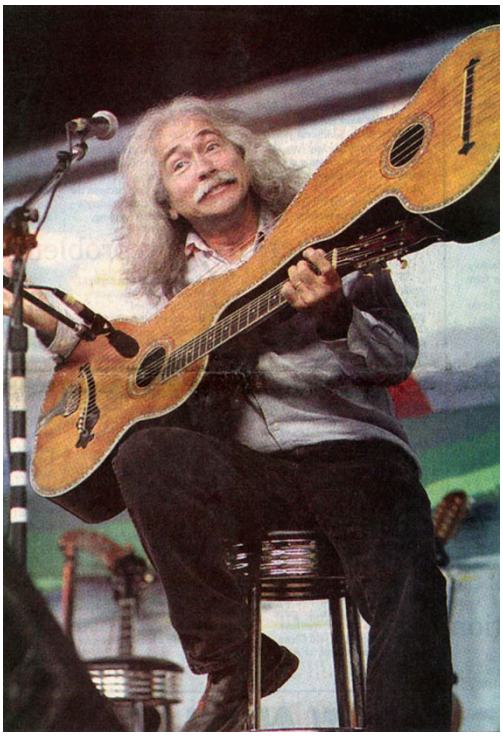
Alex also saw one other specimen that I suspect may have been the instrument that Michael Schreiner later saw – since rebuilt – in the Wurlitzer window in 1982. Alex explained that *"When I was in Chicago many years ago, I dropped into a music store that was in a high rise building there. When I showed the owner a picture of the "goitar" he said he had one in the back storeroom that was in pieces."*[19]

[18] Her son Dave thought the purchase was about 1970.

[19] It was always my "gut feeling" that these two sightings were of the same instrument; if not, then we have five specimens noted.

Alex Usher (right) with her "Straddlevarious" (yet another appropriate nickname) and family (sans Dave, who was away at college). This and the previous image are from her Mel Bay songbooks, *Children's Song Favorites* and *Side Splitters.*

In 2006, Alex and Dave (above) brought the now-famous instrument to the Winfield festival in 2006, where a newsman snapped Stephen Bennett (right) playing it for the local paper.



The madcap wizard of the harp guitar with the impossible instrument at Winfield in 2006.

Dave Usher also reacted to my original blog articles by creating a new video montage of his family and the instrument over a soundtrack of "No Place Like Home" that he and his mother recorded at the Folk School in Maplewood, Missouri on Aug 7, 2010.[20] Dave plays the Harmony, while his mother Alex plays one of the first Zimmerman autoharps sold in the U.S. in the early 1880s.

Dave Usher circa 2010. Hard to believe the instrument has remained in such fantastic shape!

In 2020, a *fourth* verifiable specimen turned up.[21] Owner Nick Boehne inherited it from a great grandfather, who may or may not have been the original owner. It had been stored for decades in the attic of a school where he had worked. It differs in the two above in being a plain model with herringbone trim – so now we know they weren't all built the same. It has some cracks, and someone added an extra tailpiece for the neck strings, obviously hoping to shore up a moving top.

[20] https://www.facebook.com/video.php?v=804674292904219
[21] The third that we have an image of.

From “Dangerous Curves” in Boston in 2000 to California in 2019 for The Museum of Making Music’s “Floating Strings” harp guitar exhibit (co-curated by yours truly), Paul Gardie could never have predicted that his unusual invention would become notorious a hundred years later!

Acknowledgements: Darcy Kuronen, Arian Sheets, Paul Ruppa, Paul Fox, Dave and Alex Usher, Joe Morgan, Nick Boehne, Michael Schreiner, and especially Jeff and Stewart Hart!

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The Museum of Making Music: Page 1, 15 bottom, 16-18, 22
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Stewart Hart: 14 top
Gregg Miner: 14 bottom, 15 top
Joe Morgan: 20 bottom left
Nick Boehne: 21 bottom

About The Author: Gregg Miner is, at various times of the day, a plucked stringed instrument collector, scholar, recording artist and performer. He is widely considered the world’s leading authority on harp guitars. His web sites include Harpguitars.net, Harpguitarmusic.com and Minermusic.com.