

“Harp Guitar” Labeling: *Have I Created a Monster?*

An Exercise in Context and Perspective

Gregg Miner



In May of 2024, the Phoenix Musical Instrument Museum graciously hosted the American Musical Instrument Society for their annual meeting. It was while wandering the vast exhibit halls during our down time that I had something of a revelation. What hit me – rather pointedly, and not for the first time – was the content of the instrument labels. My observations naturally focused on my fields of expertise, one of which – harp guitars – I found especially interesting as I perused the MIM instrument placards. I decided that it would be an incredibly beneficial exercise to examine each of those examples – not just for the benefit of MIM’s own staff, or my blog readers or visiting scholars, but for *myself*. I consider myself an expert, and yet much of the analysis that follows was far from easy, even for me. My intention is not to embarrass any MIM curatorial staff (which unfortunately may be unavoidable); indeed, I challenge those who think they could do better.

The meaning of my curious title for this piece will be revealed the further we go as we consider this: Are curators, scholars and writers “going too far” in embracing my “harp guitar” mantra?¹ Have I sent the wrong message?!

While as thoughtful and accurate as I can possibly make it, we *are* going to have some fun. We’ll perhaps help MIM along the way, and – on a more serious note – take a look at an increasingly-out-of-control “monster” of my own making!

While curators both past and present applicable to the topics below are familiar with my work on Harpguitars.net, it’s acknowledged that signage has always remain low on the priority list. Given their allotted task time, this can – and has – sometimes led to frustrating shortcuts and old errors left uncorrected.² Let’s begin our exercise:

This distinctive instrument (at right) is a harp-guitar...but not “our” harp guitar. It’s an Edward Light invention he named the “Harp-Guitar.”³ It is *not* a “Lute guitar,” clearly a mistake made when someone originally tried to look it up. Light and others *did* create other similar instruments with “lute” in the name, but not this one. This sign that I noticed on my first MIM visit many years ago has been moved intact. So, this first one should be changed to:

Harp-guitar



Lute guitar (plucked lute)
London, c. 1800
A. Barry, maker
This guitar's painted soundboard is similar to decoration found on harps of the same era.

¹ And here I mean throughout the world; this isn't just about the MIM.

² A case you can find in virtually every museum, certainly including my own.

³ This invention called a “Harp-Guitar” is just one of many synonyms I describe in my web thesis. See: <https://www.harpguitars.net/history/org/hgorg.htm>

But, as you will see again with the Scherr harp-guitar below, *some* sort of specific detail or context should be provided so that the visitor is not baffled by the lack of floating strings, assuming they have seen other “true” harp guitars.

I want to immediately next jump in with another pet peeve I have. ***Sachs-Hornbostel System labeling***. This is only my personal opinion, and scholars both on the page or in curatorial positions may completely disagree with me. Whether for the academic (who knows all this) or the lay public (who I imagine thinking “*Huh?*”), I find the repetitive inclusion completely non-valued added, a waste of valuable space, and likely more confusing to helpful to a layperson. I’m referring to that category in parentheses on the first line – in the example above, informing us that this instrument is a form of “plucked lute” in the grand *chordophone* scheme of things. After a few thousand “(plucked lute)s,” I think the strolling lay visitor gets it...if indeed they ever *got* it.⁴ For

my money, I’d rather see the additional word count giving me some extra info about the unique object I’m looking at; I’m pretty sure I won’t be quizzed on which instruments on my class trip were “plucked lutes.” Again, just my opinion.

Enough of that for now. I’m really here to help with our “at least one additional unstopped non-fretted string that is typically plucked” form of harp guitar. And how *they* should be labeled - and *why*.

Let’s start with the MIM’s small, dedicated harp guitar display in the USA/Canada Gallery. It’s an odd and random little space, but hey, great PR for Harpguitars.net. It even includes many of my friends! That’s Muriel Anderson on screen (at left) with her Mike Doolin harp guitar, while other friends and notables are featured in the video and main sign. Below the screen is a Gibson harp guitar...and labeled as such. Notice



⁴ I’m sure it was explained somewhere on another sign and once would have probably been enough.

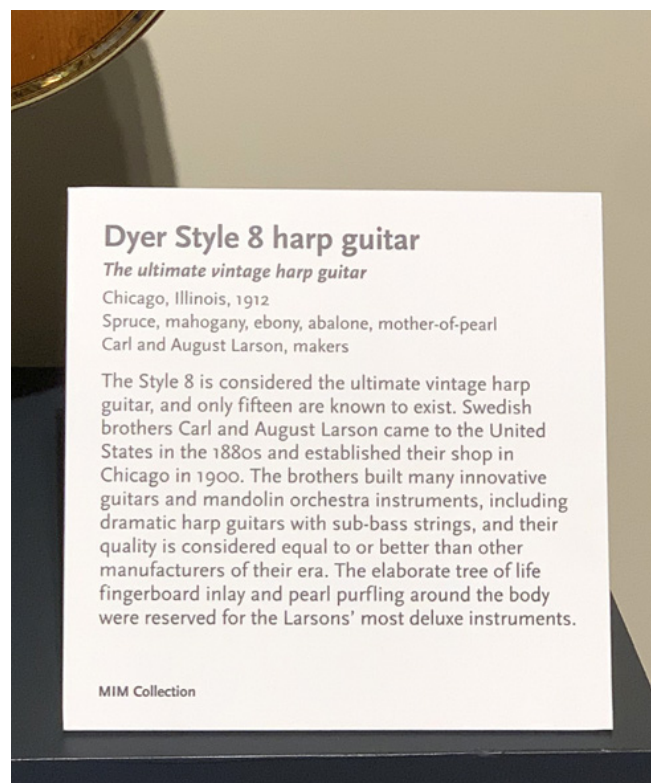
that there is no “(plucked lute)” – an inconsistency, but I’m not complaining. No muss, no fuss; it’s almost impossible to screw up this placard.

But – here’s as good as time as any to bring up a key point in HG Organology:

Surprisingly few makers, inventors or players ever actually used the term “harp guitar.” The Gibson Company *did*. Ergo, in creating the label for this one particular instrument *one cannot go wrong*.



That’s exactly what the Dyer firm⁵ called *their* harp guitars (at left), the name coming from original hollow-arm inventor Chris Knutsen.



So, the museum is perhaps fortunate in having these specific two American harp guitars, because *not every American manufacturer used the term for their own marketed instruments*.

I haven’t come across an example of that at MIM yet but suspect I will someday.

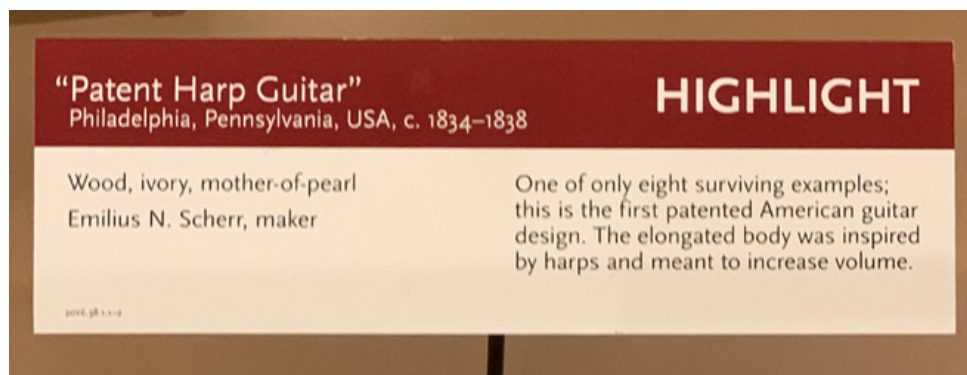
⁵ Technically, W. J. Dyer & Bro

Meanwhile, there's this:



MIM bought Peter Szego's Scherr harp-guitar (above) some time ago, and so, what better place to put it than in their brand-new Harp Guitar mini gallery. Except...where are the extra strings?

Easy to explain on Harpguitars.net in my Organology/Nomenclature study and its appearance in my “Harp Guitars in Name Only” Gallery,⁶ but not so easy on a placard, it seems.



Actually, it *would* be easy to explain, especially in their additional larger “Highlight” sign. So, I’m not sure why they didn’t. I see that they did so in one of their book publications (“...not because it had extended strings, but because...”). I’d say that either clarification is required, or perhaps a better place for the Scherr might have been in a parlor vignette with an early American piano?



Moving to the re-vamped Guitar Rotunda that first greets visitors on the ground floor, we find a new harp guitar specimen from Poland (at left).



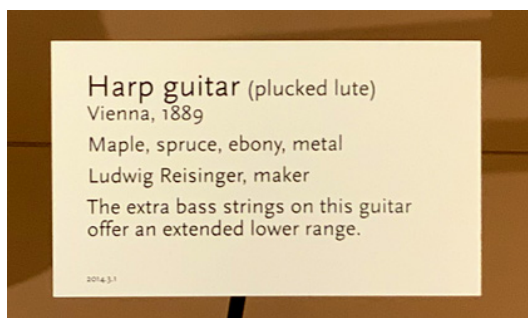
I’m not sure where this choice came from, with the French spelling of guitar. And “Archi-guitare” would translate to “arch-guitar,” which the museum uses elsewhere but really doesn’t apply here.

⁶ See: https://www.harpguitars.net/history/org/org-name_only.htm

Using “(harp guitar)” in place of the normal “(plucked lute)” business is an unusual, if interesting choice. I wouldn’t argue *against* it, but let’s consider this again, after examining this next one:



This Reisenger (above) appears in the Austrian gallery within Europe. The reason they didn’t include it in a larger dedicated harp guitar display is because their instruments are all grouped by *country*, not by form, function, pedagogy or other history.



Here, rather than saving it for the parenthetical, MIM staff specifically labels it “Harp guitar” (and, yes, back to that “plucked lute”).

And now, in order to brainstorm alternative or potentially better names for this instrument, we have no choice but to get into vernacular and semantics, and a whole troublesome world of historical and modern nomenclature, along with language and

translation. I’m not saying labeling this instrument, in this gallery, is necessarily *wrong*, I’m just suggesting that those doing so endeavor to make sure they’re fully informed...before some of my British and European colleagues come to visit!

Firstly: For those of you who might still be unaware, *you will rarely find the term “harp guitar” appearing in any serious study of guitars in all of Europe or the British Isles.* Indeed, my colleagues over there will go to almost comical lengths to *avoid* using the term, they are so condescending of it. The only possible reason they might utilize it is if they were including a reference to an American instrument such as the Dyer or Gibson which they were 100% certain was originally called a “harp guitar.”⁷

So, concentrating now on the European Reisinger harp guitar above, we must try to ascertain: *Where and when* was it made, and what did the *builder* call it? What did the *players* call it? Did it have a *specific* name? Did it have a *vernacular* name or common term?

I haven’t yet found provenance of what Ludwig Reisinger *himself* called his own “guitars with extra bass strings.” He likely followed the common practices of the place and time, i.e.: Vienna, late 19th century. One common practice going back nearly to the beginnings of the 1800s was to simply refer to them as *guitars* with the *total number of strings referenced*, as seen in the following early 1900s advertisement in *Der Gitarre-Freund* (below):

Wir warnen ausdrücklich vor Nachahmung
unserer eigenen Abbildungen (Clichés.)

Eigene Instrumentenbau- und Reparatur-Werkstätte.

en gros
Telephon 10262.
en detail

Braun & Hauser

Dachauerstraße 2 **München** am Hauptbahnhof

Gegr. 1885.





Gitarren Alle Größen. — Fichter- und Wappenform. —
Nur tadellose Arbeit. — 6, 10, 12, 15 sautig.

Lauten Stilgerechte Copien alter Meisterlauten. — Große
Tonfülle. — Erstklassige Meisterarbeit.

Taschen (Säcke), Etais, Bänder und alle Bestandteile.

Saiten

Eigene Marken. -- Eigene
Spinnerei. — Haltbare und
reine Darmsaiten.

Musikalien

Solis, Duette, Gesänge. —
Unterrichtswerke in reichster
Auswahl.

□ □ Reparaturen in fachkundiger Ausführung. □ □

Broschüren, Prospekte etc. gratis.

Wir bitten in allen Fällen Firma und Schutzmarke genau zu beachten

This firm made **Gitarren** that were “**6, 10, 12** or **15** stringed (**saitig**).” The 6-string would be a standard single neck guitar; the others would *add* 4, 6 or 9 open bass strings.

⁷ These scholars used to create their *own* generalizations and vernacular, but more and more are playing it safe and just using “guitar with extra bass strings” ... which is a mouthful and will not keep them out of trouble forever!

Thus, the MIM's instrument *could* simply be:

13-string guitar

However, by 1900 and likely before, luthiers and musicians began calling them "*bass-gitarren*" (with differing counts of bass strings), as shown in these ads:

Müller's "Bass-Gitarren" (below) include "6- bis 15saitig," or 6-to15-stringed.⁸

KARL MÜLLER

SAITEN-INSTRUMENTEN-FABRIKANT

ALPEN-STR. 22 ¹/₆ **AUGSBURG** ALPEN-STR. 22 ¹/₆

Spezialist in Wappen- und Achterform-Gitarren
Terz-, Prim- und Bass-Gitarren 6- bis 15saitig
mit tadellos reinstimmendem Griffbrett und vor-
züglichem Ton



Reparaturen in
kunstgerechter
Ausführung

Garantie für
Tonverbesserung



BESTE BEZUGSQUELLE FÜR SAITEN

⁸ Of course, the 6-string really couldn't be a harp guitar, it would be the Terz or Prim model.

Raab's "Bassgitarren" (below) feature 13 to 15 strings (meaning, having 7 to 9 basses). The instrument on the right of the ad below might represent one of his "10saitige Terz-Sologitarren."



✱ **Hans Raab** ✱

Saiten- und Instrumenten-Fabrikant
Sendlingerstr. 7—9 MÜNCHEN, Sendlingerstr. 7—9

Spezialist in Terz-, Prim- und Bassgitarren.

Empfehle meine als erstklassig anerkannten Bassgitarren 13 bis 15-saitig. 5 bis 10saitige Terz-Sologitarren, nach altem Wiener Modell, vorzügliche Tonschönheit. Kunstgerechte Ausführung aller Reparaturen. Garantie für Tonverbesserung.

Of course, the German term Bassgitarre⁹ translates directly to English as "bass guitar." *Should the MIM label this instrument a "Bass guitar"?* Before you answer that, let me continue, as things get worse. Much worse.

By 1904, the German term "kontrabassgitarre"¹⁰ came into use, with the first builder using it in a January 1905 Gitarre-Freund ad (at right):

SIDEBAR: Here's a brand-new detail I'm excited to reveal about Michael Wach's ad. Per the text, his "Kontra-Bassgitarre" utility design D.R.G.M. Nr. 203594 is for a harp guitar with a hollow arm! (*"With this contrabass guitar, the rigid neck for the basses is formed as an acoustical chamber which is connected to the body through an opening; thereby effecting a significant amplification of the sound."*)

Michael Wach

(Hans Wach's Nachfolger)

Saiten-Instrumenten-Fabrikant

Schommerstrasse 21 **München** nächst d. Karlspl.

empfiehlt seine

Wappenform-Gitarren eigner Form-Konstruktion

Unerreichte, elegante Formschönheit,
anerkannt hervorragende Tonfülle.

Kontra-Bassgitarren. D.R.G.M. Nr. 203594.

Bei diesen Kontra-Bassgitarren ist der Versteifungshals der Bässe zu einem akustischen Raum ausgebildet, welcher mit dem Korpus durch eine Öffnung in Verbindung steht; dadurch wird eine bedeutende Tonverstärkung erzielt.

Zithern und Streichinstrumente in vollendeter Ausführung.

Reparaturen. — Eigene Saitenspinnerei.

⁹ The German terms can be spelled as one word or with a hyphen.

¹⁰ Again, one can insert the hyphens or not in these compound German words.

Sadly, the patent includes no image, simply reading:

Nr. 203 594. Kontrabaßgitarre, deren Versteifungssteg zwischen Wirbelkopf und Korpus als akustischer Körper mit einer Resonanzdecke ausgebildet ist, welcher mit dem Korpus zusammenhängt. Michael Wach, München. Bauerstr. 4. 22. 5. 03. W. 14 622.

Utility Models: “Nr. 203594. Contrabass guitar, of which the rigid element between the peghead and main body is structured as an acoustic body with a soundboard that is continuous with the main body. Michael Wach, Munich, Bauerstr. 4, 22. 5. 03., W. 14622.”

From *Zeitschrift für Instrumentenbau* (Leipzig), 1 August 1903, vol. 23, no. 31, p. 863

While I have images of three Wach specimens in my files, I have yet to locate an image of this instrument (at right). Though not a new idea,¹¹ at this particular time it may have been another local re-introduction of the concept – one that prevented his fellow luthiers from creating their own hollow-arm instruments for at least three years, thanks to him snagging this design for a new patent. My Karl Müller, seen at right – which is based almost exactly on Schenk’s 1840s instrument, which Wach presumably copied as well – is dated 1908.

But before I apply the wordy term “kontrabassgitarre” to MIM’s Reisinger label,¹² I have the unhappy news to report that we have still a *third* similar term: “kontragitarre.” The earliest provenance of this term I’ve found is a 1921 *Der Gitarre-Freund* ad of Adolf Paulus. Sometime later, it eventually became standard vernacular and remains the preferred term today among many German speakers and guitarists.

And still we are not yet done.

The three terms above may have been used in serious guitar circles, but out in the real world – that of folk and popular music and the general public – what were *players* calling this instrument?



¹¹ It was copied predominately from Friedrich Schenk’s earlier designs.

¹² Seriously, it translates into something akin to “below-low-guitar.”

That would be *Schrammelgitarre*, meaning a form of harp guitar commonly used in popular *Schrammelmusik*, created by a quartet in 1878 that included two brothers with the name of Schrammel.

How popular? The music is still being played today, and even now (over there, for the 13-string Viennese harp guitar) the term remains in widespread use.



Above, the original Schrammel quartet in 1884, including guitarist Anton Strohmayer with his 13-string instrument nearly identical to the MIM Reisinger.

OK – given all that I have provided, how would we now recommend the MIM *hypothetically label* their Reisinger “harp guitar” in their Vienna gallery?

Firstly, should we, or should we not, use:

German terms? Specifically, before “gitarre,” these vernacular terms?

- *Bass-*
- *Kontra-*
- *Kontrabass-*
- *Schrammel-*

This decision would be up to MIM, and, indeed, I have seen them use many instrument names in original languages. Thus, these options could be used to appear as:

Bassgitarre (harp guitar)

Kontragitarre (harp guitar)

Kontrabassgitarre (harp guitar)

Schrammelgitarre (harp guitar)

Or how about English *translations* of those terms?

This would also have to be up to MIM, and for different reasons. You should all know what I think of the first three German terms by this point, whether in German or English.¹³ If you’ve haven’t yet made the slog through my Organology web thesis, I’ll try to sum this up as simply and as straightforward as I can.

Like all harp guitars, German and Viennese examples are **not *pitch-transposed* guitars**, they are ***extended range* guitars**. Ergo, the first three historical (if arguably vernacular) German terms above are grammatical and musical *errors*. Even if they are historical terms that remain common today, they are misleading and wholly inaccurate. Yes, though hard to believe, the entire guitar-making and playing community in all of the Austro-Germanic countries for a full two centuries *simply screwed up*. Continuing (this comes from my 2012 AMIS paper):

Since the Fender bass guitar was introduced in 1951, that lap-held, transposed *bass version* of a standard guitar (to highlight it for our example) has become such a standard instrument that it –

¹³ Especially in English!

and an endless variety of similar designs and descendants – has necessarily commandeered the name, now and for all time. Whereas for the German harp guitars, it has always been an *inaccurate and illogical term*. The Grove Dictionary gives: “*Contra: a prefix of which the musical meaning is ‘an octave below’.*” So, whereas the names *contrabassoon* and *bass clarinet* correctly signify an instrument with a *lowered* pitch range of the same general spread, *contra-* or *bass-guitar* does *not*. The bass strings are *in addition* to the standard guitar range, not *in place of*. To further complicate matters (as just one example),

...some specialized classical guitar ensembles occasionally utilize a true “contra guitar” – a 6-string classical guitar tuned down a full *octave*. Even the late great Anthony Baines finally began moving away from the term in his 1992 Oxford Companion to Musical Instruments by listing the harp guitar form of “bass guitar” with the caveat heading “Older meaning” (while also finally adding a small entry for “Harp-guitar”).¹⁴

I long ago arrived at the above conclusions, and most scholars seem to accept the logic. Still, the MIM could certainly choose to use those *foreign terms* in my examples above.¹⁵ However, if they agree with my reasoning for the now-*Anglicized* terms, and *without a more logical term available* – remember that “harp guitar” remains off the table for virtually all European scholars – the MIM remains in a tough spot!

Yes, this may seem ridiculous and overly detailed, but I’m being quite serious. If they hoped to avoid ruffling *any* feathers, they would have to label their Reisinger with my earlier suggested “13-string guitar” – either that, or:

“Guitar with Extra Bass Strings (harp guitar)”

The first term is logical, accurate, and a “cop out” by necessity; no other term that is both historical, musically logical and understandable to an educated layperson exists. The second term acknowledges modern organology¹⁶ and is understood by an increasing number of laypeople.

And now you’re thinking... *Ouch*, all that just for a single instrument?! Yes, and the MIM has a few more. Remember my title? That thought came abruptly to me as I located the two instruments that I sold to the MIM in 2020 from my own collection. *Now* things are really going to get interesting. Naturally, they were located in the country galleries matching where they were built, like the one below.

¹⁴ Interestingly, I’ve found Baines’ semantics and organology – *which he has seen the need to update over time* – to mesh extremely closely with my own; encouraging, that!

¹⁵ Or anyone; again, I’m just using the MIM as an example for our museum labeling exercise.

¹⁶ While this “modern organology” is admittedly my own it is nevertheless now commonly accepted in the States and much of the world.



And how were they labeled? Interestingly, *both* stated:

“Harp guitar (plucked lute)”

Interesting...and so, I couldn't help but wonder – were they just labeled this way because these two instruments happened to “come from Gregg Miner, and he's the harp guitar guy” and thus naturally *had to be harp guitars*? I couldn't say, and it wasn't the place or time to bring it up with the MIM staff. It *would* be a logical assumption, wouldn't it? After all, they're on my

Harp guitar (plucked lute)
Genoa, Liguria Region, 1920
Spruce, walnut, ebony, mother-of-pearl
Paolo de Barbieri, maker

De Barbieri (1889–1962) is considered one of the best violin makers from Genoa and won many awards in his career. He also made violas, cellos, guitars, and this harp guitar.

Gift of the Robert J. Ulrich and Diane Sillik Fund
2008.20.2

Harp guitar (plucked lute)
Montevideo, 1895
Rosewood, cedarwood, mother-of-pearl
Tomás Estevan, maker

In the late 1800s, a wave of European extended-range instruments sparked the interest of South American guitar virtuosos. This may be the only surviving example from the maker, an emigrant from Spain.

2009.00.1

Harp guitars.net web site *and* were part of my “harp guitar” collection. Hmm...so, this realization was why I came up with my particular title for this important article. *Have I influenced others into going too far?* Quite possibly.

So, now it's time for the next important lesson to be learned from my Harpguitars.net Organology thesis – one that perhaps I haven't yet found a way to fully convey to readers:

You know all those “guitars with extra bass strings”¹⁷ and other “guitars with unfretted plucked strings in unlikely and unusual places”¹⁸ that I show throughout Harpguitars.net? **Are they harp guitars? Yes, they are absolutely forms of harp guitars.** But what so many seem to forget is that – *at the same time* – they are also forms of many other “types” of guitars. And by “types,” I mean “groups,” and by “groups” I mean **subjects**. As in the *subject of an individual study*. And the

subject of Harpguitars.net is... harp guitars. Many of the applicable instruments on the site are *technically* “harp guitars” **only within the context of my website.**

On *another* website (i.e.: in a *different* study), certain instruments might (and should) be called by *other* terms, including their original inventors' or marketers' name (*if known*), or called or classified under the guitar *subject at hand*, i.e.: Multistring, Heptachorde, Ten-string, Early Romantic, Spanish, what-have-you.

Bearing this now in mind, let's look again at the “harp guitars” I sold the MIM.

This lovely instrument (at left) appears in the museum's “Uruguay” display, which is where it was built in the late 1890s. Though “South American,” don't think of it as a “folk guitar,” as it was actually part of the serious “classical” guitar music scene of Montevideo and (in nearby Argentina across the water) Buenos Aires during that period. Many virtuoso Spanish guitarists migrated there, along with their instruments. And at that time, a typical, if less common, form of Spanish guitar utilized by these virtuosos was the *11-string guitar*. None other than Antonio de Torres built several, and these inspired many other builders and players. These players composed music incorporating the additional open bass strings exactly as their Viennese predecessors had on



¹⁷ A nod to my British and European colleagues.

¹⁸ Sarcasm, but about the same as their term...

their Early Romantic “guitars with extra bass strings.” The Viennese guitarists simply called their instruments “8-string guitars” or 10-string guitars” or (well, you get the idea). And guess what? *So did the Spanish players.* I’ve never come across any provenance of *any* of these “theorboed guitars”¹⁹ being called anything other than “___-string guitars.”

And so, like MIM’s 13-stringed Reisinger, I think *that’s* how I would label this one:

11-string guitar

I wouldn’t even add “(harp guitar)” after it. No more than I would add “(multi-string guitar)” or “(extended range guitar)” or something else after it. There’s no need. In fact, for this instrument, “harp guitar” may be among the *least* important “subject fields” this instrument falls under. Any reference to the floating basses could be done in additional text. As the MIM typically doesn’t do that, then here’s a perfect opportunity where Gallery docents might point out to visitors (or teachers to their students) “*Hey, did you notice that that Estevan is actually a form of harp guitar?*”

Is any of this making sense to anybody? I know we’re in the weeds here, and this is the kind of nerdy stuff that just gets to be a pain for historians, scholars, curators and the like. But no one else seems to be discussing these issues, options and decisions, so here I am.

What about the one at right?

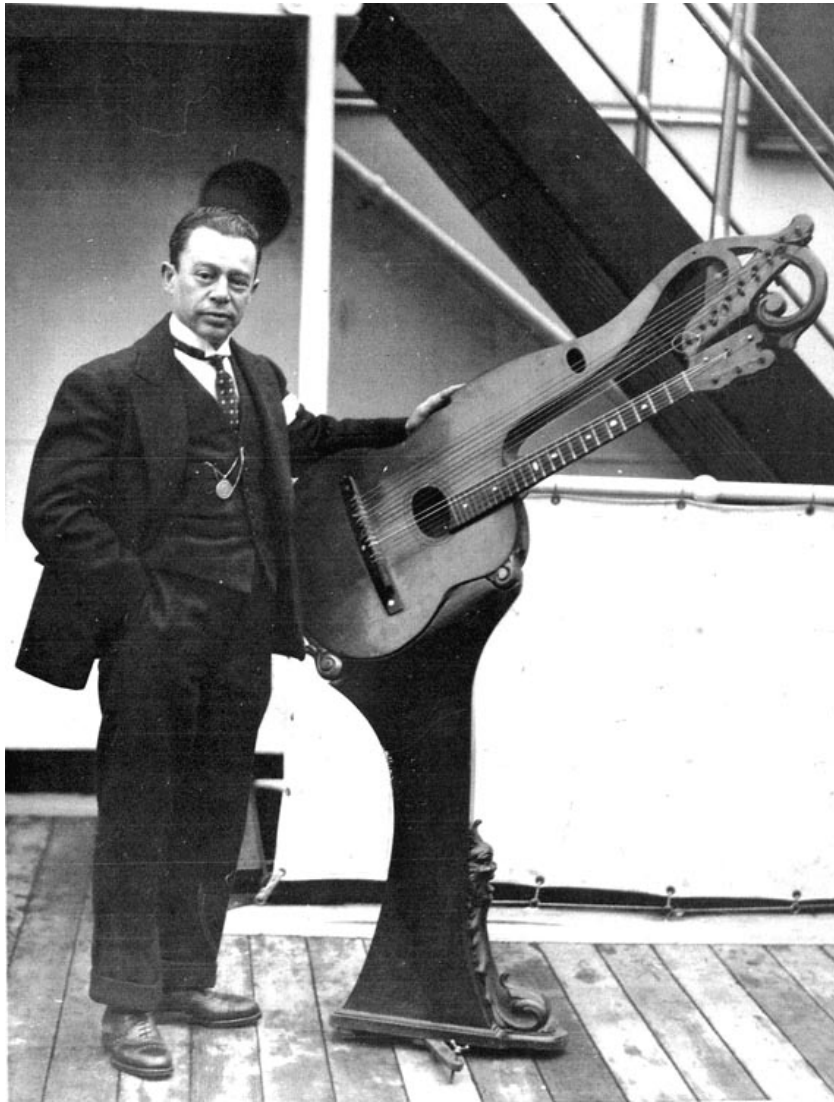
Surely, this hollow arm instrument *had* to have originally been called a harp guitar, right?

Wrong. This particular instrument was influenced by the Candi brothers’ harp guitars, and also Genoa’s general “Taraffo craze” of the 1920s and ‘30s. Taraffo played a hollow arm Gazzo, and all of the Genovese builders – dozens of them – built both hollow armed and theorboed harp guitars by the hundreds.



¹⁹ This is actually another label option, but let’s not go there just yet!

So, what did Taraffo himself – or his fans or the reviewers – call his fantastic hollow-arm instrument sitting on its pedestal (below)?



Pasquale Taraffo, in 1936

Believe it or not, only a “special guitar” or “14-string(ed) guitar.” Some Italians who “invented” their own fancier harp guitars might have chosen “chitarpa,” which, while it could and should apply here, actually doesn’t.

So, once again, we seem to be left with:

14-string guitar (harp guitar)

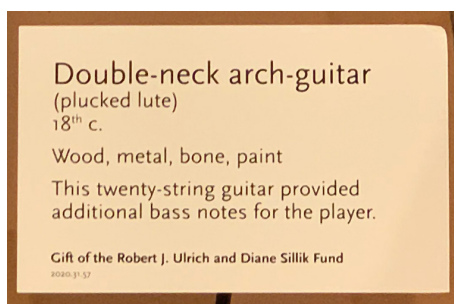
But we do have an out. Per my own footnotes: “Finally, in 1923, an Italian book author captions the hollow-arm Monzino as a *Chitarra-Arpa* (harp-guitar).” Nice! So, besides the occasional portmanteau term of “chitarpa,” we have – over in neighboring Milan by 1923 – the precise Italian translation of “harp guitar.” I would love to know how and why that author made that decision.²⁰

So, for this particular MIM instrument, I’d vote that we take a tiny liberty and consider:

Chitarra-Arpa (harp guitar)

In this case, the parenthetical has a double meaning, being a *direct translation* of the foreign term and also informing the reader that this instrument is a *form of* harp guitar.²¹

This instrument (at right) brings us back now to the curious term “arch”.



Here is its label (above). This is indeed what we would today classify as a double-neck harp guitar, though it was never called that, nor even “arch-guitar.” I’ve seen a couple of museums or books use “double arch-guitar”; in fact, in more than one collection, it’s called a “double arch-cittern.” I already put this guitar vs. cittern debate to rest some years back; it is the instrument’s specific body shape – similar to some of the more unusual Renault’s arch-citterns (*archicistre*) – that confuses curators. Similarly, it is undoubtedly that same confusion – or at least, influence –



²⁰ Interestingly, just as in a couple of German texts, it only applies to the *hollow arm* form, not a theorboed or double-neck form. Though I’ve found no provenance showing the term appearing in Genoa or elsewhere, it well *may* have been used there, since it showed up in Milan.

²¹ For completeness, I should mention some extremely rare precedents of using “*harfengitarre*” for German instruments a hundred-plus years ago, but again, only for single hollow arm forms; so, this would not apply historically to the MIM Reisinger for example.

that led to its “arch-guitar” terminology. In truth, the only name a similar *single-neck* French instrument of the period might have gone by is “*guitare theorbée*” (theorbed guitar). And yet, the original inventor of this instrument named it none of these, calling it simply a “*Guitarre a deux Manches*” (two-necked guitar). Not for the first or last time, the added floating basses (*twice!*) are not important or unusual enough to even enter into the name!²² Nevertheless, I *do* think that here we should again take some liberties. I wouldn’t just use “Double-neck guitar,” I might try:

Gitare theorbée a deux Manches (double harp guitar)
or (double-neck harp guitar)

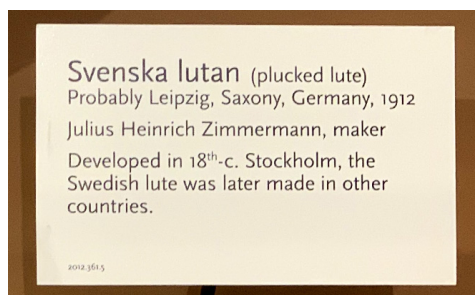
or possibly:

Double-neck theorboed guitar (double harp guitar)

That one was tough! Alright – for those brave souls still with me, I have to torture you *one* last time, and it’s another head spinner.

What is *this* instrument at right?

Well, as the sign says, it’s a:



The sign is partially correct. This one is quite tricky, and I see that every current Wikipedia entry is still wrong (are you surprised?). There are actually *two* very different “Swedish lutes,” which at a glance appear nearly identical. The one “developed in 18th-c. Stockholm” – the *original* instrument – was similar to the French (Renault) archicistre mentioned above. Derived from the tuning of



²² The above information has only recently come to light, and *no* museum or collection has probably yet discovered the cryptic information. As a professional courtesy, I myself am unable to disclose the source of the provenance at the moment.

the *guittar*,²³ it was similarly tuned on the neck in open A, with descending basses. Note its configuration below with eight fretted strings:

The *second* iteration (at right), which I long ago classified as the “False Swedish Lute,”²⁴ was “invented” by one Sven Scholander about 1880, when he salvaged an original instrument and converted it to what amounts to a Swedish-lute-shaped harp guitar with six strings on the neck and six basses, tuned and played like a standard guitar on the neck. That’s why they look almost exactly the same!

While Scholander popularized it,²⁵ few seem to have been made in Sweden. Instead, it was the dozens of German factories that churned them out as *Nordische Lauten* (Nordic lutes). That’s what the MIM has here, a typical Zimmermann model.

So, yes, it *is* a 1912 “Svenska lutan”²⁶ or “Swedish lute,” but the text about the 18th century refers to the earlier instrument. Since theirs is the common German version, perhaps they might be better off leaving out the original invention’s date entirely and labeling this one:

Nordische Laute (Swedish lute)

But again, like the Reisenger above, any number of terms and labels are possible, each just more confusing than the last!²⁷



Well, I think that just about sums up this insanely complicated little semantic exercise. Maybe the MIM curators are right. Maybe we should just switch over to calling everything a harp guitar and be done with it!

²³ Meaning the “English guitar,” tuned in open C.

²⁴ See: <https://www.harp guitars.net/history/org/org-hybrids.htm>

²⁵ In fact, it was often known as the “Scholander Lute.”

²⁶ This is a direct translation; to this day, I’ve yet to find a catalog or advertisement with that term.

²⁷ The German term *basslaute* refers to what is essentially exactly the same instrument but with a “teardrop” lute-shaped body, also seen on my “Hybrids” page. See: <https://www.harp guitars.net/history/org/org-hybrids.htm>

About The Author: Creator and Editor of Harpguitars.net Gregg Miner has been fascinated by harp guitars since the early 1970s. He purchased his first instrument (a 1916 red sunburst Gibson) in 1983, then fell in love with the harp guitars of Chris Knutsen when he found his first one in 1988. He collects harp guitars, researches harp guitars, writes about harp guitars, plays harp guitars, produces harp guitar CDs, buys and sells harp guitars, and runs Harpguitars.net, Harp Guitar Music and the Harp Guitar Foundation. You would think that by now he would be sick of harp guitars, but he is not.

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