

GREGG MINER, PRESIDENT OF THE HARP GUITAR FOUNDATION WELCOMED GUEST IN PASQUALE TARAFFO'S HOMELAND

Wednesday, April 28 at the Best Western City Hotel in Genoa, was held an extraordinary meeting promoted from the passionate collector and music lover Franco Ghisalberti who, thanks to a careful and constant pursuit, managed to find two dozen Harp Guitars made from 1960's to our days, giving rise to an exhibition of these instruments, now rare, never seen in Genoa before.

His commitment was rewarded by a lively participation of aficionados and specialists in the field. Among them the President of the Harp Guitar Foundation, Gregg Miner, who came specially from Los Angeles winning the challenge of whimsical Icelandic volcano that raged during his trip.

In this occasion the account of an era in which the Harp-Guitar was part of the musical Genoese traditions, now almost forgotten, and the extraordinary revival of interest and research that this instrument is experiencing overseas were grafted, revealing a mosaic that little by little is restored in the awareness of cultural roots worth to be rediscovered and appreciated.

Among the Harp-Guitars on show for the occasion were: 10 guitars of luthier Settimio Gazzo, built during the period 1911-1919, 3 by the luthier Priano made in 1920's, 1 guitar by Oreste Candi, 1 by Drasseg Victorin, 1 by Giorgio Bianchi 1932, 1 by Francesco Poggi 1924, 1 by Luigi Auciello, 1 by Adolfo Giacinti, 2 by the Genoese "contemporary luthier" Antonello Saccu. Of particular relevance is the presence of a Harp Guitar by Gazzo made in 1916 with removable original pedestal belonged to the Taraffo family and played by his brother Pietro, now owned by the family Cagetti, who has kindly made it available.

Almost all the guitars on show return a piece of history of Genoese families and a perspective of the music at the popular level: has even happened that some of it were built personally by their owners, as was the case for the guitar "self-produced" by Giorgio Bianchi, son of Benedetto, founder and former chairman of Banco San Giorgio. Two instruments made by contemporary Genoese luthier Antonello Saccu, deserve special attention: a guitar with 20 strings, built for an amateur guitarist who divides his life between his postman work and the devotion for this instrument, and a Harp-Guitar designed and recreated for the famous Genoese guitarist Beppe Gambetta, as a modern copy of Taraffo's Gazzo instrument, with its removable pedestal.

Gambetta, who kindly gave us his presence, in addition to providing three guitars from his collection, has nicely introduced his friend Gregg Miner, President of the Harp Guitar Foundation of Los Angeles, who, during his stay in Genoa, visited luthiers and private collections, and, thanks to the kindness of the Director Patrizia Conti, also had the great emotion to hold in his hands Pasquale Taraffo's Harp Guitar kept in the Paganini Conservatory.

During the meeting, Miner, an expert musicologist as well as collector, has captured the audience with a fascinating lecture- on the history of the Guitar Harp and international importance of the figure of Pasquale Taraffo for the evolution of this instrument.

Miner, after a careful research that has absorbed him for many years, wrote a long dissertation and etymological history that marked the beginning of its vast www.harpguitars.net Site dedicated entirely to the Harp Guitar. Today we can define with this name an instrument having at least one unfretted string lying off the main fret board are played as an open string that can accommodate individual plucking. The modern Harp Guitar must have at least one unfretted string lying off the main fretboard; these unfretted strings are played as an open string.

The word "harp" is a specific reference to the unstopped open strings, and is not specifically a reference to the tone, pitch range, volume, silhouette similarity, construction, floor-standing ability, nor any other alleged "harp-like" properties.

The Harp Guitar has a long and fascinating history: from mid-1600, though called by different names in the course of world history, has resurfaced at least once every century in different places and for different purposes of music, some obsolete, others not .

The name " Harp Guitar " was first officially adopted in 1891, when J. Hansen patented a guitar in Chicago with 6 strings plus 4 sub basses. For the first time the patent mentions that the sub bass strings are to be plucked: this is important because even today some people think that these were added only to produce low vibration for sympathy. In 1895 the Norwegian Kris Knutsen, invented in America a double neck guitar where frets and standard strings are on the main neck, and sub basses are on the second neck which is hollow.

It 'amazing the similarity between this instrument with those built by Settimio Gazzo, of which we have the first documentation in the early '900. Since 1890 to 1920 the harp guitar knows a great vogue in the United States and Europe and it is still hard to determine who actually invented this instrument or "who copied who." The most interesting aspect is, however, given by the the wide and simultaneous diffusion of these instruments both in Europe and overseas.

For what concerns us more closely, it is almost certain that Settimio Gazzo built by early 1900 Taraffo's Harps Guitars: the one given to the city of Genoa from the daughter of the great guitarist was created in 1909, when the collaboration between Taraffo and Gazzo was already begun. When and how the two became inspired to invent a 14-string guitar?

Perhaps Taraffo's great talent and the chromatic bass lines that he "heard in his head "would require not less than eight chromatically descending sub basses that he tuned towards low lowers notes . Probably he devised himself the removable pedestal to support this type of guitar, a fine and unique object that, besides from being aesthetically beautiful, let the sound falling down and spread better.

To play such a complex instrument Taraffo had to invent and develop a unique and refined technique . Studies done by listening and watching the video in slow motion, confirm the use of an instrumental technique never used elsewhere in the world, as particular tremolos and rotational movements of the arm to touch the sub-basses very quickly without even looking at his right hand. Miner reported that when they heard for the first time in the United States CD's by Taraffo, remastered by Ghisalberty, listeners thought they were two or more guitarists, believing it impossible that one performer could take such a rich and dynamic sound so vast and intense. Nor had never heard such a "virtuous" harp guitar that was one and the world's largest of its kind in the world: in fact, other guitarists such as Mozzani and Maccaferri, could play a maximum of 2 or 3 low added, instead of 8 which he used. Miner has made some techniques examples on Beppe Gambetta 's Guitar and said that Taraffo has left no written scores of his music, and unfortunately there is no classical guitarist that can play this instrument with such skill today.

We quote his words: "..Today we opened a beautiful new chapter on Harp Guitar;...would be nice to faithfully transcribe his compositions and reworkings of his records directly from listening to relive and revive his music." In this regard, Miner has proved a real enthusiasm with the idea of working with me and Ghisalberty in a joint project of rediscovery of Taraffo's music, his stature as a performer, composer and

faithful transcriber of operas, aimed at recreating the score of the Symphony of the Norma by Vincenzo Bellini directly by listening to Taraffo's recording and analyzing his technical and performing features.

THE SITE WWW.HARPGUITARS.NET, KEY REFERENCE POINT FOR DEVOTEES OF HARP GUITAR

Gregg Miner has been fascinated by harp-guitar as a teenager: the incredible passion and commitment who has devoted to the study, research, collection and appreciation of this instrument made him the recognized leading expert in this field.

In 2004 he conceived and created a huge Website dedicated to the Harp Guitar: an unique and valuable archive evolving, and the central hub of world wide web for this instrument. Includes interesting and detailed pages on history, interpreters, iconography, discography, antique and contemporary videos, and a forum dedicated to the community of enthusiasts around the world. Impressive pages are devoted to historical and modern tunings (including those of Taraffo's Gazzo Guitar) where you can also examine those of the Renaissance lute. There is a section devoted to the particular notation used for the Harp Guitar, with the chance to see ancient scores, as studies for 6 or 12 strings of Joseph Farbach Vienna in mid-nineteenth century, as well as the modern tablatures.

Miner maintains and updates this website with a continuous and ongoing research work, and is happy to collaborate, gather documentation and equipment from enthusiasts and specialists who want to enrich and disseminate the history of the Harp Guitar. Thanks to this site, it began the close cooperation and friendship with Franco Ghisalberti, which has contributed significantly to the creation of the page dedicated to Pasquale Taraffo, catalyst for international attention to the figure of the great guitarist from Genoa. Here you can find very accurate biographical and historical notes, his whole discography (which lists all the labels 78's), photographs, posters and international reviews of his concerts and a rare video as well. Worth mentioning are also the chapters on the instruments made by Genoese luthiers Gazzo, Candi, etc., Genoese Guitarists and the cultural background of his era. The exploration of this site is fascinating and compelling: a musical adventure through the Internet will never end.

THE HARP GUITAR FOUNDATION AND ITS "GATHERING"

In 2009, after five years of growth of the web site was created The Harp Guitar Foundation, whose president is Gregg Miner, made possible largely by the support of 200 subscribers and benefactors who contributed to the site and its training. It is a nonprofit Public Benefit Corporation created to preserve, support, and enrich the world of the Harp Guitar, expanding the historical documentation, and to serve the worldwide community of fans of this instrument, its performers, researchers, collectors, luthiers and restorers, and project Harp Guitar into the future through experiences of new music, new interpretations and new discoveries.

Important annual event is the "Harp Guitar Gathering", a Festival that brings together lovers of Harp Guitar which began in 2003 in Virginia, thanks to the idea of the famous guitarist Stephen Bennett: on this occasion he gathered such a great number of Harp Guitars never seen before. Following the success of this first meeting, the event has become annual, and was organized in Oregon, Florida, etc., receiving enthusiastic participants from all over the world (England, Canada, Belgium, Japan, etc.) All this people, motivated by the desire and joy of meeting and "making music" together, give life to a full immersion of

meetings, conferences, and seminars. The 8th Harp Guitar Gathering will be held at the Athenaeum Theatre in Indianapolis next November 2010.

<http://www.harpguitars.net>

GREGG MINER - "...IN SEARCH OF THE LOST SOUND" , THE MUSEUM AND RECORDINGS

Gregg Miner is a collector, performer, and musicologist, but also a restorer and maker of rare and unavailable instruments. His musical education includes a wide variety of genres: he studied classical guitar, rock, jazz, lute, mandolin, and classical harp (studying with the famous Mildred Dilling). His desire to play every instrument which he found led him to set up a collection of several hundreds: some historical instrument that could not be found, was commissioned to the most skilled luthiers to be faithfully reconstructed. Many instruments in his collection are unique.

His museum "The Miner Museum of Vintage, Exotic and Just Plain Unusual Musical Instruments" can be visited "virtually" on site www.minermusic.com is an amazing mine that includes hundreds of specimens of string instruments, cataloged by family, year and maker, Harp Guitars (including one of Settimio Gazzo, and one by Mozzani, beyond those by Knutsen, Dyer and Gibson), Mandolins (including a Monzino Mandolin-Harp), citharas, harps, lutes, Dolceole, and Orpharium Melloarpe, ethnic instruments and exotic Banjos, Ukuleles and balalaika, plus many unusual hybrids like Pianophone, and Miner-Cello of his invention, and others, ad infinitum.

Animated by the desire not only to own these wonderful instruments, but bringing their sound to a new life, Miner has personally restored and recreated the technique, performance practice and every nuance of each style, making them the protagonists of his recordings. Of extreme interest is the 2-CD collection, "A Christmas Collection", in which you can now listen to the voices of lost and forgotten lyres, harps, Octophoni, mandocello, Chitarrone, Viola da Gamba, Tromba Marina, and of course Harp Guitars: one hundred rare instruments that, under the sensitive fingers of Miner come back to life in a very fascinating musical path. His versatile interpretation is amazing just as the refinement of his arrangements of folk and traditional Christmas songs: namely the Choir "Joy of Man's Desiring" for Mandolin, Mandocello, Mandola and Mando-Bass strikes for the vibrant vitality, "The Ukrainian Bell Carol "Balalaika for soprano and bass and Bandura, such as a 17th century Provencal song "Bring a Torch, Jeanette, Isabella", played with a Dyer Harp guitar of 1920 (absolutely one of the favorite instruments), evoke very ancient suggestions. The booklets accompanying the CD are treated in detail with beautiful photographs, historical notes and tuning of each instrument, and can be considered a real mini encyclopaedia of sounds and images precious for every music lover"... When you are able to find something with a personal story behind it – something played and loved by someone you've never met, from a completely different time or place – that's the extra magical part."

<http://www.minermusic.com>

by

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