

Zither Newsletter

OF U.S.A.

Summer, 1987

Quest for the Fretted Zither

by David Baird

Cocoa, Florida

One evening while sitting on the beach at Grand Turk Island, I was overwhelmed by an irrational desire to become a master of the fretted zither. This case of obsessive desire was precipitated by a trip to Orlando, Florida, where I heard one of the few surviving zither artists perform at the Orange County Home Show.

Thus began the quest. My first goal was to find a zither. They are not plentiful. I could not accept an auto-harp, hammered dulcimer, bowed psaltery, only a pure fretted zither for me.

My first step was a letter to the chairman of the Music Dept. Berea College, Ky. My reasoning went like this: zithers are alpine instruments, the Alps are mountains, there are mountains in Kentucky, somewhere in those hills there might be an unattached zither for me. Besides, I had to start somewhere.

He referred me to the Louisville Courier-Journal which recently had articles about zithers in which Willie Dittrick of Homestead, Iowa was mentioned. A con- (page4)

ZITHER MUSIC AT FIGA CONVENTION



Art Anderson

Janet Stessl

Lou Stessl

When the Fretted Instrument Guild of America (FIGA) held its 30th annual convention July 15-19, 1987 in Flint, Michigan zither music was heard again. An alpine trio consisting of Janet and Lou Stessl, and Art Anderson played three genuine Bavarian folk music pieces: Gretl Boarischer, Erste Schönauer Landler and Schützen Polka.

Janet Stessl also gave a two hour workshop on zither. History, types of music, methods of instruction, strings and the new video instruction tape were some of the topics covered. About 15 people attended, with significant interest shown in a zither presence at the convention.

Approximately 750 members of FIGA attended the meeting, with England, Germany and Puerto Rico among the distant places represented. While banjo players predominate, mandolin and guitar players are a significant portion of membership. Next convention will be in Baltimore, Md.

editorial page editorial page editorial page editorial page editorial

We want to thank all of you for the wonderful response we've been having to the first edition of the Zither Newsletter of the USA. Subscriptions have been coming in on a regular basis, and we're happy about that. We don't mind a little red ink, but we'd like the venture to carry itself eventually. Subscriptions alone will not carry the letter, hence some advertising is in order. The 39¢ mailing cost is high, but we are not mailing enough copies to avail ourselves of the bulk rates. Also, we want to guarantee return mail so that our mailing lists can be cleaned up, and we must use first class mail for that. So you see, your subscription is very important, and very much appreciated.

The other editorializing we want to do is regarding a **national zither assembly** of some type. As we watched the participants at FIGA convention in Flint, Michigan we envied the benefits accruing to those folks. Most of them are like us, everyday folks who happen to enjoy playing a little music to brighten their corner of the world. They were trading ideas about music, exchanging ideas on music systems, instruments, teaching techniques and there was a whole lot of just plain picken' for fun going on in Flint. There was the en mass banjo orchestra and the en masse mandolin orchestra. We yearned for an en mass zither orchestra.

We firmly believe in the value of a zither conference/seminar/ convention/ or whatever-you-want-to-call-it. We also believe that we are too small in numbers at this time to be able to organize it by ourselves. The zither seminars that have happened in Philadelphia are largely due to efforts of Dr. George Beichel and Sofian Zapf. The Chicago seminars are organized by yours truly, and we can testify to the work that goes into just a one day event.

For these reasons, we recommend that zither players of the USA plan to attend FIGA convention in Baltimore, Md. July 6, 7, 8, 9, & 10, 1988 at the Holiday Inn Inner Harbor on the shores of Chesapeake Bay. For the small price of the FIGA registration fee we'll have meeting rooms, rehearsal rooms, concert facilities with good amplification arrangements, display areas, jamming sites. The entire hotel has been reserved for FIGA's use.

We'd like to hear some comments from you about this suggestion. Would you plan to come? How do you feel about a zither meeting? Do you have any other suggestions?

The Zither Newsletter of the USA is published and edited by Janet Stessl as a service and information link for zither players in the United States of America. Your comments, articles, listing of events, classified ads are welcome. Subscription rate \$8.00 annual. Advertising rates: business card \$10, 1/8 page \$15, 1/4 page \$25. Newsletter published quarterly, on or about February 1, May 1, August 1, and November 1, copy requested six weeks prior to publishing. 6173 North McClellan Ave. Chicago, Illinois 60646 Telephone: 312-631-2854.

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THE TEACHERS TABLE

METHODS OF PRACTICING

by Toni Gösswein

Part 2 of lectures given by Toni Gösswein at the Trossingen Zither Seminar, April 1986. Translated by Janet Stessl from her notes.

Use a systematic method of playing. Many players practice many hours with few results.

Avoid mistakes. Study a piece first. What is the overall purpose of the piece. Work through passages. You don't need to play fast parts fast. Decide which fingering you will use, whether you will play with right or left hand, etc. Mark places where you will use different fingering. If you want to use thumb more often, mark thumb over and thumb under, as in a scale passage down, instead of using 1, 2, 3, 4, use thumb under to avoid a break in the continuity.

Avoid looking up and down too much, by studying the music. Prepare by looking at the notes, feel the zither, find the strings - place hand on the G chord strings and find strings from there.

Know your mistakes. When we are sick we diagnose what is wrong and do something about it. When we make zither mistakes, we must diagnose why we make those mistakes.

The finger is in the wrong place. Why is it on the wrong fret? Perhaps by leaving your fingers lay you will know better where they are. Be aware of your "anchor" finger to keep your place. Maybe you should have changed position. In a position every finger has a place.

Maybe you are not playing in the correct rhythm and finger and pick are not meeting at the right time. Why not? Do you play the

bass note before the melody note? You must critique your mistakes and decide how to correct them.

Overcoming mistakes. Play scales in different positions to find correct position for a passage. Check the rhythm with a metronome. Simplify the music to find problems. For example, break the counting down to a simpler count. Take out a tie or dot, count, then put it back in. When you have the count correct, play it 20 times.

Many mistakes are thinking mistakes. Practice correctly. Practice the places you make mistakes. You don't need to play every piece all the way through each time. Practice all the way through an entire piece when you have worked out the mistakes.

Teachers and students. Each zither player has a different ability. Good or bad teaching can influence and develop this ability for better or worse results. A good teacher cannot create a miracle, if the student does not have the ability. However, a good instructor will be able to help any zither player improve their skill. There are many factors to consider: age, time for practicing, aspirations, etc. Some students only want to play in a group and have no ambition to be a soloist. A good teacher will respect this. On the other hand, he would also expose them to solo playing to open the door to that opportunity. A good instructor analyzes his student and makes a plan to develop that student's abilities.

JANE CURTIS

ZITHER

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Quest . . . (continued from page 1)

nection! He was the performer I saw in Orlando. I wrote him. He answered with brochure for his LP records and a note saying he had two zithers available, asking price \$650 each. This news slowed me down a bit.

Then came another letter from Berea with the address of a violin maker in Lexington, Ky. who had a fine old zither, "called a concert zither and it is listed in my books of museum instruments. It will need a new set of strings. Asking \$100." "I'll take it!", I wrote back immediately. Shirlee and I were going to drive to Ohio in two months and Lexington really is between Ohio and Florida, just a short detour off I-75. The instrument was worth the quest. A real beauty. The sound hole was ringed with mother of pearl, ivory tuning nuts, german silver fret plate.

Music Custodian at the Library of Congress advised me to contact Zapf's Music Store in Philadelphia for strings. Stringing the instrument was a tedious but interesting task. I tuned the 32 strings against my Baldwin. A coat of lemon oil, some silver polish, and the zither was ready to play. I placed the instrument on a coffee table, opened my copy a A. Darr's Method for Zither and took the first hesitant step toward mastery. Darr's book was written in 1867 and brought up to modern standards in the 1888 revision. Written in both English and German, the book drops the student into zither land sans parachute.

Competency on the instrument seems to be an hereditary characteristic. I soon learned it is impossible for an adult to master the zither. I played at the zither for a few months until the sheer impossibility of what I was attempting sank in.

But my love for the instrument could not be sublimated and I did find the elegant solution. Now I sink into my favorite chair, place the zither on my lap, turn on the stereo and relax to Willie Dittrick's LP records. (Editor's Note: We hasten to assure David that many of us do learn as adults, but difficult by yourself. David is looking for some Florida zither friends now.)

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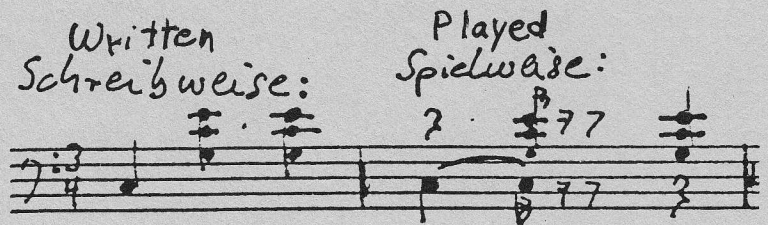
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NEW MUSIC
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a critique
by Johannes Popp

Lustig & Staad, Book IV. compiled by Brigitte Amasreiter. Publisher J. Preissler. Order Nbr. 6532. Price 12,-- DM. Seven traditional landler melodies - most without source. Can be played as zither solo, but second zither part is included on separate sheet - only fretboard notes. Grade: easy to medium difficulty.

"Landlerisch auf'gspielt" is the title of this book of the series and it closes a gap in folk music notes for zither solo. Clear and simple melodies, combined with arrangements in the open strings, which I have wanted to have in print for a long time. It is too bad, however, that there are no double notes on the fretboard, that the key of C prevails, and that the bass arrangement uncommon for zither players of the third bass appears. Moreover, I miss an explanation in the forward of the difference between written notes and the art of playing folk music in 3/4 time.

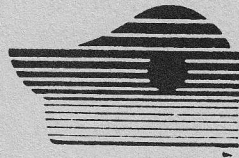


Singen is unser Freud, compiled by Brigitte Amasreiter. Publisher, J. Preissler, Order Nbr. 6532 Price, 12,-- DM. 18 alpine songs with zither accompaniment. Zither solos with words of songs printed also.

A book full of beautiful, well known melodies. Also here we have simple arrangements on the open strings, especially good for zither players in beginning stages. Here I also miss two or three tones in the melody since it would enhance the charm of the song accompaniment. Exceptional fingering could have been noted, but none was used. All songs are in the first or second position.

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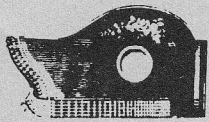
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Zither Music for Special Occasions


 NOTES Heard Here and There

Sofian Zapf played at Rittenhouse Town in May and on June 2 with the Olney Symphony Orchestra. On June 7 Sofian and Dr. George Beichle played at "German Heritage Festival" at Mt. Bethel in the Poconos. On June 13 Robert Stykemiam of Toledo, Ohio played the whole day at a local museum. Ruth Valentino played for the Chicago Lyric Opera Benefit Guild in the lobby of the Civic Opera House last January. In June she appeared at the Germanfest of St. Luke Church in Itasca, Illinois. Mary Porzelt of Maple Park, Minnesota played for German Day at their local high school. Janet Stessl played for the Miss Polonaise Contest during Festival Polonaise on Chicago's lake-front in July. Sepp Diepolder was featured zither player with the Tiroler Zugspitz Echo Band at German Fest in Milwaukee. He and the band will be appearing at the Brauhaus, on Lincoln Ave. in Chicago later in August. Robert and Johannes Popp are teaching at seminars in Bruneck, South Tirol, Italy in August and in Marktoberdorf, Bavaria, West Germany in September. By the way, Robert and Birgit Popp celebrated their marriage in religious and Bavarian folk ceremonies in July. Zither music will be featured on the New York radio program of Karl Haas during the month of September, '87. Tune in to WQXR. Jack Bourdess in Bellevue, Nebraska has a new Mädchen group at his school. They use zither, violin, string bass and harp.

August 4 - 24, 1987 Tirolian Folk Music Trio, Peter, Reinhard & Franzl - Black Forest Chalet Restaurant, 8840 N. Waukegan Rd. Morton Grove, Il. Tele: 312-965-6830. Harp, zither, guitar, steirische harmonika and other instruments playing genuine alpine folk music.

October 11, 1987 Milwaukee Zither Club Concert 3:00 PM Sunday Bavarian Inn, 700 West Lexington, Milwaukee, Wisc. Contact Mr. & Mrs. Hans Gassner, 2952 N. 48th St., Milwaukee, Wisc. 53210. Tele: 414-871-1695. Tickets \$4 in advance, \$4.50 at door.

November 8, 1987 Chicago Zither Club Concert and Dinner Dance. Sunday 3:30 PM Tickets \$20 advance only. Contact Mrs. Ernestine M. Kandlbinder, 1601 Greendale, Park Ridge, Il. 60068 Tele: 312-825-5166

July 6 - 10, 1988 FIGA Convention, Baltimore Maryland. Holiday Inn Inner Harbor.

October 30 - November 1, 1988 Quadrennial Congress of Deutsche Zithermusik Bund.

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LETTERS from Subscribers

"I became interested in the zither (as I suppose others have) by hearing the sound track of the old "Third Man" movie. I still have my original 78 RPM London recording of it, although much deteriorated. Later I found one of Ruth Welcome's LP record albums "Christmas in Zitherland" and that did it! I decided I just had to locate a zither for myself and try to learn to play it. The locating of a zither took me the better part of two years and it was during that time that I found how unknown the instrument really is. Finally I was able to locate and buy one, but then found it to be very difficult to get any strings for it. I solved that dilemma by writing to the different string manufacturers in the USA and while waiting for any response, I strung my instrument with three sets of mandolin strings. The Toledo library fortunately had an old copy of the Darr Method which I started to use to teach myself to play. In the meantime my activities in trying to locate an instrument had stirred up enough interest locally that someone referred me to a man who could teach me to play. That was Rudolph Ochs, who was about eighty at the time, but who enthusiastically agreed to teach me to play. He had come to this country from Germany in 1904 and told me that I was his only zither student, although he was a teacher of other instruments . . . I became acquainted with Bill Pagels who got his zither out of the closet . . . we found Trudi Kahn and encouraged her to begin playing again. Now the three of us play together every two weeks and we play for different occasions a few times a year." Bob Stykemian, Toledo, Ohio

"The Dutch zither players are united in the Nederlandse Cither Bond. Our quarterly magazine, entitled "Cithernews" has reached up its 15th volume. Enclosed you find number 1986/4. I hope its contents will please you. Our committee would appreciate it, to communicate by yours and our magazine. So we propose to interchange our two magazines." Laurent van Beek, The Netherlands

"What's happening with old zither scores and sheet music? Could we compile a master list of titles and composers? The goal of this project would be to eventually have a system whereby any zitherist in the country could share copies of the older works that presently lie unused in cupboards, attics, etc. Another benefit of this system would be to preserve the history and deteriorating old zither scores by copying and cataloging them. Much of the 19th and turn-of-the-century music is in danger of rotting away which would deprive many of us of the rich heritage of old German-Austrian folk music that is no longer published." John Roeder, Columbus, Ohio

"We have a zither club here in Buffalo, N.Y. At one time we were a big club with 18 zither players plus other instruments, but now we are down to 7 zither players and we are getting up in years. We used to have an annual concert, but not any more. The last three years we have just performed at German Day picnic at Schiller Park in Buffalo on Labor Day weekend. " Alexander Susan, Tonawanda, N.Y.

"What is a \$35 pick? I am playing the zither for quite a number of years using the conventional silver steel or plastic guitar pick. So, I can't imagine the Super Pick. I was pleasantly surprised when I opened the mail and found the Zither Newsletter. I am glad there is someone out there promoting our beautiful instrument before it is extinct." Carl Mittelhammer, Bergenfield, N. J.

"I believe these instruments must be brought out of the back of the junk shop or the attick and we must show people that they are not old relics of a by-gone age, but can produce wonderful music." Gareth Tonkes, SouthWales, England.

LETTERS (continued from page 7)

"I especially like the "Teachers Table" and hope to see this feature in each issue if possible. It is good to read about all that is going on zither-wise in the USA." Maria Klaus-Skowronek, Ellicott City, Maryland

"I compose and arrange for the zither. All types of music are represented: popular classical, semi-classical, medieval, renaissance, folk, operetta, musicals, and so on. I have even written variations on an ancient Chinese ch'in melody. I also have the idea of preparing a book of American pieces for zither students to use a) as pieces to play and b) as exercises in learning the different techniques, chords, etc. Do you think people would be interested in this?" Jane E. Curtis, Sterling Virginia

"We inherited a library of zither music - solos and orchestrations. We will gladly xerox copies at charge of 10¢ per sheet. Send SSAE for listing. Herman von Bernowitz, 1508 N. Hancock St., Arlington, VA 22201

"Here in Canada, in the West especially, there might be a few people who are capable of zither playing. In Kamloops we are three. H. Kienzler, Lamloops, B.C. Canada

"My zither has no strings, but is in perfect repair otherwise. I've looked for strings for seven years. I felt really excited to find another person interested in zither. Barb McDowell, Columbus, Ohio

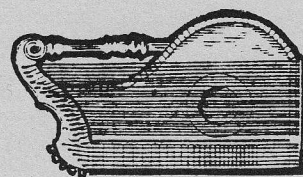
"I have been playing Concert Zither (Wiener Stimmung) for about 25 years now. My interest in the zither is intense, but I do not spend enough time practicing and have to teach myself as no zither teacher is available in the area. I have been a vocal music teacher here in the Davenport area for 35 years; I keep one zither at school and play once in a while for the students; have even been brave enough on a few occasions to play in string ensembles at our Christmas Chorus Concerts - especially when we perform German or Austrian carols. Donald L. Ockelmann, Davenport, Iowa

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Yellow Bird (Calypso-Lied)

Zither Arr.
Jane E. Curtis
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Entspannt

The first system of musical notation consists of two staves. The upper staff is in treble clef with a common time signature (C). It features a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes, including a circled cross symbol (⊗) above the final measure. The lower staff is in bass clef and provides a harmonic accompaniment with chords and eighth notes.

The second system continues the piece with two staves. The upper staff maintains the melodic line with various rhythmic patterns. The lower staff continues the harmonic accompaniment with chords and eighth notes.

The third system of musical notation consists of two staves. The upper staff features a melodic line with eighth notes and a circled cross symbol (⊗) above the fourth measure. The lower staff provides a harmonic accompaniment with chords and eighth notes.

The fourth system of musical notation consists of two staves. The upper staff features a melodic line with eighth notes and a circled cross symbol (⊗) above the fourth measure. The lower staff provides a harmonic accompaniment with chords and eighth notes.

The fifth system of musical notation consists of two staves. The upper staff has a first ending (1.) and a second ending (2.) marked with a circled cross symbol (⊗). The word 'Schluß' is written above the second ending. The lower staff provides a harmonic accompaniment with chords and eighth notes. A circled cross symbol (⊗) is also present in the upper staff.

The sixth system of musical notation consists of two staves. The upper staff features a melodic line with eighth notes and a circled cross symbol (⊗) above the fourth measure. The lower staff provides a harmonic accompaniment with chords and eighth notes.

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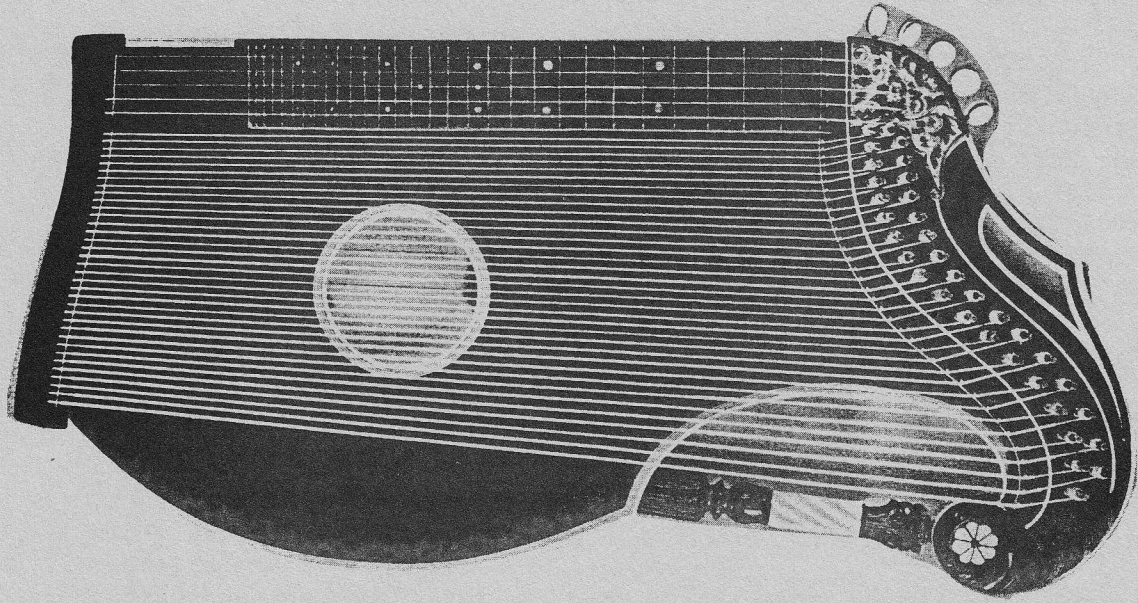
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