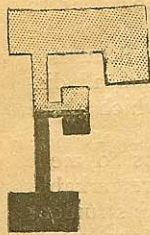


J Geo MORLEY  
HARP MAKER FROM ERARD  
8 SUSSEX PLACE  
SOUTH KENSINGTON LONDON



By J. Geo. Morley.

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FOR the last hundred years the harp manufacturer has been, almost exclusively, located in London. Certainly nine out of every ten double-action harps ever made have been made in London. Of course this is the result of the accident of Sebastian Erard's work and inventions being interrupted in France by the political troubles of the Revolutionary period.

He came to London, no doubt, for quiet. Erard's first patent in England was for the adaptation of his "fork" in place of the old "hook" in single-action harps, in 1794, just a century ago.

His first double-action harp, patented in 1801, was a very queer affair, not in the slightest degree resembling the Erard double-action with which we are familiar. This first double-action harp of Sebastian Erard was in no way superior to, nor indeed was it so practical as, that which Cousineau had brought out in 1782, nineteen years earlier. In Erard's first attempt at a double-action he got the first and second semi-tone, not by shortening the string (as now), but by causing the tuning-pin to revolve, by means of the pedal, thus increasing the tension of each string two successive semi-tones, the vibrating portion of the string remaining of the same length when either flat, natural, or sharp. Of course no self-respecting string could be expected to stand such rough treatment as this, so this idea and patent never went beyond the experimental stage.

Nine years later, in 1810, Sebastian Erard patented his second double-action harp, in which the two desired semitones were obtained, not by increase of tension but by cutting off successively two small portions of each string by means of revolving "forks." Excepting insignificant modifications and increase in size, the Erard harp of to-day is the same as that of 1810.

At last the harp has become a satisfactory musical instrument, unlimited in modulating powers, clear, bright, and full in tone, because the brass plates of the neck gave enough rigidity and strength to permit the use of strings twice as heavy as in former years.

As soon as Sebastian Erard had found time and money to make and dispose of a few hundreds of these new harps they attracted enormous interest in the whole of the musical world, so that between 1815 and 1830 there arose a crowd of excellent harpists, the most conspicuous of whom were the Brothers Godefroid, Bochsa, Labarre, Parish Alvars, Marin Wright, and Dizi, whose delightfully poetic studies so much resemble Stephen Heller's in style.

This period, 1815 to 1835, was the good old time for the harp trade. There was an immense insatiable demand for the new instrument, the double-action harp. Many new makers appeared—Stumpff, the friend and correspondent of Beethoven, Erat, Dodd, Schwieso. So great was the anxiety to get the lion's share of the harp business, that on 24th April, 1822, three different harp makers, Erard, Dodd, and Delveau, all took out patents on the *seifsame day*!

What a different state of affairs now! There is no record of any patents in connection with pedal harps from 1835 to 1894. From about this date, 1835 or so, the public interest in the harp seems to have subsided rapidly. The harp businesses died out one by one—Schwieso, Serquet, Blazdell, Grosjean, Erat, Dodd, Delveau, Barry, Egan, all disappeared, their children taking to other businesses, in which there seemed more probability of getting bread and butter.

In searching for the reason of this decline, there seems to me a possible explanation in the "Bochsa" scandal. This remarkable Frenchman was a strange mixture. The harp, on which instrument many people think he surpassed all his rivals, was only one of many instruments the which he played equally well. He was a prodigy pianist at the age of seven, at nine he was writing symphonies, at eleven he played a flute concerto of his own, at sixteen he wrote an opera.

With all these talents he seems to have been unable to make money enough honestly. He was tried in Paris and condemned to be branded and imprisoned for forgeries, among the signatures he counterfeited being Méhul's, Boïeldieu's, and Lord Wellington's.

In spite of these eccentricities Bochsa seems to have been well received and petted on his arrival in London. He was Director of the King's Theatre, and Director (the first I think) of the newly-established R.A.M. Queen Victoria accepted the dedication of his "Plaisirs de la Mémoires."

In 1839 Bochsa decided to leave London on an artistic tour, accompanied by a lady singer, forgetting to ask her husband's permission. He went to the Antipodes and died there in 1856.

The harpist, Parish Alvars, was universally acknowledged as towering head and shoulders above all his fellow artists, in the same way as Liszt and Rubinstein are revered by all pianists. He was an Englishman from Devonshire. He and Liszt travelled all over Europe together in the days before railways. Liszt died the other day over eighty; Alvars died in 1849, in the prime of his youth, at Vienna.

Some of Alvars' pupils still live—Charles Oberthür and Mr. Krüger of Stuttgart, who has just been pensioned after fifty years' service in the Stuttgart Court Orchestra. Dubez, another pupil of Alvars, died only

two years ago, leaving to the writer of this article his collection of Alvars' musical manuscripts.

Dizi, that delightful player and composer for the harp, seems to have been of an ambitious and dissatisfied turn of mind. He by no means considered the then available harps, Erard's or others, as satisfactory. Among other defects he noticed was the rather frequent distortion of the pillar, causing the neck to bend over and thus carry the thick strings beyond the reach of the revolving forks, this distortion and twisting of the neck being caused by the pull of the forty-three strings on one side of the harp only.

So he got Dodd in London, and Pleyel in Paris, to make a lot of harps to his (Dizi's) special design; very strange, very ingenious things they are. He gets rid of the one-sided strain by making all the strings pass between (instead of the outside) the two plates. The consequence is that when a string breaks it is a good half-hour's work to fix a new one by groping among the machinery between the plates. It does not take long to discover you have fixed the string in the wrong place; then you use adjectives and begin to try again.

One of the most artistic among English harpists is Mr. T. H. Wright, so well known as always playing in a duet for two harps with Mr. John Thomas at his annual concert.

Mr. Wright's most fascinating speciality is his power of extemporising. He will play for hours without book to an interested and willing listener. Mr. Wright is a link uniting us with the dim past, he travelled to Paris by diligence, before the days of railways, to get his lessons from Naderman.

Naderman was harp professor at the Paris Conservatoire, was considered (and very justly so, I believe) to be the best harpist of his day.

Unfortunately for art in Paris, he was also a harp maker, the rival of Erard. So powerful was his influence that he was able to prevent the entrance into the Conservatoire of Music in Paris of a double-action harp until the year 1845.

All musical amateurs with any pretension to taste or knowledge had been in possession of the double-action harp for years. But the principal State-aided College of Music in the capital of the country where the double-action harp was invented was officially deprived of the use of the double-action harp for thirty years by the influence of Mr. Naderman, in his double character of harp virtuoso and harp manufacturer!

There have been no patented improvements at all in the pedal harp since 1835, and none worth mentioning since Sebastian Erard's of 1810. Still the harp seems to have always exercised a fascinating influence on inventors.

Naderman, the great harpist, always dreamed of some way of getting rid of the pedals altogether, of some means of obtaining the semi-tones and unlimited modulating powers without using the feet.

Indeed, in 1845, Pape, the ingenious piano-maker, patented a harp quite pedalless. It was "over-strung," or "cross-strung," *i.e.*, it had two rows of strings, one row with seven strings in the octave, giving the

diatonic scale corresponding to the seven white keys of the piano. The second row had the rest of the strings producing the semi-tones and completing the chromatic scale. These two rows of strings were not parallel, as on the old Welsh harps, but were crossed, and it was intended the strings should be played at the point of the intersection.

Only four years ago a doctor of medicine from Lancashire called and asked me to purchase his NEW invention (!) the pedalless, actionless, cross-strung harp, the which he had invented himself, made himself, very crudely, of course, and actually taught himself to play! He had taken all these immense pains, only to learn, after years of labour, that his ideas had all been anticipated forty-five years previously.

The principal trouble in connection with the harp is the renewal of the strings which occasionally break. Moisture breaks the strings wholesale; a harp left near an open window on a showery day will break, perhaps, six strings in one day, whereas the same harp, in a dry room, and out of the draught, would not break one string in six weeks. The forty-three, or forty-six, or forty-seven strings of course exert a great pressure, all parts of the instrument feel this, the board made originally flat bends to a curve, the neck bends and descends quite half an inch, the pillar bends. If it has been constructed with a curve against the pull of the strings, as it should be, then the pull of the strings bends the pillar about upright.

As at present constructed the harp is just strong enough to successfully resist the tension and a little bit over, but not much over. It follows, therefore, that it is very necessary to take special care not to upset the harp, the which, from its special form, is not very stable. If the harp be accidentally knocked over it is certain to break in its weakest part, viz., at the bend of the neck near the treble end. So whenever sending a harp by rail it is highly desirable to entirely remove the tension by giving each one of the tuning pins one complete turn backward. This simple precaution will ensure the harp's travelling safely all round the world, whereas if this precaution be neglected the neck of the harp will very likely get broken at the first small accidental shock, no harp ever made being strong enough to successfully withstand *tension combined with a shock.*

On Monday, 21st May, passed over to the great majority, regretted by a host of friends and pupils, T. H. Wright, a little man, but a great artist and accomplished gentleman. He had nearly reached the age of ninety, and was twice married, his first wife being the daughter of the celebrated pianist and composer J. B. CRAMER.

(To be continued.)

