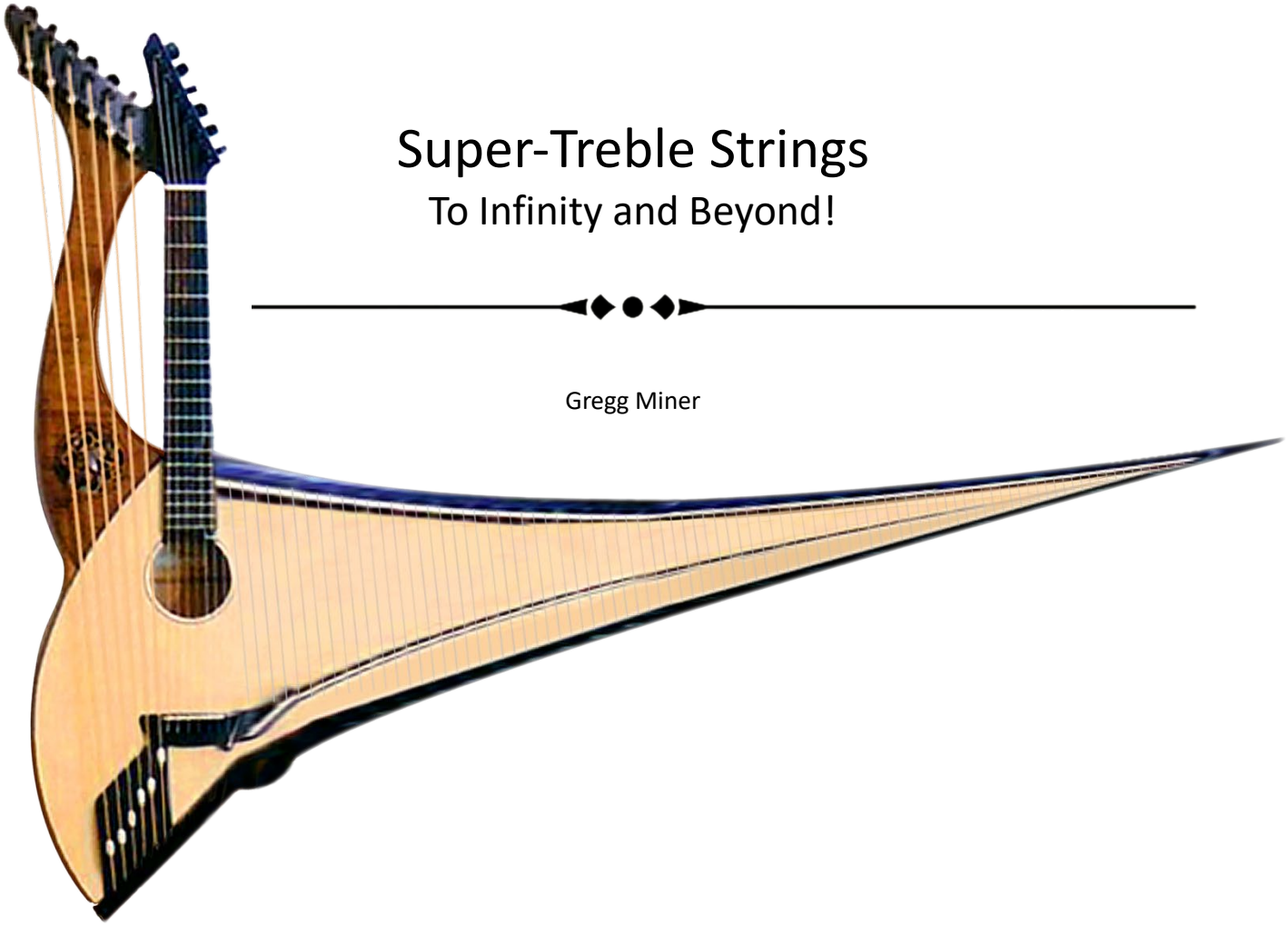


Super-Treble Strings

To Infinity and Beyond!

Gregg Miner

Introduction

"Super-trebles" – what a curious term!

In this article, I will attempt to answer:

- What exactly *are* they?
- Where did they *come* from?
- Why are they *called* that?

The easiest question to answer is the last one: **Why are they called "super-trebles"?**

Believe it or not, in 1986, harp guitarist John Doan invented the term for the high strings on his Sullivan/Elliott 20-string harp guitar.

Was he right?

Actually, it was clever and completely logical. We already had the historical term ***"sub-bass"*** strings: ***Sub*** = "beneath," "under" or "lower." Thus, ***sub-bass strings*** – which are almost always adjacent to the neck's lowest string – are pitched ***below*** the neck's bass string.

Incidentally, where did this term come from?

The earliest reference I have found so far appears in Jenkins Sons' catalog from c.1895-c.1899, where they show a harp guitar "with sub-bass attachment." The term was subsequently popularized by Gibson, beginning with their 1903 catalog, and continuing even when they switched to their final ten-bass configuration which had several of the sub-basses pitched ***above*** the neck's E string.[1] Stephen Bennett's high G sub-bass is a modern example of this phenomenon. For better or worse, this is an important distinction – that the original intent of the term "sub" ("*below*") was expanded, even though linguistically inaccurate. We still use the term today, as it is easy to understand, both musically and visually.

10 J. W. Jenkins' Sons Music Co., Kansas City, Mo.

HARWOOD GUITARS.

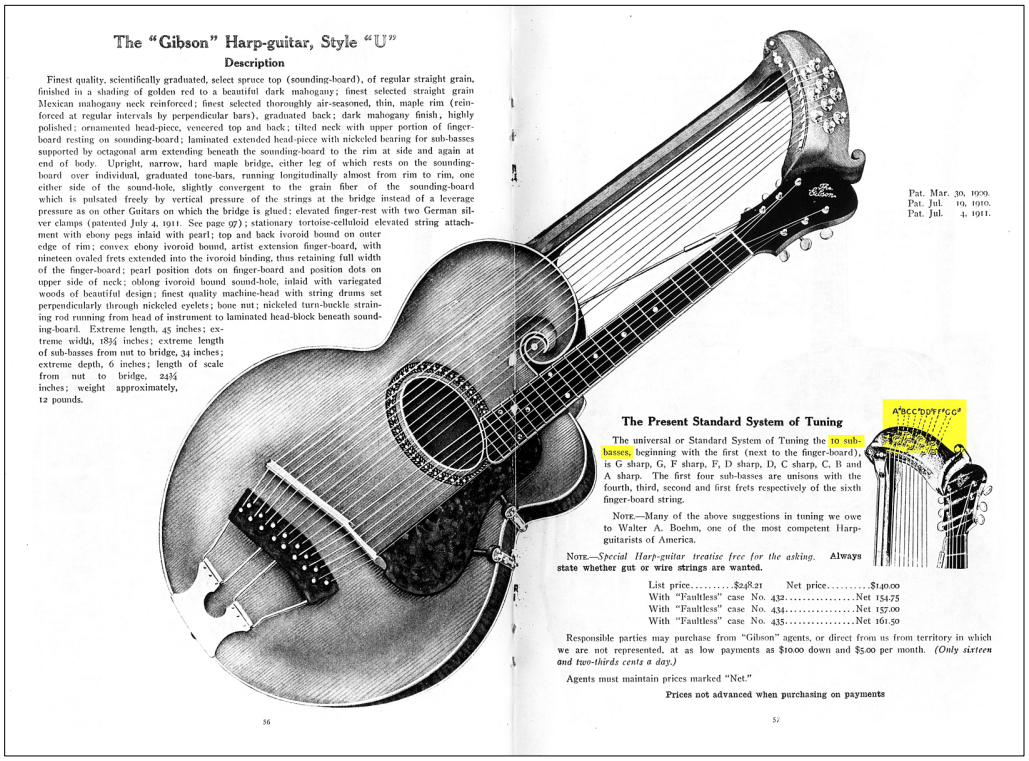
THE No. 9 HARWOOD GUITAR. (New Model.)

ARTISTS' GRAND WITH SUB-BASS ATTACHMENT.

Popularly Known as the HARWOOD Harp Guitar, Resembling the Italian Harp in Effects.

HARWOOD ARTISTS' GRAND WITH SUB-BASS ATTACHMENT.

SPECIAL HARWOOD CATALOGUES.



The "Gibson" Harp-guitar, Style "U"

Description

Finest quality, scientifically graduated, select spruce top (sounding-board), of regular straight grain, finished in a shading of golden red to a beautiful dark mahogany; finest selected straight grain Mexican mahogany neck reinforced; finest selected thoroughly air-seasoned, thin, maple rim (reinforced at regular intervals by perpendicular bars), graduated back; dark mahogany finish, highly polished; ornamented head-piece, veneered top and back; tilted neck with upper portion of finger-board resting on sounding-board; laminated extended head-piece with nickeled hearing for sub-basses supported by octagonal arm extending beneath the sounding-board to the rim at side and again at end of body. Upright, narrow, hard maple bridge, either leg of which rests on the sounding-board over individual, graduated tone-bars, running longitudinally almost from rim to rim, one either side of the sound-hole, slightly convergent to the grain fiber of the sounding-board which is pulsated freely by vertical pressure of the strings at the bridge instead of a leverage pressure as on other Guitars on which the bridge is glued; elevated finger-rest with two German silver clamps (patented July 4, 1911. See page 97); stationary tortoise-celluloid elevated string attachment with ebony pegs inlaid with pearl; top and back ivoroid bound on outer edge of rim; convex ebony ivoroid bound, artist extension finger-board, with nineteen ovaled frets extended into the ivoroid binding, thus retaining full width of the finger-board; pearl position dots on finger-board and position dots on upper side of neck; oblong ivoroid bound sound-hole, inlaid with variegated woods of beautiful design; finest quality machine-head with string drums set perpendicularly through nickeled eyelets; bone nut; nickeled turn-buckle straining rod running from head of instrument to laminated head-block beneath sounding-board. Extreme length, 45 inches; extreme width, 18¾ inches; extreme length of sub-basses from nut to bridge, 34 inches; extreme depth, 6 inches; length of scale from nut to bridge, 24¾ inches; weight approximately, 12 pounds.

Pat. Mar. 30, 1909.
Pat. Jul. 19, 1910.
Pat. Jul. 4, 1911.

The Present Standard System of Tuning

The universal or Standard System of Tuning the 10 sub-basses, beginning with the first (next to the finger-board), is G sharp, G, F sharp, F, D sharp, D, C sharp, C, B and A sharp. The first four sub-basses are unisons with the fourth, third, second and first frets respectively of the sixth finger-board string.

A°B°C°D°D°F°G°

Note.—Many of the above suggestions in tuning we owe to Walter A. Boehm, one of the most competent Harp-guitarists of America.

Note.—*Special Harp-guitar treatise free for the asking.* **Always state whether gut or wire strings are wanted.**

List price.....$248.21 Net price.....$140.00
With "Faultless" case No. 432.....Net 154.75
With "Faultless" case No. 434.....Net 157.00
With "Faultless" case No. 435.....Net 161.50

Responsible parties may purchase from "Gibson" agents, or direct from us from territory in which we are not represented, at as low payments as $10.00 down and $5.00 per month. *(Only sixteen and two-thirds cents a day.)*

Agents must maintain prices marked "Net."

Prices not advanced when purchasing on payments

56 57

[1] When you hear the musical "re-entrant," this is an example – meaning that rather than moving up or down in pitch *linearly*, an instrument's strings "double back" with a note or notes out of linear pitch arrangement.

Super-treble strings, then, are simply be the **opposite** of ***sub-bass*** strings (***super*** = "above," "over," or "higher than"). They are typically adjacent to the neck's highest string, and pitched ***above*** this treble string. But as with sub-basses – or harp guitars in general – there has never been any strict historical convention. Thus, they can lie *elsewhere* on the instrument, with some of them pitched *below* the neck's first string.

Confusing, isn't it?!

Super-Treble Characteristics

Let's move on to the next question: **What exactly *are* they?**

- Are they consistent or standardized? **No, not remotely, as you'll soon see.**
- Have they been specifically defined? **No, in fact, this is the first attempt.**

Features to consider and define include:

- **String count** (theoretically, **one** to as many as one can possibly cram onto a guitar)

This continues to be a wide-open parameter, as we have instruments like Knutsen's convertible harp guitars (*at left*) with just *four* treble-strings, and Mori Yasuda's *twelve*-treble instrument (*at right*), and many with even more.

- **String Material** (steel, nylon, silk, etc. or combinations of materials)

Like strings on different guitars, players might use steel, gut or nylon, silk and other materials, and sometimes a combination of different materials, depending on their musical goals.

- **Tuning** (diatonic, chromatic, chordal, or other)

This is another wide-open parameter – in fact, we don't know how most of the historical examples were tuned. So, what we now call "super-trebles" could – and can – be diatonic, chromatic, chordal, or anything the musician desires.

- **Pitch Range** (*generally* meant to be *above* the highest open neck strings)

Although we generally imagine them to all be *above* the pitch of the highest open neck string, again, this is pretty flexible. However, it is generally understood that super-trebles should **extend** or at minimum ***add to*** the guitar's treble register.[2]

- **Location** (*typically* adjacent to or near the treble side of the neck)

This can be similarly indiscriminate – though they are most often adjacent to the treble side of the neck, which is logical for certain musical styles.[3]

So, it appears that, while most traditional instruments generally follow long-established customs and practices, harp guitars – *especially* when it comes to added super-trebles – do *not*.

[2] This is a pretty poor "rule," as I can't actually define this "treble register." In truth, the guitar's high E string can already be fretted to achieve an octave + (at minimum) to even two octaves higher (on a 24-fret guitar). Super-trebles are virtually never expected to exceed that highest pitch, though some might (depending on the frets available). For one popular example, John Doan's *lowest* super-treble matches the *octave* of his open E string (= pitch at the 12th fret), then goes up diatonically from there to end *two octaves* higher (equivalent to a 24th fret pitch, which his instrument does not include). In his case, then, he is indeed "extending" the natural high range of his "guitar." Whereas I would pitch my super-trebles much lower – *above* the first open string, but only *falling within* those first 12 or so frets.

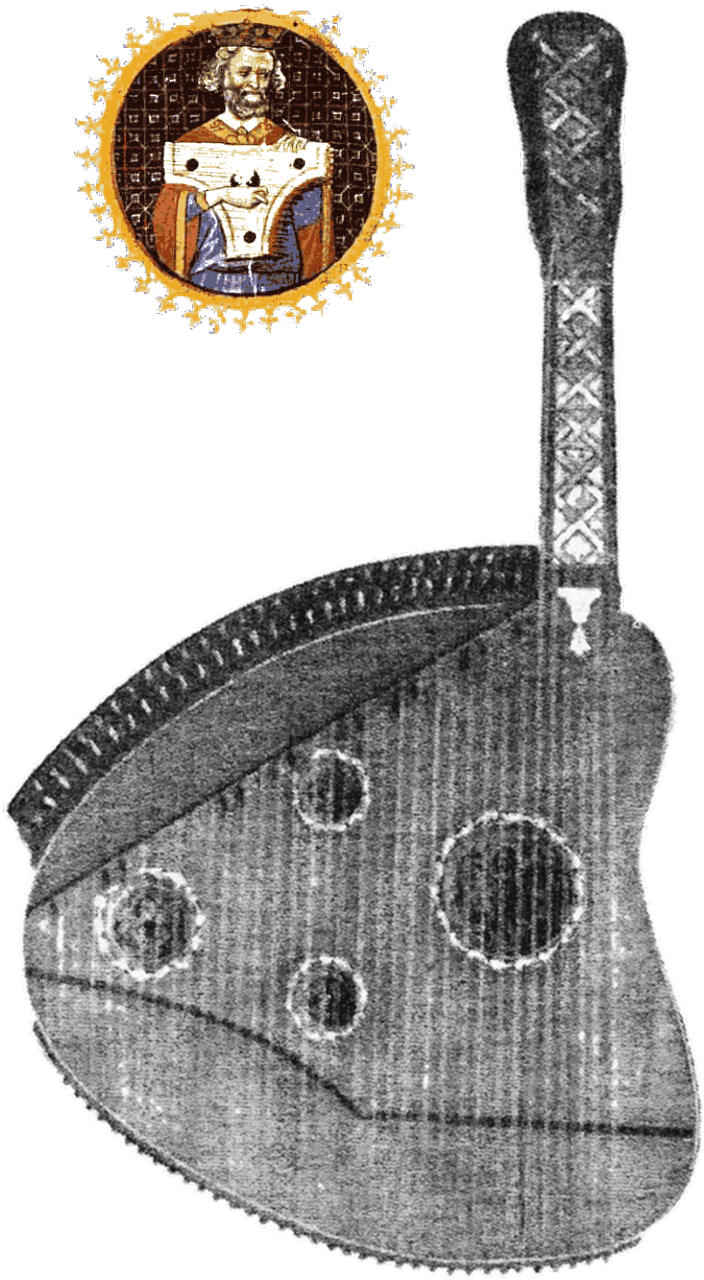
[3] Certainly, John Doan's style and those that followed him. Indeed, his intent was to create a "continuous" and "uniformly-spaced" row of twenty strings. Other builders and players might throw a batch of anywhere from six to a dozen or more strings placed further away from the neck, or in unlikely places on the body.

Historical Instruments

To investigate these features in more depth, let's look at the historical examples – which may lead to our last answer: **"Where did *today's* super-trebles come from?"**

For this study, I somewhat arbitrarily chose to first examine chronologically those instruments that incorporate *only* super-treble-like strings; more complex instruments will follow.

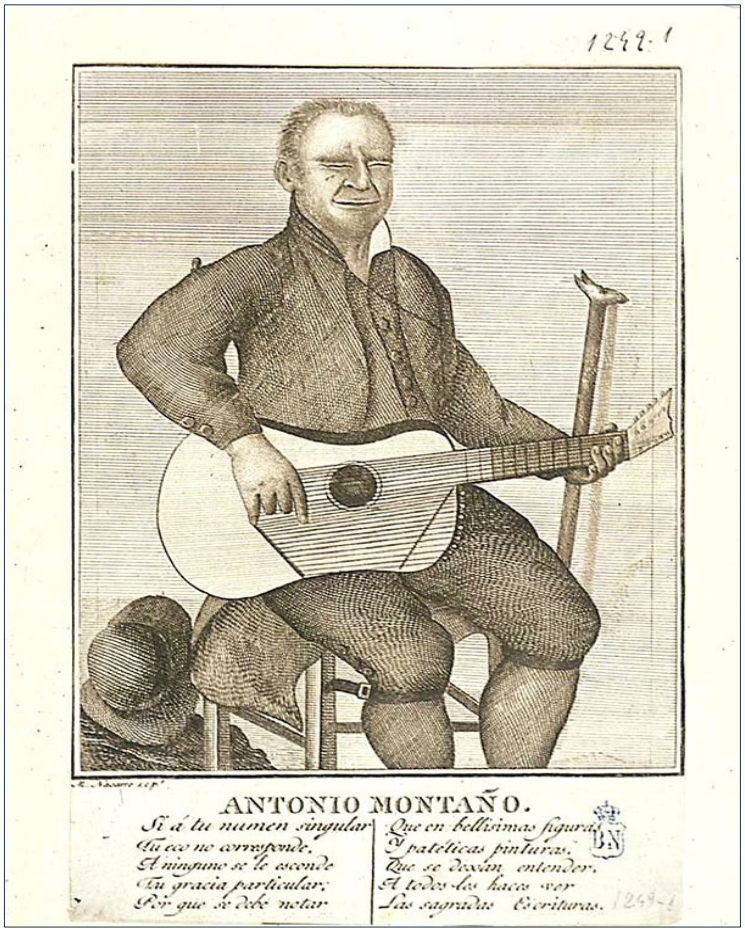
The earliest treble string banks on guitars and other instruments were likely inspired by the psaltery. They've been around for centuries (below is just one form).



In fact, the Italian ***"chitarra-salterio"*** – perhaps our *oldest* "super-treble" harp guitar – seems literally a *hybrid* of guitar and psaltery. This instrument of the late 1700's had six double courses on the neck and, on the "wrong" side, twenty-nine double brass courses. It was perhaps an "either/or" instrument - only one section to be played at a time – though how any guitarist could reach over to play it as a standard guitar is beyond me. It therefore may have simply been an extravagant artistic experiment.

It is worth noting that this instrument is very likely a "one-off" – meaning that it may have more curiosity value – and importance to an organology-based historian like myself – than musicology value. Many other examples seem to fall into this category.

There were similar instruments in that same era – a French ***"zithergitarre"*** with twenty psaltery strings on the "correct" side, and an instrument mentioned in Madrid called a ***"vihuela asalteriada."***[4]



This is **Antonio Montaño** (?-1816), who was a Spanish or Portuguese blind singer and famous player of an instrument called a ***"guitarra-tiorba"*** – although that name clearly seems wrong for his illustrated psaltery-guitar.

We don't know if the sixteen treble strings are meant to depict sixteen single strings or eight double courses. We also can't know the string material, or how accurate the drawing is. There is no record of his tuning.

The only other historical instrument I have come across remotely similar to Montaño's is the well known and stunning instrument built by **Rafael Vallejo** of Granada, c.1790, allegedly for King Charles IV of Spain.

Here, its tuning pegs can be seen from the back.

[4] "Eccentric Forms of the Guitar." *Journal of the Lute Society of America* 7 (1974): 90-102. The French instrument survives in Berlin's Hochschule collection (#402), and I would appreciate any help in getting information and an image.

It has six double gut courses on the neck and twenty wire strings arranged in ten courses on the body, all tuned by full-size friction tuners mounted in the slab jutting out of the body. Again, this is quite likely a combination of a guitar and a psaltery, the latter of which was still a popular instrument in Spain.

One of the most stunning of all historical instruments is surely the well-known anonymous specimen below in the Brussel's MIM.

I suppose those are technically a form of "super-trebles," but in truth are the first real "harp-like" strings we see on a harp guitar: a full *four octaves* of colored gut harp strings!

MIM catalog # 1550, it has never been on display nor fully described. Curt Sachs examined it, going so far as to call it a "slightly worthwhile construction." He attributed it to England, "traced to the first quarter of the 19th century" (1800-1825), while my colleague Benoît Meulle-Stef pointed out that the "Egyptian" pilaster tuner cover is similar to that of Grosjean's "double harp-guitar" of London, circa 1840. Like the 18th century chitarra-salterio above, it seems to be more of an "either-or" instrument. In fact, I was fortunate to have been able to try it out in every possible playing configuration![5]

[5] See my 2016 blog: https://www.harpguitars.net/2016/05/06/harp-guitars-brussels-musical-instrument-museum-part-1/

Several decades after the above, America got into the act. We probably had no idea what a psaltery was, though we *had* become familiar with **fretless zithers**, a possible influence?

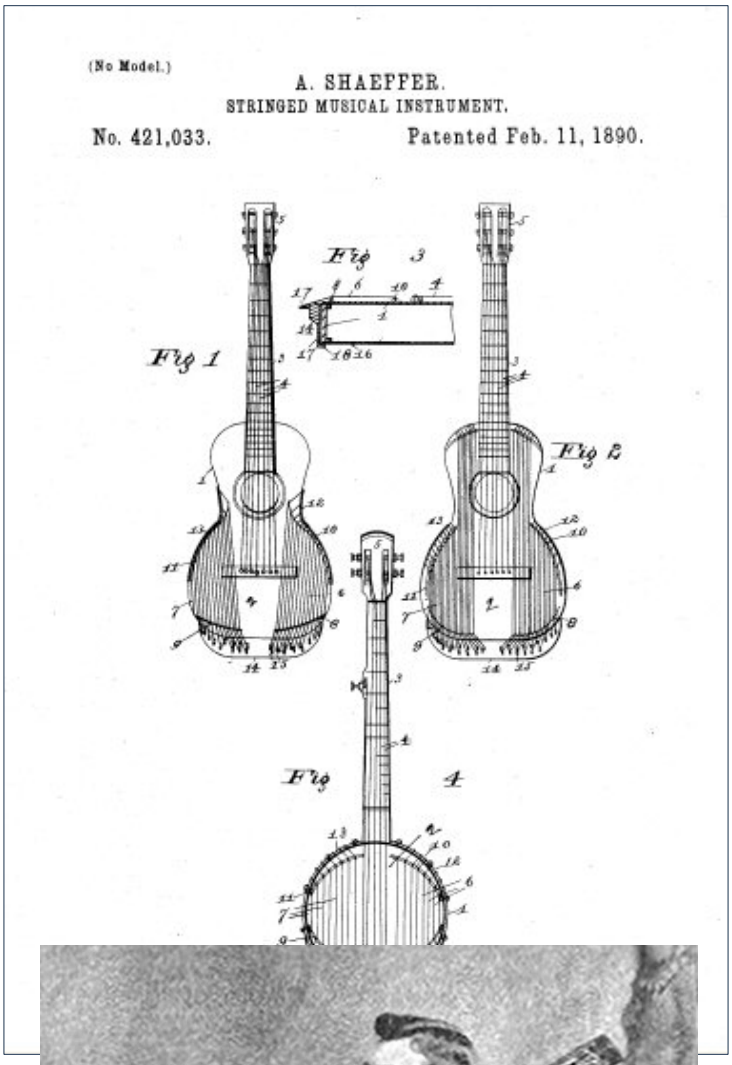
Arling Shaeffer patented his interesting **"harp" string attachment** design in 1890. It's the oldest bona fide American harp guitar patent I am aware of.

His design fitted two separate banks of treble strings on either side of a guitar body. Their purpose was to allow the performer to play "difficult or impossible harp-like arpeggios."

These arpeggios were made by a "simple sweep" across the extra strings, meaning that a *glissando* was actually performed, with the strings tuned to chords (A & D triads)

Shaeffer – below right, with his own creation – discusses the options of using only **one** bank, tuned to the main chord of the piece, adjacent to the guitar's highest string. When the preferred **two** string banks are installed, the second is tuned to one of the other commonly used chords. However, he *also* mentions the option of tuning to a "diatonic or chromatic scale."

Thus, this patent – even though virtually forgotten today – becomes our first super-treble "smoking gun" that lends historical veracity to today's definition and analysis.


(No Model.)

A. SHAEFFER.

STRINGED MUSICAL INSTRUMENT.

No. 421,033. Patented Feb. 11, 1890.

Fig 1

Fig 3

Fig 2

Fig 4

Washburn, c.1890

At least two specimens were built by Lyon & Healy (left), and one nearly identical instrument by Joseph Bohmann (right), who likely machined his own parts.

I'm frankly surprised that this invention didn't catch on.

Whether we consider any of the above "psaltery-guitars" or "early guitars with super-trebles," all of these instruments can be considered "Form 4 harp guitars" (Body harp string attachment).

Bohmann, c.1890

Guitarp*, 1997, designed and built by Ralph Novak** | **Michael Sanden, ca.1993** | **William Eaton 26-string *Elesian Harmonium | **Oakwood Instruments, U.K.,** copy of Eaton design

Mitsuhiro Uchida (6 + 12 diatonic) | **Mitsuhiro Uchida** (12 [chord] +6 +12 [diatonic]) "Player" Oct. 1995, photographer: Tomuji Ohtani | **Pierre Lamour (France, 2005)** | **Steve Klein**

At left are some very modern versions of harp guitars with "super-trebles" from Harpguitars.net. Most conform to "Form 4" harp guitars with "body harp string attachment."

Form 4 harp guitars, however, are actually quite *rare*. Most often we find super-treble strings in *combination* with sub-bass or other strings.

And so, we continue on to…

Composite Harp Guitars with Super-Trebles

First, some examples of *non*-harp guitar "relatives" with both bass and treble strings, just to show that it was not unprecedented:

At left is the fabled c.1590 ***"polyphant"*** built by Tieffenbrucker. It may have been the world's first plucked fretted instrument to offer both "sub-basses" and "super-trebles." Neither guitar nor lute, historians have classified it as a form of cittern. I consider it more of a "one-off" chimera of harp, lute, cittern & psaltery.[6]

Another harp guitar "relative" is Russia's ***torban*** (*right*) – a hybrid of swan-necked Baroque lute and bandura. Conceptually, it is not too different from the harp guitar John Doan plays today.

True harp guitars with both sub-basses and super-trebles finally appeared in 1832 with the incredibly prescient ***Guitare-multicorde***.

The remarkable story of this rare and cryptic instrument finally became known in 2022 when its original patent was discovered and several scholars pooled their research on the inventors.[7]

Once again, I was able to examine one of the two surviving specimens at the Brussels MIM. This one was definitely a playable design!

In fact, this short-lived invention turns out to be extremely close in every way to what John Doan would re-invent in 1986 – though he didn't know it at the time!

[6] It has also been recently rumored to be a *non-original, composite instrument*, so its place in the history books may be changing.
[7] See "Charpentier, Munchs & Louis: The Guitare-multicorde, a Harp Guitar 190 Years Ahead of Its Time": https://www.harpguitars.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Guitare-Multicorde-Miner.pdf

This is so far the oldest surviving harp guitar that predates John Doan's Sullivan/Elliott-style configuration. In fact, it has almost the exact same stringing, with six sub-basses, six neck and nine super-trebles. While at the museum, I made sure that it could indeed be played *a la* John Doan (demonstration above).

Though presumably built in Paris, c.1832, Benoît Meulle-Stef and I still can't believe it wasn't built in England, as it has more of a "harp-lute" vibe (though significantly cruder), as opposed to it being more of a fine French guitar. Perhaps its "novelty factor" precluded finding the right luthier.[8]

[8] The luthiers who constructed these remain unknown.

As I've been going in chronological order, you might wonder why I skipped the well-known 1829 Harpolyre. Indeed, I believe it directly inspired the preceding Guitare-multicorde, and state so in that separate article. And just like that instrument, I believe it is *also* extremely similar in its configuration and musical goals to John Doan's eventual instrument.

Perhaps it's no coincidence that John now owns and plays a Harpolyre, and in fact, he was the first musician – before any published scholar or museum curator – to actually figure the instrument and its tuning *out.*[9]

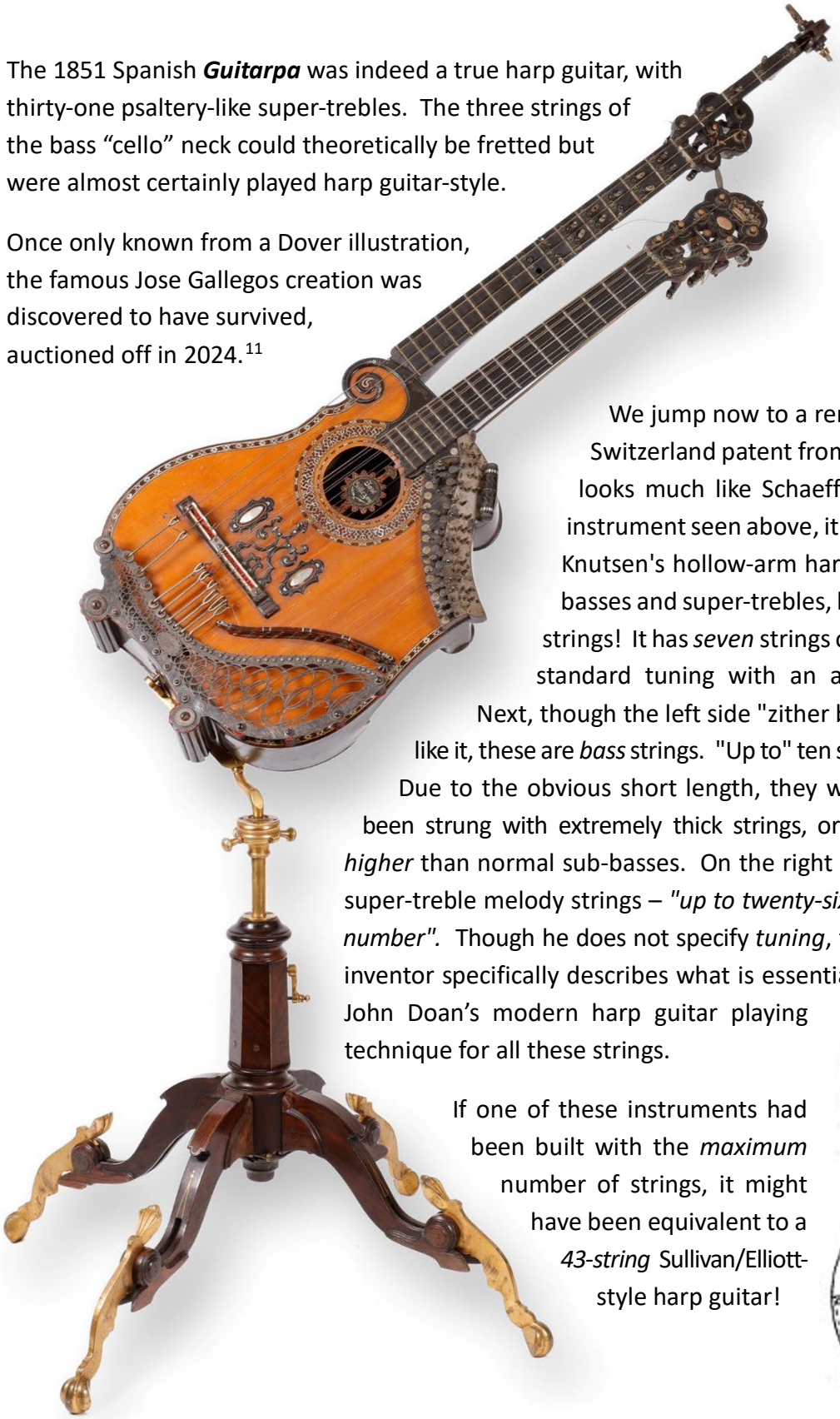
The Harpolyre is neither a true harp guitar, nor quite a "fretted harp guitar."[10] I came to the conclusion that it was so unique and *specific* that it warranted its own classification, namely, its own "family" of *harpolyres*. While the stringing may appear superficially similar to John's Sullivan/Elliott harp guitar, its treble neck contains a diatonic C scale that falls entirely *below* the high E string of the standard neck. In the majority of Sor's pieces, the gut-strung treble side diatonic neck was specifically meant to provide open string, harp-like effects. However, it is also fully fretted, and in a couple of Sor's pieces, that neck's frets are utilized, though the bass neck frets never are.

[9] Doan's 2008 recording "The Lost Music of Fernando Sor" was the first to capture this music on Harpolyre and his self-published 2017 book of the same includes the music written for the instrument and full historical and performance notes.

[10] Nor does it have anything to do with French lyre guitars, despite others' lumping it in; the visual similarities are superficial at best.

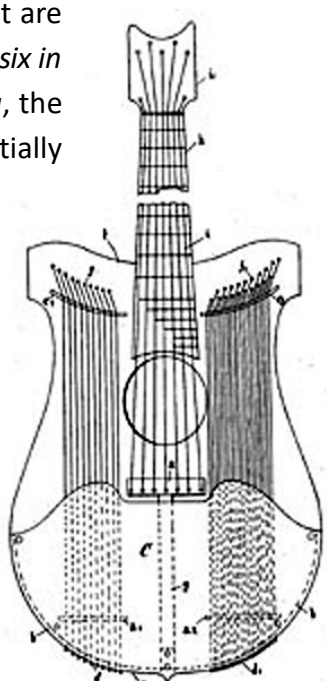
The 1851 Spanish ***Guitarpa*** was indeed a true harp guitar, with thirty-one psaltery-like super-trebles. The three strings of the bass "cello" neck could theoretically be fretted but were almost certainly played harp guitar-style.

Once only known from a Dover illustration, the famous Jose Gallegos creation was discovered to have survived, auctioned off in 2024.[11]



We jump now to a remarkable forgotten Switzerland patent from 1894. Although it looks much like Schaeffer's arpeggio-bank instrument seen above, it is actually closer to Knutsen's hollow-arm harp guitars with sub-basses and super-trebles, but with even more strings! It has *seven* strings on the fretted neck: standard tuning with an additional low C.[12] Next, though the left side "zither bank" may not look like it, these are *bass* strings. "Up to" ten strings are specified. Due to the obvious short length, they would have to have been strung with extremely thick strings, or perhaps all tuned *higher* than normal sub-basses. On the right are super-treble melody strings – *"up to twenty-six in number".* Though he does not specify *tuning*, the inventor specifically describes what is essentially John Doan's modern harp guitar playing technique for all these strings.

If one of these instruments had been built with the *maximum* number of strings, it might have been equivalent to a *43-string* Sullivan/Elliott-style harp guitar!



Rosenberger-Margot, Switzerland, patented in 1894

[11] See my article: https://www.harpguitars.net/The_Guitarpa-Gregg_Miner.pdf
[12] Yes, Switzerland had a *baritone* harp guitar in 1894!

And now, back to America for our final, and perhaps most important, historical instrument.

Chris Knutsen and family, Port Townsend, Washington, c.1898

This is Chris Knutsen, creator of America's hollow-arm harp guitar about 1895.[13] Within two to three years, he had added a curious bank of seven treble strings to some of his harp guitars.

It was one of these models that was discovered almost ninety years later by multi-instrumentalist John Doan of Salem, Oregon (at left is John's original 18-string Knutsen Symphony harp guitar).

It would soon instigate a new chapter in harp guitar – and specifically *super-treble* – history.

John shared these details and images of the back-story with me:

[13] See The Knutsen Archives for everything on this remarkable luthier: https://www.harpguitars.net/knutsen/knutsen_home.htm

By the early 1980's, John was performing on both a Gibson harp guitar (*right*) and a Tremblelin (*left*). The latter is a fretless zither like the common Marxophone or Celestaphone with diatonic steel melody strings (very similar to what John would later incorporate into his harp guitar). In fact, John Doan's very first recording was a Tremblin solo record!

But he hadn't remotely imagined combining the *two* instruments at the time. And then he lucked upon an 18-string Knutsen harp guitar. With his unique harp guitar and fretless zither background, John said: "When I first saw the Knutsen harp guitar with zither pins at the Seattle Folklife Festival instrument auction in the early 1980's I knew absolutely that I could play it."

That was the instrument he famously wrote and recorded his first super-treble piece "Night Crossing" on (seen at left).

Being in Knutsen country, John soon acquired a total of *three* Knutsen harp guitars, seen here together with Jeff Elliott and the late John Sullivan. Amazingly, ***two*** of the three were the early Knutsen super-treble versions. Jeff is holding the original find, a specimen not in the Knutsen Archives, as John sold it early on. Inspired by these instruments and the new music that could be created on them, John Doan quickly commissioned Jeff Elliott and John Sullivan to design and build him a more modern version in 1986. And history was made!

I have often thought about the amazing good fortune – in fact, astronomical odds – of John finding this particular instrument.

First - 90% of Knutsen harp guitars do not *have* super-trebles. And of this model, only *seven* currently exist of fourteen specimens known. That is truly like finding a needle in a haystack!

And John had ***two*** of them!

c.1897, Port Townsend

c.1902, Tacoma (slanted frets)

The instrument at left is now owned by Brett Bunker.

Knutsen only made that model for a few short years – then after a four-year gap, he brought them back – but strung them *backwards.*

At right is a specimen of the type Knutsen built in Seattle from c.1906 to 1913. Fourteen of this configuration have been archived, of which *nine* survive. So there appear to be a few more of these around.

Had John Doan found one of these instead, would he have had the same inspiration and success? Would he have been playing the super-trebles backwards, like a harp?

Even stranger are the strange Knutsen "convertible" harp guitars below, of which many more are known. They're actually *lap steel guitars*, but could also be played like standard harp guitars, with a built-in adjustable neck action (height of the strings off the neck).

Most have just *four* seemingly insignificant trebles – so again, it's lucky that John didn't discover one of these models for his inspiration!

Convertible harp steel guitar
c.1914-1920s

Usually only 4 super-trebles,
occasionally 5 or 6

14 total specimens surviving

And finally, there is this single “one-off” c.1913 Knutsen instrument I call his “zither harp guitar” (at right).

It has three banks of seven “treble” strings each, which I believe were originally tuned to three widely voiced chords (it was found with strings varying greatly in thickness).

After restoration by Kerry Char, I tuned them to the I, IV and V chords of D major, though in higher pitched, denser clusters (two 6/9 chords and a sus7).

But what always fascinated and perplexed John Doan and me is: How did *Chris Knutsen* string and tune his early super-trebles?

To a scale? Or a chord? Or *what?*

Chris Knutsen’s first, c.1898

Knutsen’s second, c.1899

John Doan’s, modern strings

This comparison shows Knutsen’s own first two super-treble harp guitars compared with John’s second one. To *my* eye, Knutsen’s first instrument looks like it has steel strings on the neck. His second is almost certainly strung with gut. His two treble banks look about the same. Comparing them to the adjacent gut strings in the center image, they appear much thinner, and almost

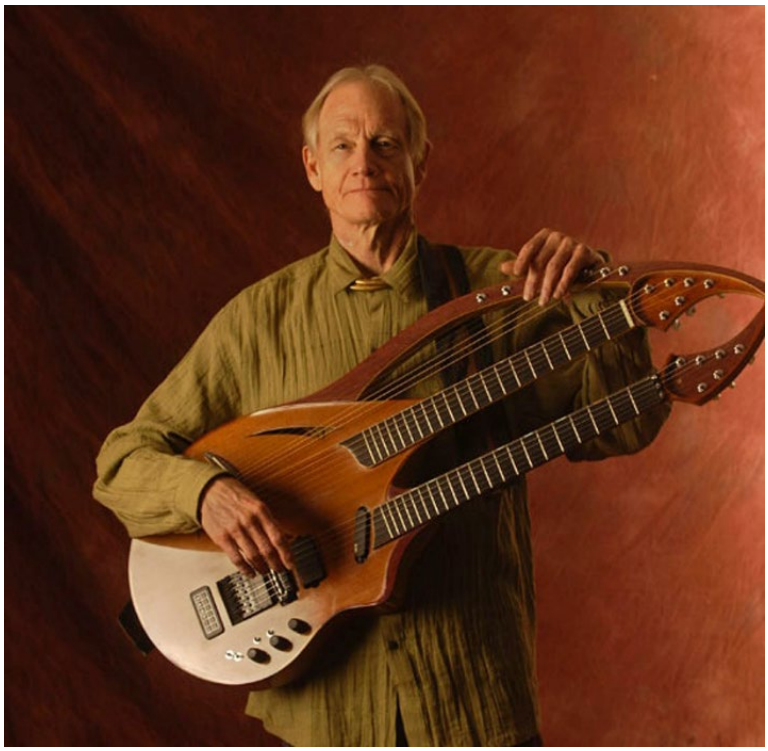
certainly not gut strings. Nor do they appear to vary too much from thin to thick. Thus, I think they were probably steel strings – but pitched lower than John's, as they seem much thicker than John's .011-.012's.

They may have been tuned to a diatonic scale, as John did, or perhaps to a chord? Or perhaps Knutsen was inspired by the Norwegian *langelik*, his home country's ubiquitous folk instrument, which had several drone strings tuned in simple tonics and fifths (at right). He certainly could have become familiar with it through the community of his family's fellow Norwegians.

We may never know, but regardless, in the end, it made obvious musical sense for John to choose a melodic diatonic scale.

Was there nothing else from the time of Knutsen in the early 1900's to John Doan's Sullivan/Elliott concert harp guitar in the 1980's?

Yes – most notable was William Eaton. He has made many wonderful original guitar-based designs since the mid-70s, and continues to this day. Most of his extra strings seem to function as generic lyre or harp strings – often of mid-range to a higher pitch, and often pentatonic.



His instruments illustrate the conundrum with all these instruments, whether ancient or modern. Which is, that unless music examples or tutors were created and preserved, we often don't *know* what pitches or musical purposes such strings might have served.

Just *some* of William Eaton's remarkable harp guitar creations.

Mickey Fischer of northern California was a similar early inventor/builder of one-of-a-kind multi-string guitars (below).

But it was the Sullivan-Elliott design that very quickly began to take hold.

This is undoubtedly the largest part of the answer to our final original question: **"Where did *today's* super-trebles come from?"**

Did John Doan in effect "invent" true super-trebles?

Well, no – and partly, *yes…*

John and his two luthier friends didn't simply *copy* his Knutsen. Rather, they adapted and *modified* it, creating an improved, modern instrument. The trio thus introduced a modern new instrument: the "20-string concert harp guitar," which allowed for more sophisticated musicality with the super-trebles.[14]

Since then, dozens – possibly hundreds – of copies and endless variants of John's instrument have been made, with no end in sight. After John Sullivan made a few more instruments by himself (one of his shown top right), many local Oregon luthiers soon got into the act.

John Westling (Oregon) built many on his own or with the Sandpiper Co. (at left).

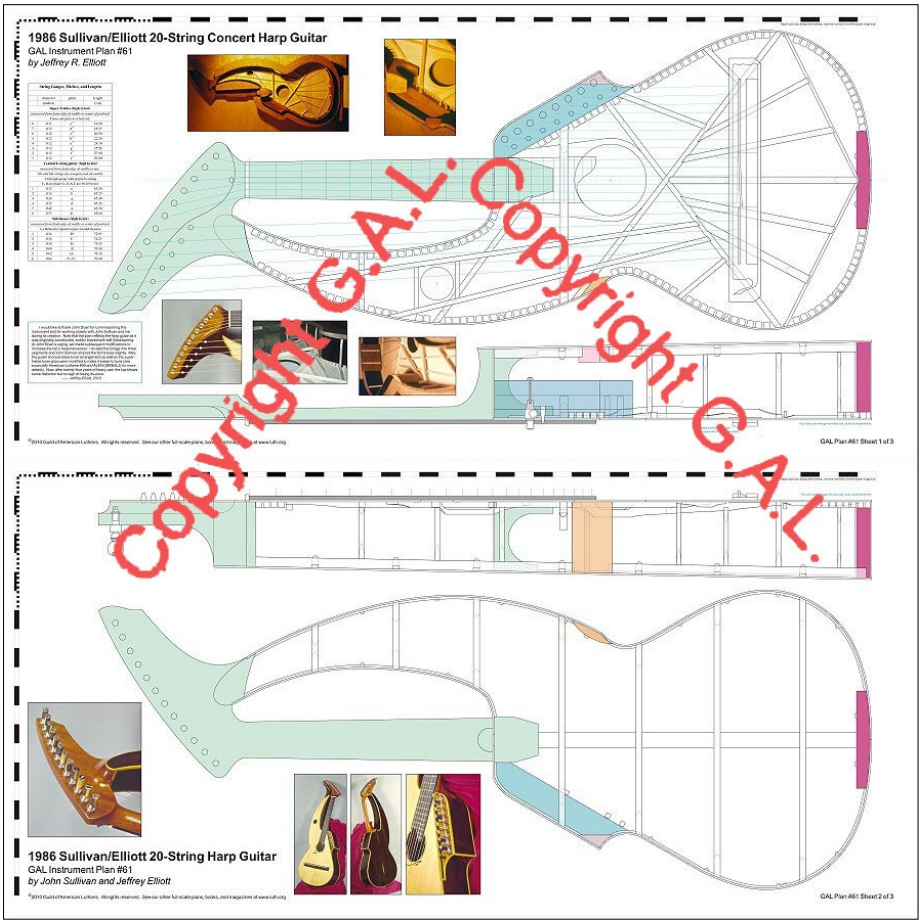
John Doan's friends, Orville and Bob Milburn made arguably the best copies at the time (right).

[14] Additional details can be found in John's 2008 article "The 'Expanded' Harp Guitar - Adding Possibilities with Super-Trebles": https://www.harpguitars.net/players/after6_vol7n1.htm

And word kept spreading… though some were starting to get more creative…

Charles Shifflet (Canada)

Mark Kaiser (for Eric Loy)



Then in 2011, Jeff Elliott himself drew up the original plans.

I've sold a couple of dozen myself, so *lots* of people have been hoping to make them.

And many have, though again, often going off in new directions.

Michael Schreiner (Florida)

Hawaii builder Woodley White added them to his line, then did new custom orders (left and right).

As you can see, there were some who simply copied the original, but many builders (or their customers) were *inspired* by the Sullivan-Elliott and then wanted to make it their own.

Steve Sedgwick (England>Germany), has been a fan for years, and has built many of his own harp guitars with super-trebles (all images on this page). Eventually, he went right back to the original plan!




Mike Doolin, a good friend of Jeff Elliott, eventually adapted his double-cutaway Doolin guitar into a new harp guitar design. His second harp guitar had super-trebles, and so have many since. Mike's instruments have become so popular that, they too, have been copied.

< Michel Pellerin (Canada)

Canada's Michel Pellerin had Mike's blessing … while others did not.

Cheap Chinese knock-off >

Creative Japanese luthier Mitsuhiro Uchida was inspired by John Doan's harp guitar and created very stylish instruments and new designs for Mori Yasuda and others.

Jim Worland (Illinois) got into the game, and received many commissions for his custom instruments.

Others have continued to put their own very unique stamp on it.

< Davide Castellaro (Italy)

Seraph Harp Guitars (England) >

Cédric Verglas (France) for Philippe Fouquet

Sean Woolley (France) for Jason Carter

Tony Karol (Canda)

Some players don't want to part with their original harp guitars, so decide to add super-trebles to their *existing* instruments…

< Nate Blaustein with his Jim Hewett (Texas) harp guitar, super-trebles added by Kerry Char (Oregon).

Rich Eberlen, the "Fretboard Explorer" created an add-on "Treble Rail." >

And if you can't afford *any* of these options, you can always create your own!

<Chris Fraser (Australia)

You've now seen the ***past*** and some of the ***present*** state of super-trebles… let's continue with some of the more ***futuristic*** designs.

For many years now, world renowned artist/luthier Fred Carlson (Santa Cruz, CA) has built the most original harp guitars-as-works-of-art. Those with his own strange take on treble strings include:

2002: *The Harpouditar*

2003: *The Flying Dream*

2005: *Big Red*

2006: *The New Dream*

2010: *The Barikoto*

2012: *Taproot*

The latest, Taproot, was created for Jeff Titus. But where are the *super-trebles?* Here, Fred's additional thin sympathetic strings that are usually inside the neck, come *outside* to be plucked or hammered!

Belgium's Benoît Meulle-Stef has long been obsessed with harp guitars. All his instruments are one-of-a-kind, and many have super trebles (all images this page).

He finally made one (*at left*) with the two octaves he's always wanted.

Yes, he is a Mozzani fan as well.

Rich Mermer (Florida) has made some unique modern designs with subs and supers (*left*) – and *all* supers (*below*).

Alan Perlman (California) is of course the guy who put the add-on "attachable" super-treble section onto James Kline's arch-guitar. He's built three of these now for Jim. The one below has steel strings. He also did another for a different customer the "normal" way, on a single body (*on right*).

A somewhat similar idea to add super-trebles to the guitar was created in Austria by Harald Petersdorfer.

He invented with a friend an attachment that slips over the treble side of a traditional six-string guitar providing eight super-treble strings.

Extremely popular in recent years are the “Muriel Super-Trebles” created by Lucas Brunner for Muriel Anderson, enabling her – and now anyone – to attach them to their standard guitars or sub-bass-only-harp guitars.

At left, another distinctive Mitsuhiro Uchida instrument with a ton of supers.

Many years ago, the late player Doug Whittier (below) designed and built his own futuristic Doan-style instrument. I believe he was the first to extend the supers out on their own little matching arm.

(Left) Takahiro Shimo (Japan) later did something similar with the super-treble arm extension.

(*Right)* Hubert Soumis-Pilon (Canada) created a modern version of an 1850's Schenk, adding trebles just for fun.

< More from Cédric Verglas in France.

Below, instruments by Oliver Klapproth (Germany).

Perhaps nothing made more news than Linda Manzer's Pikasso guitar for Pat Metheny (left).

It has four different treble banks.

Sometime later, she built another for the late collector Scott Chinery (below).

Linda Manzer (Canada)

These three “folk art meets harp guitar” creations by Marko Lipovsek (Slovenia) all incorporate various treble string banks.

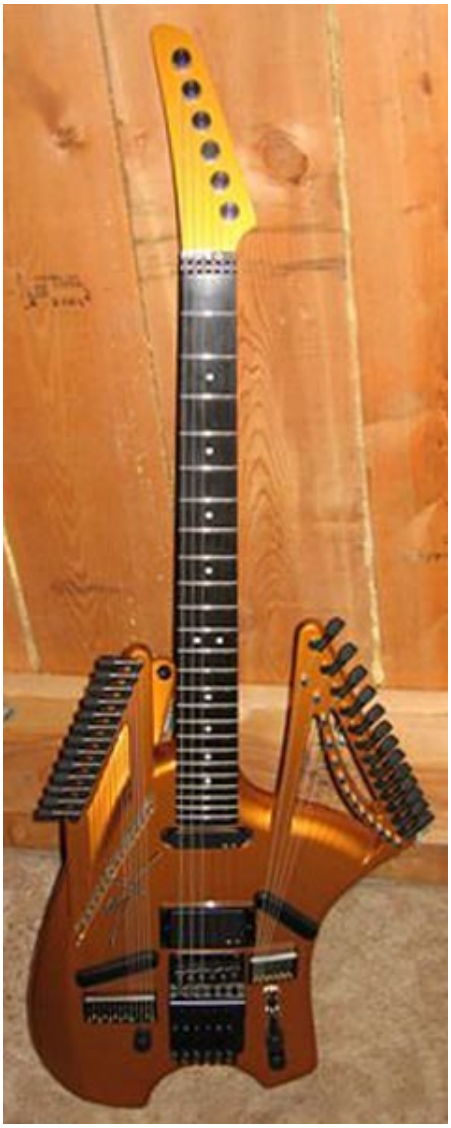
Luke Brunner (Switzerland) got started in harp guitars when Philippe Fouquet commissioned the first one.

He soon figured out how to add six supers, then did a Sullivan/Elliott configuration for John Doan with two detachable necks (above right).

A later model has the same stringing, but a *single* neck attachment.

And of course, there have always been plenty of unusual electric harp guitars, many with trebles also.

California's Ralph Novak's Guitarp for Phil deGruy



A futuristic Steve Klein

A star-like "Flying V" shape from Jim Worland (Illinois)

Clearly, strange and futuristic new super-treble harp guitar designs will always be with us. Some of them have already firmly taken hold. Other as-yet-unimagined new inventions may appear out of the blue and become popular as well.

To wrap up, let's take a look at the *future* for super-trebles.

At the French harp guitar festival in May 2013, all of the five players used some form of super-trebles.

James Kline

Jason Carter

Yaouen

Philippe Fouquet

John Doan

At 2012's 10th Anniversary Harp Guitar Gathering, *three of the four* featured artists played their own "super-treble" inventions. They are:

Keith Medley (Tennessee), who became well known from CNN, dreamt up and built his own instrument – it has nine subs and twelve trebles.

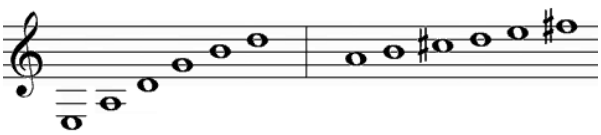
He has a total of 27 strings, plus he gets the tuners out of the way by moving them out on a miniature arm extension.

He's since built more variant harp guitars for himself.

Tim Donahue (Japan) now plays a new production version of his famous 1980's TD Electric Harp Guitar.

Are *these* "super-trebles"? Actually, yes. They're just on a different side than we're used to – that's because Tim invented a whole new instrument and playing technique, almost out of thin air.

As for pitch, they begin below his second neck string and end above his first string.



Tim Donahue Signature Harp Guitars

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WELCOME TO TIM DONAHUE SIGNATURE HARP GUITARS PRODUCTS PAGE
Check out the latest models, finishes and options for 2013

Please note:
Limited production of our 2013 model harp guitars will be begin this summer.
These will be available on a reservation-only basis.
To reserve a 2013 HG model, all reservations must be made before July 15, 2013.
For information on our reservation system and reduced pricing, please see here.

STANDARD FEATURES

Our Standard 6/6 Model (6 harp strings, 6 fingerboard strings) has a medium 630mm scale and comes in 4 Oil finishes

Natural Mahogany Oil | Wine Red Oil | Green Oil | Purple Oil

By his own efforts, Tim's original creation has started becoming a new "standard" harp guitar.

Masato Wada (Japan)

Jeff (Jahloon) Berg (U.K.)

Eric Fleisher (USA)

Christophe Godbille (France)

Per Boysen (Sweden)

Takumi Uchida (Japan)

Yoichi Kayama (Japan)

Derek Dallenger (Japan)

A couple of decades ago, the late Hirokatsu Takai (Japan) cleverly made his own koto harp guitar out of a Yairi double-neck (at left).

"Super-trebles"?

Yes, though an extreme variation.

Like Tim Donahue's, they are also mid-to-high range in pitch, and are on the opposite side. And he can do cool string bends!

He subsequently had an even more elaborate new instrument co-designed and built by Benoît Meulle-Stef, which he played at the 15th Harp Guitar Gathering (below)

Hiro's widow gifted his harp guitars to his good friend Okada Okayan Hidenori, who not only took up the koto-harp-guitar, but excelled at it, commissioning his own Meulle-Stef creation (next page).

As I update this article twelve years later, the Harp Guitar Gathering just held its 23rd festival, where Hidenori (right) won third place in the competition.

Other super-treble players that have appeared during those years include:

Phil deGruy (above, with his Guitarp), Claude LaFlamme (below left with one of his Pellerins), Tony Barnard (with his Sedgwick) …

… along with:

Jamie Dupuis

Jon Pickard, the first ever to perform on a *fretless* harp guitar with super-trebles.[15]

[15] The instrument at right, built by Sean Wooley with super-trebles added by Jon. The "first of this form" I should explain; technically Tim Donhue performed much earlier on his own distinctive form of fretless harp guitar.

More importantly, during the last decade, *three* companies added production harp guitars with super-trebles to their lines.

L-R are:

- Tonedevil (Idaho)
- Emerald (Ireland), and
- Timberline (California, hand-built in Indonesia, co-designed by the author)

That is pretty amazing. But always remember that with super-trebles…

…the sky is your limit!

All on this page by Linda Manzer

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P30: Nate Blaustein, Rich Eberlen, Chris Fraser
P31: Fred Carlson
P32: Benoît Meulle-Stef
P33: Rich Mermer, Alan Perlman
P34: Harald Petersdorfer, Lukas Brunner
P35: Mitsuhiro Uchida, Doug Whittier, Takahiro Shimo, Hubert Soumis-Pilon
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P41: James Kline, Jason Carter, Yaouen, Philippe Fouquet, John Doan
P42: Gregg Miner, Tim Donahue
P43: Tim Donahue
P44: Hirokatsu Takai, Chuck Thompson
P45: Gregg Miner
P46: Jamie Dupuis, Jon Pickard
P47: Tonedevil Guitars, Emerald Guitars, Timberline Guitars
P48: Linda Manzer

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.

The Harp Guitar Foundation Archival Project

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