

The Resonet Electric Harp Guitar

A Remarkable Czech Prototype

Gregg Miner



It's Rabbit Hole Time!

While I am not typically a fan of *electric harp guitars*,¹ I fell in love with this instrument the moment I saw it.²

Built about 1958 by the Resonet company in Blatná, Czechoslovakia, it's a fascinating combination of antique Bohemian *kontragitarre* design and '50s Central European retro-modernism.

You know *me* – I *had* to know where it came from. It was not an easy tale to either translate or decipher. But it totally drew me in.

And so, rather than simply post the singular photo with a short caption, I thought I'd share what I learned of the Resonet story, a captivating labyrinth I quickly fell into.

I'm hoping you'll fall, too!

¹ Too *much* of a good thing? In any event, my observations are that the sub-bass strings require constant damping control and also sound too much like an electric bass guitar, with very limited notes available at that!

² Another great find by my Russian correspondent Ilya Kryzhanovsky.

Introduction



Today, guitar players likely know the Resonet brand name from the 1958 *Futurama* model that George Harrison played in his early Beatles years.³ A huge baby boomer Beatles fan myself, I was only vaguely aware of its story.

Left: Harrison's original Futurama sold for a record-making \$1.27 million dollars at Julien's Auctions in November 2024.

Below, in action at a Hamburg show.



As Czech guitar collector and Resonet expert Jiří Janků explained in an interview in 2010:⁴ *“On November 20, 1959, sixteen-year-old George Harrison, accompanied by Paul McCartney, went to Liverpool to buy an electric guitar. At first, he thought about the Stratocaster. But he soon noticed an interesting and inexpensive instrument, the ‘Futurama.’ Paul plugged the Futurama into the amplifier, but not a note came out, so he turned the volume to the right. The guitar had three switches. He pressed one and an almighty bang sounded through the amplifiers and the other guitars fell to the ground, the legendary Beatle later recalled. Harrison eventually bought a Futurama guitar. He had no idea that he had taken home an instrument that was originally called the Resonet ‘Grazioso’ and came from the South Bohemian town of Blatná. Throughout the rest of the world, the Czech guitar was sold by the Selmer company under the trade name Futurama.”*

³ The *Futurama* being the imported name for the same Czech *Grazioso* model.

⁴ This was during a unique six-month exhibition of Janků's Czech guitars in Hořovice, with brands including Resonet, Neoton, and Jolana.

My particular introduction to the Resonet name came from a two-part article published in *Muzikus* magazine in 2010 that was written by the same Czech guitar collector **Jiří Janků** (seen below right).⁵

The crux of the piece was Janků's interview with – and story of – the gentleman below on the left holding a 1958 Resonet lap steel guitar. That man is **Ladislav Kořán**, who founded Resonet in 1947, his first effort creating (with his brother-in-law Vladimír Vlček) the world's first functional electric piano in 1949 (below).



Following my own interpretation of the article, I'll include my translations for clarity.⁶

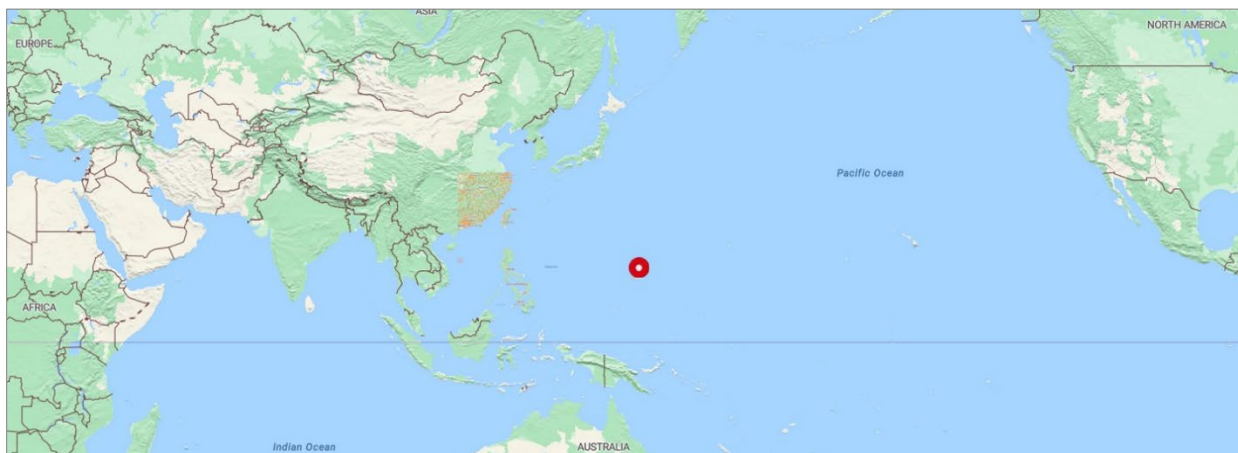
⁵ Brought to my attention in 2025 by the aforementioned Ilya. They appeared on the web site of Vladimír Žák: www.jolana.info, accessed April 2026, and where most of the images come from.

⁶ I have not received responses from the web site author or Mr. Janků, and am including my personal translations of their work here so as not to lose it for posterity, with respectful Fair Use. The translations of specific passages are my own, extrapolated from Google Translate, ChatGPT (courtesy of Brad Hoyt) and my own common sense.

The Heartrending Story of Musical Instrument Pioneer Ladislav Kořán



Our story starts in the town of Blatná, seen on the map above. Or more precisely, Doubravka, a nearby town where Ladislav Kořán first gained athletic fame as a championship runner during WW2. Blatná was where he set up Resonet shortly after his athletics career ended.



And *this* dot – the tiny island of Saipan in the middle of nowhere in the Pacific Ocean is where Kořán's story *ended*, at age 90. That's where guitar collector Jiří Janků finally located the still-living legend after a long worldwide Internet search in 2009, learning – during their extensive interview – the unbelievable story.

Read it and just try to imagine the Dopyeras, Leo Fender or any of the mid-century American musical instrument inventors having to contemplate such a sudden twist in their exciting new companies.

The Resonet Company was founded by in 1947 by a Czech professional engineer named Ferdinand Machálek, who had created and patented an electromagnetic sound pickup for musical instruments. In 1948, Kořán bought the company, including the patent and their initial electric piano prototype, which was “not functional, incomplete, and had many faults,” including “small keys and two unfinished double electromagnetic pickups.”

Setting up the new Resonet in Blatná with his brother-in-law Vladimír Vlček as head of development in their laboratory, they successfully completed the electromagnetic pickup system, exhibiting the finished prototype instrument at a trade fair in 1948, the first of its kind in all of Europe.

At right, the completed prototype.⁷



Sound promising so far?

By 1949 Resonet had a finished product but was not allowed to sell it. *Why?* It seems the nascent communist regime got wind of it when Kořán tried to sell production licenses to Canada and Australia – meaning, “Western countries.” This was considered treason and “industrial espionage.” They promptly took over the Resonet company and sent Kořán to prison, where he would spend the next ten years in hard labor in the notorious Jáchymov uranium mines. *This* is why interviewer Janků said Kořán’s life was suitable for a film adaptation. In fact, it *was* turned into a book, written by Jaroslav David. From the publisher’s synopsis:

“The title *Mukl 010806* refers to the number assigned to the main character Ladislav Kořán in a communist prison. Láďa Kořán found himself there because of his company, Resonet, one of the first in the world to produce musical instruments with electric sound sensing. The communists took a liking to Resonet in 1949, so they resorted to what they knew best: they stole the factory and put the owner in a grim prison for ten years. While Resonet’s musical instruments won a gold medal at the Expo in Brussels in 1958, Kořán had been suffering in a camp for years. Before that, however, Kořán managed to run with Emil Zátopek, win the Army World Championship in cross-country running, start a family, escape across the border from arrest, and nearly get shot at the border when he tried to return from Germany with his wife in 1950. The book describes with terrifying honesty the communist regime's

⁷ Image from <https://czechkeys.blogspot.com/2006/12/resonet-prototyp.html> accessed 3/16/2026

efforts to break the humanity of anyone against it for any reason. At the same time, it is also the story of an athlete with a big heart. It is a story that combines scarred post-war Europe with sports. It takes the reader not only to the frozen dungeon in the Rovnost camp in Jáchymov, but also to the ship Calypso and to distant islands in the Pacific after Kořán left his homeland of many years. The book is an eloquent testimony to the absurdity of communist terror, resentment and denunciation. But at the same time, it is a testimony to indomitable tenacity, will, determination, and above all, friendship. It is a book with a happy ending.”

Soon after his early release from prison, Kořán emigrated to America. He ended up in California, where he worked for Ocean Sonics (becoming the only Czech to sail with the legendary Jacques-Yve Cousteau). He subsequently worked for an airline, then sold and made his own jewelry. Through that venture, he met a woman who made gold chains in the Hawaiian Islands who happened to own a hotel on Saipan Island. He soon became the general manager of her hotel, where he also built a small village for entrepreneurs and tourists nearby. In these last years, he would travel back and forth between California and Saipan, which is where the indefatigable Janků tracked him down.

In 2015, Ladislav Kořán returned to the Czech Republic for the launch of the book. During his stay, he injured his head falling down some stairs and after a long struggle in the hospital, died from his injuries on September 19, 2015. I myself can find joy amidst the irony of his story’s end.

I’d like to now return to the Resonet company that grew and met with success, even while Kořán was suffering in prison.

Resonet, 1949-1964

While Kořán was imprisoned, the company was placed under state administration, and brother-in-law Vladimír Vlček became the national administrator. The company continued production, completing 85 units of the Resonet 506 piano. Below, a production Czechoslovakian Resonet Electric Piano.⁸

Its success was shortlived. The company was soon liquidated in 1952, and all its assets were sold at absurdly low prices. (For example, “a Resonet piano valued at 13,500 Kčs was sold during liquidation for only 270 Kčs” or about \$13 today.)



⁸ Image from <https://czechkeys.blogspot.com/2006/12/resonet-prototype.html> accessed 3/16/2026

A year later, the brand was resurrected when Josef Růžička, a young guitarist and manager of a state-owned furniture company, decided to start experimenting with electric lap steel guitars. Production began under the new Dřevokov cooperative in Blatná, a cooperative of carpenters, fine mechanics and electronic musical instrument makers officially founded in 1954.



The furniture factory was soon repurposed and both Růžička and Blatná instrument maker Jan Hořejší were hired to work in development under the original designer Vladimír.

His electric Hawaiian guitar design was soon completed, and the Akord, with a new pickup design, began mass-production in 1954 (at left).⁹

Apparently, the development of the first Resonet solidbody electric guitar – the very instrument the young

George Harrison would later acquire – began in 1955 when a Fender Stratocaster was “smuggled” into the country under the watchful eyes of the Communists. After being fully studied, the Resonet team created their own design, which included Vlček’s original rocker switch and patented mechanical lever tremolo bar (at right).

After the Grazioso, the Resonet design team created many more instruments, including the Hawaiian Arioso guitar and Arco bass. Those specific three instruments were awarded gold medals at the EXPO 1958 exhibition in Brussels.



⁹ It should be remembered that both the pickup concept and that of the electric steel guitar began under Kořán, now toiling away in prison.

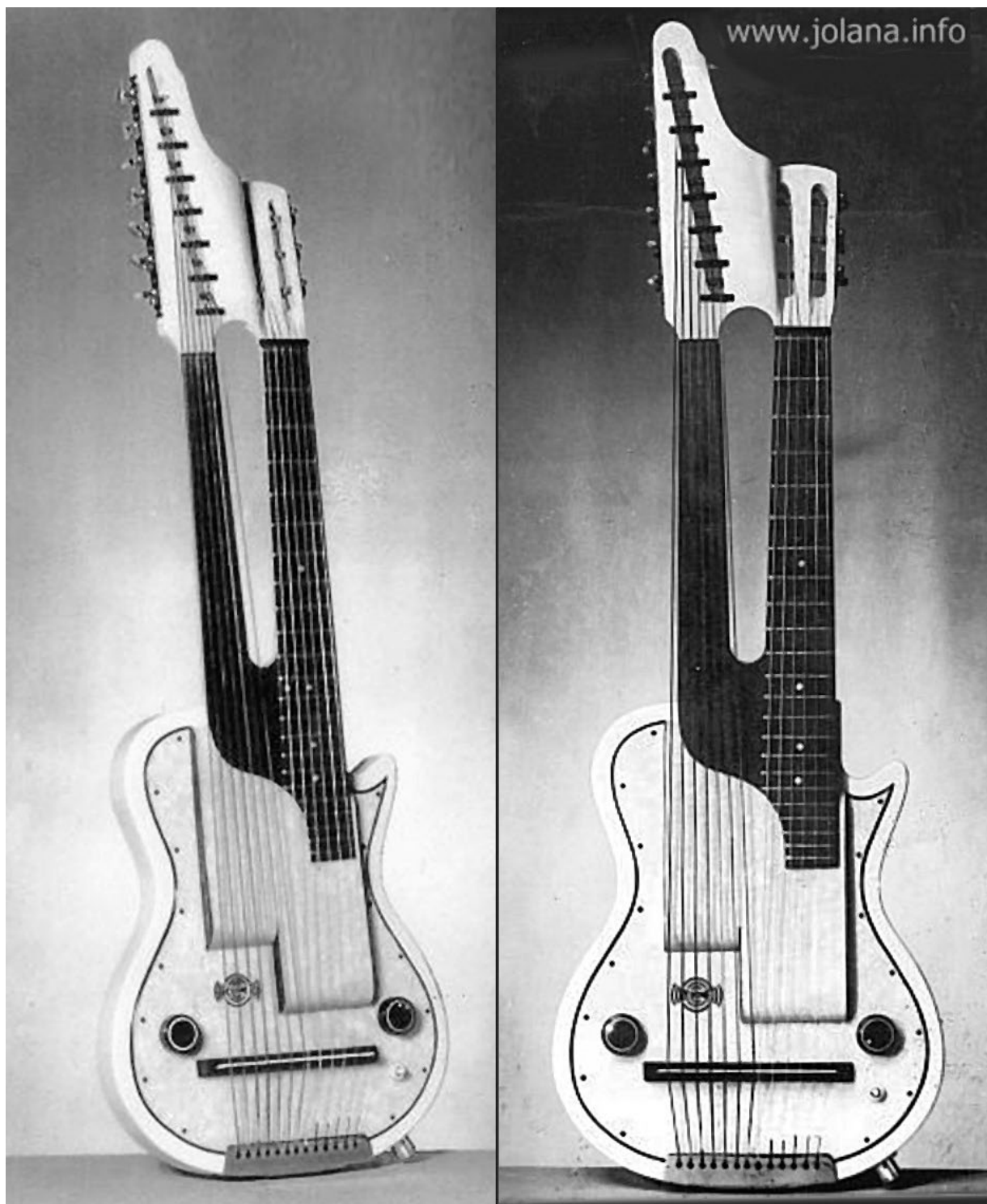


Above, the small but stunning Resonet exhibit in Brussels in 1958.

The Arco bass is noticeable on the left, while electric Hawaiian guitars and amps are on display.

And note the cool electric mandolin and balalaika!





1958 is also when the sole prototype of a proposed electric *kontragitarre* was built. A shame it was never put into production.

In 1962, the Resonet brand was shut down, and its production was moved to other locations, where similar guitars continued to be produced by other companies, branded as Jolana.

Frankly, the odds of this story becoming known in the U.S. and a permanent part of Harpguitars.net seem astronomical. If the images of the electric *kontragitarre* had not been taken, preserved, then shared decades later on a Czech guitar website, they would never have been spotted by my Russian pen pal Ilya.

And I would have never learned about the fascinating Resonet instruments, nor the tragic-but-inspiring true story of the company's founder, the indefatigable Ladislav Kořán – the man responsible for his country's original electromagnetic pickup concept, but who spent ten years in prison, largely forgotten while his company, ironically, prospered.



About the Author: Gregg Miner is, at various times of the day, a plucked stringed instrument collector, scholar, recording artist and performer. He is widely considered the world's leading authority on harp guitars. His web sites include Harpguitars.net, Harpguitarmusic.com and Minermusic.com.

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