



PHOTO SUBMITTED

John Doan with harp guitar

HARP GUITAR GATHERING

Athenaeum Theatre, 401 E. Michigan St.
Public concerts: Nov. 13, 7:30 p.m. and
Nov. 14, 3 p.m.; individual concerts: \$15
advance (harpguitars.net/tickets), \$25 door;
both concerts: \$20 advance, \$35 door

Carmel's Brad Hoyt figures that he's the only actively-performing harp guitarist in this state. (The harp guitar being, by definition, a guitar with extra open strings that can be plucked, in addition to the typical fretted guitar strings we've come to know and love.) And it's because the harp guitar diaspora is so vast—with players like Hoyt sometimes hundreds of miles away from a fellow comrade—that harp guitarists sometimes feel the need to gather together to share secrets, to meet up with luthiers, to show off their latest.

Their annual meeting, the Harp Guitar Gathering, will take place in Indianapolis for the first time this year, with guitarists gathering this weekend at the Athenaeum Theatre. Two concerts during the Gathering will offer the general public an opportunity to hear the latest coming out of a scene that's still in flux, a scene in which performers often take it upon themselves to design their own instruments.

Hoyt's an exemplary case: a pianist by training, he set on the search for a stringed instrument he could pluck (and not pick) after he got a wild hair one day and reached inside a piano to directly play the strings. Hoyt failed to find an instrument that served his means, so he resolved to construct something on his own, and met a builder at a previous Gathering, Stephen Sedgwick, who agreed to take on his challenge.

Four years later, he had his arpa viola caipira, a 20-string harp guitar with 10 treble strings in five courses ("the first time that's ever been done on an instrument before," according to Hoyt) and another 10 bass strings in 5 courses.

The harp guitar first came to life in the mandolin orchestras that were popular around the turn of the century—and Hoyt traces its pre-history back to varieties of lutes that featured open strings. It entered its modern era when finger-style guitarists picked up the instrument to afford themselves more range.

Many of those modern adopters will perform Saturday and Sunday night, in what Hoyt says is a rare opportunity to see the best finger-style guitarists in the world: Muriel Anderson, Brian Torosian, John Doan, Jeff Titus and Phillippe Fouquet, the event's featured artist. He notes that the concerts will offer a wide variety of music—from blues to jazz to classical and back.

And Hoyt mentions excitedly that harp guitars will soon go even more mainstream—one of the Gathering's sponsors, Holloway Harp Guitars, plans to "mass-produce" harp guitars, giving the average consumer a chance to try out what was once a somewhat esoteric instrument.

—Scott Shoger