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# B.M.G.

BANJO

MANDOLIN

GUITAR

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One Dilling and Threepence



## *Music in this issue*

Experiments with the B.M.G. Mandolin (by David D. Dilling)

Experiments with the B.M.G. Guitar (by David D. Dilling)

# B.M.G.

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## Cover Subject

**T**HE name of Geoffrey Sisley must be known to all players of the guitar. Composer, recording artist, arranger, teacher, broadcaster, there is hardly any corner of the fretted instrument field in which he does not excel.

The instrument in our cover picture is a contra-guitar—a member of the guitar family on which Mr. Sisley has specialised during the past few years and readers may be interested in learning something of this traditional instrument.

It has a wider body than the usual concert guitar but is generally shallower in depth; this last feature being a compensating factor regarding cubic capacity of the body, i.e. a wider soundboard for resonance but a shallow body to assist in the brilliant reproduction of the higher notes.

The contra-guitar has two necks: one is a replica of the normal concert guitar, the other carries the added bass strings, which run down in chromatic scale order from the low E string of the standard neck.

### TWO KINDS

Contra-guitars are broadly of two kinds. Firstly we have the traditional and authentic Viennese contra-guitar, 13 to 15 strings in all, with push-in pegs and a metal rod running inside the guitar body from the heel to the extreme base of the instrument. This classical and national instrument of Austria originally came into prominence as an integral part of the Schrammel Quartet, an authentic



GEOFF. SISLEY

with his German type contra-guitar

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instrumental group consisting of two violins, chromatic (button key) accordion, and—contra-guitar.

It is the usual thing in Austria for published music to be arranged for Schrammel Quartet, in addition to the usual orchestral arrangements. One can find many famous works by well-known composers such as Wagner, Schubert, Schumann, Strauss and Lehar arranged for Schrammel Quartet, in addition to the lighter marches, ländler, waltzes, polkas, etc.

The other type of contra-guitar is the German type (illustrated in the photograph on this page) which, although still a double-necked instrument of broadly similar appearance as the Viennese instrument, differs in constructional details. The body of the instrument is more like the ordinary six-string concert guitar—but larger, of course. It is usually fitted with machine heads and may have 13, 15 or even 18 strings; the latter having a complete chromatic scale of twelve strings on the bass neck.

### SOME CONJECTURE

There is, however, some conjecture as to the maintenance of tonal quality and volume of so large an instrument as compared with the 15 or 13 strings variety.

Many people have asked Mr. Sisley how the contra-bass guitar is played, particularly in respect of the bass strings. He tells us these are not fingered by the left hand (indeed, there are no frets on the bass neck!) as they are in chromatic order. These basses are therefore tuned thus:

13 strings contra-guitar (7 basses):  
E♭ to lower A.

15 strings (9 basses): E♭ down to low G.

18 strings (12 basses): E♭ down to low E.

It will be seen that the first essential is a thorough knowledge of the chromatic scale, sharps and flats by name.

The playing of the basses are required to be controlled as regards their duration of sound and as the contra-guitar is so extensively used for accompaniment, let us deal with this aspect of the instrument. The bass strings are damped (after they have sounded for the desired length of sound) by touching the string with the lowest knuckle joint of the right-hand thumb. It should, perhaps, be emphasised that the clarity of the note is not thus impaired as in the plectrum guitar effect of actually damping the initial note with the outer edge of the right-hand palm. With the contra-guitar, the sound (though short) is clear.

Another advantage the contra-guitar enjoys is that playing in the usually-avoided flat keys is facilitated by the fact that comparatively simple chord formations can be employed on the treble neck as the player has, in most cases, the fundamental and alternative basses already on the bass neck. That is the normally problematical keys of B♭, E♭, A♭, D♭, G♭ and C♭ present no real problems to the player of the contra-guitar.

## The Greeks have a Word for it

By IVOR MAIRANTS

**E**VER since the success of the film "Never on Sunday," curiosity has been aroused by the sound of a long-necked, Mandolin-shaped, instrument called the Bouzouki. Imagine my surprise when I was asked to take part in a day's recording of Greek music—which included a Bouzouki player flown straight over from Athens.

It happened this way. A film called "Manolis," produced by a Greek-speaking Englishman named Paul Crossfield, was made in Athens. (Incidentally, Paul Crossfield, besides being the Producer and Director, also plays the part of the puppet man under the nom-de-plume of Paul Homer.) The



LAKI KARNEZIS and IVOR MAIRANTS get together for a warming-up session before the sound-track recording

music was written by Greece's leading composer Mikis Theodorakis and has a strong "folk" flavour.

The story of the picture (which is reminiscent of "The Red Balloon," the famous French film) is about a poor boy, caught up with a gang of youths and made a scapegoat for a petty theft, is nearly drowned but is rescued by the puppet man who shows both him and the gang how to live a happier life by making an honest living instead of thieving.

The theme tune that is played whenever the boy, Manolis, is portrayed is called "Parapono."

Everything but the music track had been completed. What was now required was a sound similar to that heard by the composer on a record by "Manuel and the Music of the Mountains" called "The Wedding Song." Eventually, it was discovered that "Manuel" was none other than Geoff Love; and the "Music of the Mountains" included 4 guitars (of which I was one), mandolin, a battery of strings, rhythm section and choir.

Since, in Greece, it would have been impossible to find the type of musician required for this recording, it was arranged for the composer to come to London with the solo Bouzouki player and record the whole track here.



LAKI KARNEZIS, GEOFF LOVE and MIKIS THEODORAKIS discussing the score of the music to be recorded.

And so the Orchestra was assembled by Geoff Love and recorded at Elstree.

The rhythm section consisted of Arthur Watts—bass, Geoff Lofts—drums, Jock Cummings—vibes, bells, etc., Ike Isaacs, Chick Laval and Archie Slavin—guitars, Steve Gauna—mandolin, myself—solo guitar and Laki Karnezis—Laki to you—solo Bouzouki.

Four of the pieces included the string section and one or two pieces a mixed male and female choir. The remainder of the music, including a folk tune in 7/8 time, consisted of the fretted instruments plus bass and drums.

A really high time was had by everybody, especially in the fast 7/8 piece—which eventually turned out to be quite straightforward when divided into 3 and 2's. Either Mikis Theodorakis or Geoff Love conducted or supervised in the control box and thus ensured a perfect balance. The composer's intensity and brilliance reflected itself in the ensemble, which gave of their best.

Laki, who plays by ear, had memorised all the music and was brilliant. His tone, technique and, of course, memory were equal to the occasion whether in solo or in ensemble passages.

### "RACE TRACK"

The Bouzouki fingerboard is tremendously long and has 27 frets. Therefore, each string has a range of over two octaves and you really have to be sure-fingered up and down such a "race-track." It is fitted with three double strings as follows: low D, Middle D in octaves, two A's in unison and two D's in unison, played with a plectrum.

Laki, as you see from the picture, is left-handed and apart from an excellent technique, produces a terrific tremolo. He used a pick-up and an amplifier which I had the pleasure of choosing for him. It was a great pity the language barrier came between us but Paul Crossfield helped out with his interpreting whenever we could grab him for a few moments.

There are, I understand, about 7 good Bouzouki players in the whole of Greece who would be capable of this kind of work and Laki is the soloist with the composer's ensemble which is resident in Athens. So if you would like to hear this kind of exciting and romantic music, other than in the film, Greece is the place.