

# Larson Brothers Harp Guitars

## DIVERSITY AND CREATIVITY

**T**hroughout the 44 years the Larson brothers were making hand-made stringed instruments, they built many sizes, shapes and one-of-a-kinds. August Larson bought the business from Robert

Maurer in 1900 and kept the Maurer & Co. name. Carol Larson was a partner for some of those years and an employee for most of the others. They designed lines of guitars and mandolins in their early period under the Maurer brand, and under the Prairie State brand in the late 1920s. When the Euphonon brand was



42 From left, Abner, Alvin, Alden, Milda (holding Verona, R.C. Hartmans mother), Carl and Violet.



**Stahl 18-string Harp Guitar, c.1912**

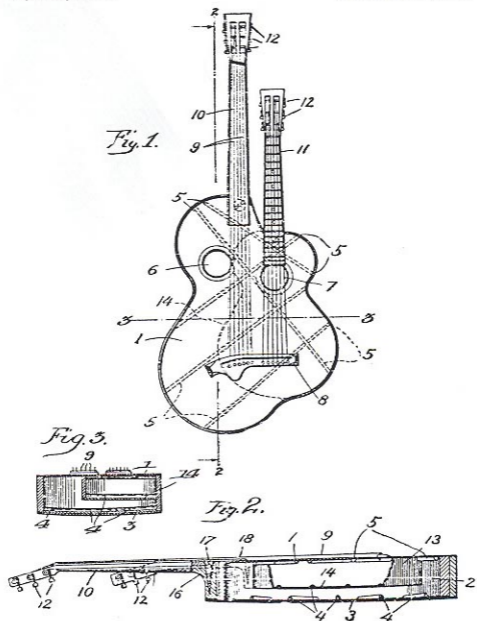
This style was shown in a 1912 Stahl ad, and Stahl also used the same cut for his catalog of the same vintage. Again, this Larson creation varies from the drawings in the most delightful way. Its harp side has 12 strings instead of 10, and is created with a one-piece bass neck with a most unusual configuration: it forms two necks, converging again to form a fantastic peghead arrangement. This monster is 51" long and 20" wide at the lower bout, and I'm told it has an "incredible sound." It also can be seen in the forthcoming *The Chinery Collection, 150 Years of American Guitars*, published by Balfon Books.

A. LARSON.  
GUITAR.

APPLICATION FILED JUNE 2, 1909.

1,022,031.

Patented Apr. 2, 1912.

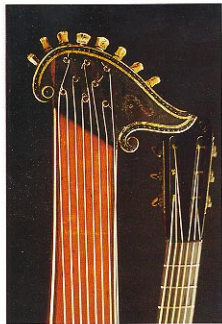


Witnesses:  
*Walter Larson*  
*Frank Johnson*

Inventor:  
*August Larson*

The Stahl pictured on the right, is most like the patent drawing above, because it has the internal sound chamber, which in effect is a 12" wide, 3" deep body inside the larger one. Its obvious difference is the hollow bass neck instead of the more conventional neck. The other harp guitars similar to the patent have the neck style shown there, but do not have the internal smaller body.





added in the mid-30s, both the Prairie States and Euphonons sported the large modern bodies with longer, narrower necks that we commonly see made today.

For almost 40 years, they built a variety of styles and shapes of guitars, and mandolin orchestra instruments

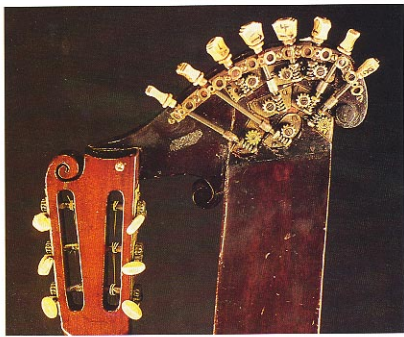


(1912-1932), the Larsons built harp guitars, harp mandolin family instruments, and Stetson guitars for W.J. Dyer & Bros. of St. Paul. All these brands were produced simultaneously, and must have kept the

bookkeeper on his or her toes.

for a music teacher and publisher, Wm. C. Stahl of Milwaukee.

Harp guitars were sold under the Stahl label, which claims him to be the maker. The Larsons made most of Stahl's instruments, but some were built by Lyon and Healy, Regal or others. For 20 years



In recent years, these harp guitars have been escaping the closets of the world by becoming collectible. Of course, if a guitar is standing in the corner, someone is going to pick it up, and so the inevitable happened. New ideas and new techniques have resurrected





**The W.J. Dyer & Bros. Symphony Harp Guitar**  
 The Larsons were commissioned by Dyer to build these harp instruments c. 1912. The early models were adaptations of a patented design by Chris Knutsen. The Dyer shown here is the result of the many prototypes that had different bass pegheads, bridge dimensions, and bodies with points sticking out here or there. Many of these early instruments were of the fine quality but not quite the design for which the Larson brothers were searching. The Dyers that look like the shape of this one are the ones sought after by players and collectors, and are considered by many to be the finest harp guitars ever made. Fortunately, they are the most commonly found.

these beasts (I say that fondly) of the past. Now many of the bravest players are creating new compositions for these great instruments.

Harp guitars built by the Larsons have from five to 12 sub-bass strings to test your mettle. I have heard some beautiful music created for harp guitar, and anticipate a great deal more in the future. John Stropes of Racine, Wis. (800-733-2520) has transcribed a Michael Hedges composition, "Because It's There," and offers it for sale. He also plays and teaches harp guitar.

This article portrays a general idea of the diversity and creativity of the Larson brothers, yet it is but a smattering of their total achievements. So often when I see or hear of another Larson-



strings, and the first American makers to use laminated X-braces and laminated necks for steel-string guitars.

The great differences in these harp guitars are not only the visual ones, but also include a range in sounds from that reminiscent of a harpsichord, to a sweet mid-range, to the giant, bold boomers. But all are well-balanced and a joy to play. Each sound will lend itself to a type of music. Each player will extract his own music, and will be inspired by the sounds built into each of these wonderful Larson brothers creations.

*Robert Carl Hartman*



made harp guitar, I find yet another "something" new. Maurer & Co. was as much a custom shop as it was a supplier of the catalog models, and each instrument was built with devotion and care. The Larsons were pioneers in developing the flat-top guitar with steel

#### **Maurer Harp Guitar, c. 1912**

This double-neck has no brand name and is most likely a one-of-a-kind. Its construction implies that it started out to be a regular guitar, and was converted to a double-neck to meet a customer's requirements. It has a 14½" wide lower bout and a 25½" scale length. It has a Brazilian rosewood body, and is an early example of a laminated neck feature on a guitar. This instrument has a very sweet tone and perfect balance.

