

Stephen Haluska: Harpist, Improviser, and Experimentalist

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On Saturday, March 4 at 8:00 pm, at SPACES, No Exit Presents will host harpist Stephan Haluska in a free concert that will include music by Carol Finer, Yasunao Tone, Rhodri Davies, and Stephan Haluska.

No Exit's Laura King caught up with the improviser and experimental musician.

Q. The harp has ancient origins and is such a unique instrument. Can you give us a short overview of its early manifestation in Mesopotamia and its evolution?

SH: What a question about the harp that I don't get asked very often. Let's simply define a harp. We might say it's a plucked instrument with strings stretched between a resonating body and supported by some kind of post. Using this definition, anthropologists generally regard harps as one of the most primitive instruments invented. Harps were independently invented all over the world, in ancient Egypt, sub Saharan, East Asia, and I believe the oldest were found in Mesopotamia. Those Mesopotamian harps evolved into the harps described in the Bible and spread to ancient Greece, which then further spread throughout the European continent.

In medieval Europe, there was a desire to play more complex music on the harp and

various developments were added—first they added more strings and then added sharpening levers. Pedal harps, the kind of harp used in classical music and seen in orchestras were developed by various instrument builders throughout the 18th century and by the end of the century, Sebastian Erard refined the design into what we consider to be the modern pedal harp.

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Published on ClevelandClassical.com March 1, 2023.

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