



Contents

- Introduction
- The Concept
- The Material
- The Tunes
- The Incredible Imagination and Instruments of Chris Knutsen (*in progress*)

Introduction by Frank Doucette

All artists strive to find their own original voice, that intangible that allows full expression in a way instantly identifiable and unlike any other. Gregg Miner could easily consider himself notable for his choice, and unusual combinations, of instruments. This, however, is no mere showman. A quick listen to his music reveals a mature and deeply expressive composer in whom, as older pieces here demonstrate, an original muse has been at work from a young age. In a body of work spanning 40 years, an exceptional gift for melody is evident even when employing unusual harmonies or abstract forms.

With various harp guitar compilations and Gregg's 2009 release *Good Dogs, Bad Dogs, Best Friends* behind us, I found myself craving more from this person fast becoming one of my favorite tunesmiths. The idea for this project had been percolating in his mind for some time and, all these years later, I am most pleased to see it become reality. I have listened to these pieces over and over and over again as this CD came together and, still, I love every one. On many days, I continue to wake happily humming a current favorite. These tunes tell stories you will want to hear again and again.

Ostensibly, this is a concept album celebrating the creative efforts of Chris Knutsen. I find it more a portrait of the artist displaying (or juggling) these instruments, and his most personal project to date. Whether fresh interpretations of music that set the path in formative years or original works, these tracks all embody the artist's innermost self. From the nostalgia of pieces such as "Midwest Memories" to the yearning of "What the Soul Wants," with profound expressions of friendship, happiness, whimsy, and more in between, this is uniquely and beautifully my friend Gregg Miner.

Enjoy! – FD



The Concept



2005

I inadvertently started this “concept album” way back in 2003 when I was stringing up the just-restored “zither harp guitar” and wanted to arrange and record something for it. This was a fascinating early 1900s musical instrument variant by the indefatigable Chris Knutsen, and the modern tune “Little Martha” was the result; I was pleased enough to burn a few “singles” for my family and friends. That Knutsen was perhaps my tenth, but hardly the last, as they seem to find their way to me. And of course, each one is unique, often dramatically so, as Knutsen’s creativity knew no bounds.

(Left) With the zither harp guitar at the 3rd Harp Guitar Gathering® in

The following year I happened to use my Knutsen Symphony harp guitar – this is a *pre-1900* instrument, mind you – for two professional recordings submitted for *Beyond Six Strings*, a groundbreaking project that led to the formation of my Harp Guitar Music label and web business.



By this time, I was imagining doing a version of my “Christmas Collection” CD project, but with Knutsen instruments – including several models and examples owned by friends of mine. To that end, in 2005 I borrowed Flip Breskin’s unique “wrap-around” hollow arm guitar built by Otto Anderson (builder of 200 of Knutsen’s earlier instruments) – both to document for the Knutsen Archives and to record a couple things with it. I ended up not pursuing any other loans, as I managed to fill in nearly all the gaps in my collection over the years. I continued to experiment with this growing family of Knutsen instruments in the occasional performance or recording, while also playing and recording on Dyer and Merrill harp guitars, which have a direct relationship to Knutsen’s, explained below.

After a time, I found myself with a growing number of unreleased recordings using these instruments, along with a plethora of other ideas – and so began the arduous task to complete the project. I found that Knutsen’s instruments were the perfect choice, as he made not just harp guitars, but steel (Hawaiian) guitars, mandolins and ukuleles. Not only do no two look or sound quite alike, they are often configured very differently. A given instrument might have additional open bass strings or open higher strings (melodic or chordal): one or the other, both, or neither. Their string counts often vary as well, along with the size and scale of Knutsen’s endless inventions. They might be strung with steel strings, nylon strings or other materials, which you’ll hear typically in solo outings, along with the occasional duo, trio or quartet. Finally, I added my Larson brothers-built Dyer instruments and a

couple new Merrill harp guitars (highest quality Dyer copies) due to their direct evolutionary link to Knutsen and their incredible sound.

The Material

Personally, I've never considered myself a "composer," but that hasn't stopped me from coming up with all sorts of tunes, motifs, soundscapes, what-have-you. All of which are nothing more than a very personal, private relationship between my muse and me. But occasionally (so Frank tells me), others find them entertaining, so you can thank him for making me stick at this rather exhausting project. Even more surprising is that I pulled several of these tunes (*seven* of them!) out of my deep past – my 20-to-24-year old "creative period," Curiously, the majority of the covers I arbitrarily chose are *also* things from my youth. Then there's a gap of a full two decades (my *Christmas Collection* will explain the '90s...) and we next jump to 2004, when I wrote my first original piece in ages on my return from the second Harp Guitar Gathering® (Track 10). Several subsequent new pieces appeared on the Harp Guitar Music compilations and my 2009 *Good Dogs, Bad Dogs, Best Friends* CD. And now this project contains another six more recent pieces. Old or new, originals or covers, all have been reworked to fit the various instruments herein. I hope you enjoy both the instruments and the music – thanks for reading and listening!

The Tunes

(Note: "#code" in parentheses refer to the instrument inventory numbers in the online [Knutsen Archives](#).)

1. **Midwest Memories** (Gregg Miner; String Fever Music, ASCAP) **Dyer harp guitar, Knutsen convertible harp steel guitar (#HCP1)**

This tune was the very last one I was working on in Illinois in late 1978 before moving to Los Angeles in early 1979. It was always a duet, originally on 6-string and 12-string guitar (I toyed with a bottleneck on the 12-string). I never did locate my old work-in-progress recording of this tune; unbelievably, I remembered virtually every note nearly forty years later. As the original 6-string was tuned to open G with a low C in the bass, it naturally leant itself to harp guitar, though the strumming and muting became a challenge! Still lousy at bottleneck guitar forty years later, I chose a harp steel to play lap style slide, while getting an additional set of subs in the bargain. This one never had a title – until now; it serves as the wrap up to my treasured Illinois days of acoustic music experimentation and so many other memorable experiences.

2. **Little Martha** (D. Allman; BMG Bumble obo Happily Married Music) **Knutsen "zither" harp guitar (#HGS40)**

After Kerry Char restored this one-of-a-kind Knutsen, I had to figure out how to string and tune it; the normal, long sub-bass bank is split in half to make two shorter string banks, giving 3 treble banks with a total of 7 strings each. As it had been found with old strings of very thick to thin on each bank, and since there were three sections, I immediately imagined the purpose as having a I, IV and V chord. As my gauges and options were coming together (two were 6/9 chords, the V was a Dom7sus), I was brainstorming for a simple 3-chord instrumental to try (*Louie, Louie* was out). Suddenly I remembered this tune that I used to play ages ago from The Allman Brothers' *Eat a Peach* LP (which I still have).

3. ***Mood for a Day*** (Steve Howe; Warner-Tamerlane Pub Corp.) **Knutsen nylon-strung harp guitar (#HGP4)**

You can probably tell that I come from more of a folk/pop background than a classical one. Case in point: when thinking about a tune for this nylon-strung Knutsen, this “pseudo-classical/flamenco” Steve Howe solo from the Yes *Fragile* album came to mind. I had played the popular piece for my last year high school talent show, but probably never since – but it was like riding a bike (it seems I still have “muscle memory” from decades ago even if I have none from last month...). As the transcription and then recording evolved, the embellishments grew and grew – added subs, more harmonies and flights of fancy – while preserving the simple essence of the original I think. Note that there is *no* reverb added to this track; it was recorded completely dry in my padded booth – that is all the Knutsen’s own sympathetic resonance (natural overtones emanating from every string in “sympathy.” Thus, if I stopped *any* of the eleven strings with my palm/hand, it was like I had literally unplugged a reverb unit. So, it was either mute constantly (and ruin a great effect) or counterintuitively train myself to avoid *all* damping, which I finally did.

4. ***Sea of Life*** (Traditional Chinese) **Knutsen 20-course harp guitar & teardrop steel guitar (#HGS1, #HTD5)**

In 2003, my wife and I found ourselves in Edinburgh, Scotland during their August music festival with its incredible stream of constant live music both indoors and out. As we ascended a hill one afternoon I could hear the “Theme from Titanic” played by some strange, beautiful instrument. Cresting the rise, we were treated to a virtuoso player of a Chinese erhu (a 2-string bowed instrument). The tune was a bit cliché (and the cheesy synthesizer “orchestra” played by his partner didn’t help any), but then they launched into a folk tune that had me bawling within a minute. I bought their CD, happy to discover that the tune – this one – was on it. I can’t do the expressive and plaintive erhu justice, but tried to channel some of the exotic color and nuances I remembered onto the steel guitar. The particular harp guitar used for accompaniment, with its 3 top neck strings doubled and its 7 super-trebles tuned to the pentatonic melody (the entire song fits on these 7 notes), turned out to be ideal for the introduction and accompaniment to this simple but inspiring piece.

5. ***Pavane de la Belle au bois dormant*** (Maurice Ravel) **Knutsen harp mandolin with sub-basses (#HM2)**

Translation: “Pavane of the Sleeping Beauty,” from Ravel’s *Mother Goose Suite*, which along with Debussy’s *Children’s Corner Suite* has always been one of my absolute favorites. This is played exactly as written in Am, the harp mandolin having a much larger range than a standard mandolin. I play it solo fingerstyle, like a miniature harp guitar.

6. ***Ode to a Heloderm*** (Gregg Miner; String Fever Music, ASCAP) **Knutsen short-scale harp guitar (#HGS72)**

The particular heloderm in this case being my pet gila monster, Cliff. Though that sentence reads back as bizarrely to me today as it does you, it’s quite simple really, and not as aberrant as I know you’re thinking! I was a serious herpetoculturist (reptile keeper) back in the ‘70s, the aforementioned *heloderma suspectum* being just one of my many charges. No, none were actually “pets” and none had “names,” other than a couple that my comedian friend Rick insisted on christening based on their perceived personalities. As it turns out, gila monsters (and their beaded lizard cousins) are ridiculously docile animals – my little ditty is an homage to their goofy, benign personalities, with that underlying hint of danger (they *are* venomous, after all!).

7. ***Humming Song*** (Gregg Miner; String Fever Music, ASCAP) **Knutsen 20-course harp guitar & harp mandolin (#HGS1 & HM1)**

Another tune from my Bloomington, Illinois period, circa 1977, originally on a 6-string guitar in standard tuning, flatpicked. At that time, when I couldn't find anything from my little burgeoning collection of random instruments suitable for the separate melody on the verse, I recorded it with my then-girlfriend and I simply *humming* it, ergo the title (that had remained the *only* version until today). Even with all the instruments I have now, I *still* didn't have something appropriate! A mandolin drew the short straw, but then came up with its own additional appropriate bits.

8. *Perplexual Movement No. 1* (Gregg Miner; String Fever Music, ASCAP) **Knutsen harp ukulele & harp steel guitar (#HU16 & HHW1)**

This and *PM2* below are examples of "abstract music" – i.e. they are not "about" anything, but little experimental "studies." They made me think of *perpetual movement* – simple repeating motifs with endings that presumably go on forever. Being a bit weirder than, say, Poulenc's "*Mouvements Perpetuels*," I combined that with "perplexing" to create a more applicable term. Each started out with an unfinished idea on a single instrument. In this case it was something I came up with ages ago on my Dobro in this close tuning. The three sections I remembered virtually verbatim and transferred to this Knutsen 12-course harp steel, then came up with the "clockwork uke" idea. The unique configuration of Knutsen's seemingly limiting harp steel enables the illusion of multiple instruments with its Hawaiian-style neck, two sub-bass strings and a mere four chimey super-trebles, for this experiment strung in Nylgut to counterpoint the harp uke.

9. *Sad Pig Dance* (Dave Evans; Shining Shadows Music) **Knutsen jumbo 8-sub-bass harp guitar (#HGS73)**

When I learned that my absolute hero, '70s guitarist Dave Evans, would be coming from Brussels to attend the 5th Harp Guitar Gathering® in 2007, I realized that I *had* to work out one of his tunes on harp guitar to surprise and honor him. Back in the mid-70s I had learned and played incessantly nearly all the 6-string acoustic guitar tunes on his classic Kicking Mule "Sad Pig Dance" LP, and now, over forty years later, the title track was still under my fingers. I fiddled with a few things and added subs by stretching the 1-5-1-5 Travis-picking accompaniment into an insanely wide variation across the two string banks. That became even more difficult when I further tweaked the tune for the latest Knutsen I acquired – this giant-bodied (but standard-scale) monster with a Knutsen-record *eight* subs. Given the extra bass strings, I had no choice but to add a bit more chromaticism – something I knew Dave would approve of!

10. *The Friends I Finally Met* (Gregg Miner; String Fever Music, ASCAP) **Knutsen harp mandolin with sub-basses (#HM3)**

This tune appeared on the *Further Beyond Six Strings* compilation with an additional fretless bass part performed by Michael Manring. Here's the original fingerstyle solo as originally recorded, and intended, for this current CD project. I wrote it after the second Harp Guitar Gathering® as part parody, part loving tribute to all my tapping, rapping and slapping harp guitarist idols. Idols who have all since become friends. I'd like to dedicate this to the memory of the late Tom Shinness, my biggest inspiration that fateful 2004 weekend.

11. *The Magic Pony* (Gregg Miner; String Fever Music, ASCAP) **Knutsen Symphony harp guitar (#HGT1)**

I consider this my first decent original tune, written on my old Martin 6-string in 1975 at age 20. As I often did at the time, I arranged and recorded a personal demo (and later, better studio version) for "random ensemble" – including the Martin, electric guitar, lute, harp, toy piano, banjo and flute (session player). The trick with this

new solo harp guitar version was capturing as much of that ensemble color as I could, rather than simply going back to the basic guitar part. About its creation: The A section (verse) always sounded somewhat “clip-clop” horsey, as you hear it now; the unusual B waltz section sprung from frustration of not knowing what would come next...and then finally just letting whatever happened happen. I immediately understood that it was now indeed about a pony, but as imagined by a child riding a carousel horse...which can of course detach itself to lead them both into fantasy...

12. ***Women of Ireland*** (Sean O’Riada; Mechanical Copyright Protection Society Ltd) **Knutsen “zither” harp guitar (#HGS40)**

This was once a sort of “theme song” for me; the first tune I taught myself on the harp (before I could even play the instrument!), from the album that introduced me to my lifelong love affair with Irish and similar music: the *Barry Lyndon* Soundtrack. The Chieftains famously performed this – as hauntingly beautiful as it gets – and their late harpist Derek Bell did a little harp solo reprise of it. It’s not strictly “traditional” – it was composed by O’Riada, a fascinating Irishman who played harpsichord and led a groundbreaking band that eventually spawned The Chieftains. The original version is a song, with Gaelic lyrics whose varying syllabic scans give very different melodic phrasing to each verse. Knutsen’s unprecedented “zither harp guitar” was the obvious choice to adapt this piece; treble harp banks on both sides of the neck (with some tuning overlap) were utilized on the first verse for both melody and the ends of various arpeggios.

13. ***Miner Lullaby in a Major Key*** (Gregg Miner; String Fever Music, ASCAP) **Merrill harp guitar #14**

This original tune stemmed from feelings much like those evoked by Shenandoah below – specifically, an “extremely poignant yearning.” However, I’ll keep the particular subject private and let you listen with a blank slate – hopefully to receive your own impressions and feelings.

14. ***Fossils*** (Gregg Miner; String Fever Music, ASCAP) **Dyer harp mandolins, Larson brothers 5-course harp mandola, Dyer harp guitar**

This piece is based on a simple riff that I came up with in the 1990’s on my Gibson mandocello – just something that sounded cool on the giant cello-pitched mandolin. Finding myself with this group of all Larson-built instruments, I adapted it, changing the key to fit on the octave/tenor mandola with harp guitar doubling it an octave lower. Next was to come up with interesting things for the dual mandolins to do. Finally, finding places for the mandola and harp guitar to fit percussion in (assorted hits and knocks on the bodies, with the occasional slap harmonics) was the fun part. While for the most part I eschewed “special effects” reverb for this album, this piece just begged for it.

15. ***Return to Deserted Island*** (Gregg Miner; String Fever Music, ASCAP) **Knutsen Symphony harp guitar & harp steel guitar (#HGT1 & HCN3)**

I made this return to my “Deserted Island” from *Beyond Six Strings* to add a steel guitar part that I always felt it sorely needed. The original version was one of my mid-70s multi-tracked extravaganzas with acoustic guitar, lap steel, mandolin, harp, flute, percussion, synth and who knows what else. I thus had a lot of different voices and lines to try and incorporate into this single harp steel. The four super-trebles manage the mandolin part in the first chorus, the five subs beef up some of the harp guitar’s basses even further, while the slide does the flute line in the second chorus and many of the lap steel’s original effects plus some new licks.

16. ***Glad Dave's Rag*** (Gregg Miner; String Fever Music, ASCAP): **Merrill harp guitar #18**

The Dave in the title is my '70s fingerstyle guitar idol Dave Evans, who through an incredible but completely coincidental bit of fate became part of the harp guitar community and a special friend in 2007. I wasn't writing much at the time, and at one of our Harp Guitar festivals he sidled up to me and quietly suggested "You should write more." And thus, *this* – which really isn't in Dave's style, nor necessarily suggestive of him (other than its quirkiness) – but he instigated it! The title is a play on his "Sad Pig Dance," which I also cover on this album.

17. ***Perplexual Movement No. 2*** (Gregg Miner; String Fever Music, ASCAP) **Knutsen harp taropatch & tenor harp steel guitar (#HT5 & HHW25)**

Like *PM1 above*, an example of "pure music" – i.e. it's not "about" anything; it's a simple little experimental study (though what exactly I'm supposed to be *studying* I have no idea.) This one began with a pattern of rapidly arpeggiated randomly fingered chords I kept noodling with on a uke. Ultimately, I think the double-strung taropatch gave it a bit more fantasy. As often my case, I studiously avoided thinking theory or even acknowledging the "math" of the fingerboard; to this day, I don't know what these chords are! I couldn't even figure out the root key, so pretty much picked one out of a hat, tuning the little harp steel's two "sub-basses" to a mid-range and a high C. The slide melody on the neck strings is pure fantasy.

18. ***Os Amores Libres*** (traditional Galician) **Otto Anderson wrap-around-arm 6-string guitar & Knutsen harp mandolin with sub-basses (#HGP16 & HM3)**

Throughout my life my most cherished musical moments have been discovering new tunes that fall under the category of "hauntingly beautiful." This one immediately fell into that group. I found it on Galician piper Carlos Nunes' CD *Os Amores Libres*, which featured members of The Chieftains. I haven't quite done it justice, but really wanted to share it with others.

19. ***The Black Rock (Heman Dubh)*** (Traditional Scottish) **Knutsen "zither" harp guitar (#HGS40)**

This is one of the many gems from the 1972 Alan Stivell classic *Renaissance of the Celtic Harp*, from which I learned several tunes on the harp. Truthfully, I hadn't quite expected to pull off *Women of Ireland* above, as the melody had to jump between two opposing banks of strings. This one was similarly impossible – *just* do-able. It has more – and higher – melody notes, so I had to restring one bank. The right hand jumps back and forth between the two treble banks on the body while the left-hand hammers and pulls the chords.

20. ***Shenandoah*** (traditional) **Knutsen Symphony harp guitar (#HGT1)**

Sometime after our first dog (Shaanti) died, I heard this classic song playing somewhere, and it just seemed to click – somehow summing up my feelings precisely. I subsequently did a lot of research on it – all its fascinating variations in title, lyrics, and morphing permutations across continents and eras. The unifying thread seems to be a sense of loss and something treasured that may not be regained.

21. ***Harvest Home / We Gather Together*** (hymns) **Otto Anderson wrap-around-arm 6-string guitar (#HGP16)**

My friend Dave Marchant once suggested I do “We Gather Together” for another holiday album someday. That lovely tune, which we always sang in church around Thanksgiving time, reminded me of another: “Harvest Home,” with its fabulous chord surprise on the second enharmonic line. My mom sent me my old Methodist hymnal for reference and here’s the result (“Harvest Home” starts it off).

22. ***Peaceful Piece*** (Gregg Miner; String Fever Music, ASCAP) **Knutsen 5-course harp mandola & harp mandolins** (HMA2, HM1 & HM35)

Nearing the end of this project, I still had two Knutsens I hadn’t used, and tried them on all sorts of old existing tunes of mine. Finally, one clicked – another mid-70s Illinois untitled piece that captured me in a rare relaxed and patient musical mood. I switched out the original guitar for this trio of interweaving mandos, the large one giving me a low G an octave down and some nice new color.

23. ***Perro*** (Gregg Miner; String Fever Music, ASCAP) **Knutsen nylon-strung harp guitar & “baby pineapple” steel guitar** (#HGP4 & HP6)

This tune may have the oldest backstory of any. Back in 1972, my high school friend and bandmate Steve, who was a *drummer* mind you, told me one day he had “written a song” which he called “Perro” (Spanish for “dog,” he was a dog lover, as am I). It was literally *two bars* only – the first C then F chord patterns that open the piece. But it was a lovely easy-to-play little motif, so over the years I finished it, keeping those original two bars intact. It seemed to need some other part, ergo the slide melody (perhaps the soul of *perro?*), originally played on a lap steel, and now played on a short scale Knutsen “pineapple” shape steel guitar, tuned to high G.

24. ***What the Soul Wants*** (Gregg Miner; String Fever Music, ASCAP) **Merrill harp guitar #14**

The chorus of this tune came to me in a dream – yes, a cliché, but the first and only successful time for me in all my musical life. It was apparently the soundtrack to one of those long, meandering dreams that you can’t remember when you wake up. Of course, in the cold light of day, the “the greatest melody in the world” that your dream state created invariably turns out to be terrible. Nevertheless, as I slowly drifted awake, I forced myself to continue playing the theme in my head to retain it (a simple melody over simple tonic notes). I quickly stumbled into my recording closet in my pajamas, with just enough brain cells firing to think to turn on the machine, hit REC, and quickly find the notes on a handy harp guitar. Later, fully awake, I was stunned to find that I loved it as my dream-self did. I then worked backwards to imagine what would have come *before* to get the verse. The basic chorus remains exactly as dreamt. Letting the bridge (C section) just sort of come, it then finished itself. Once complete, it struck me that this was either the most personally intimate song of my entire life – from my *subconscious*, mind you! – or it could have just been a T.V. commercial theme heard before I went to bed and subliminally recalled. Obviously, with my rather dramatic title, I’m going with the former premise.

25. ***Norwegian Wood (This Bird Has Flown)*** (Lennon, McCartney; Sony/ATV Tunes LLC dba ATV obo ATV (Northern Songs Catalog) **Knutsen harp mandola, steel guitar & company** (HMA2 & HHW18)

I suppose it’s time to fess up. I was originally planning to call this album “Knutsenology.” It was my Weissenborn/Knutsen researcher pal Ben Elder who adlibbed the new title one day (please tell me you get it or he’ll be crushed). As things were coming to a close, it occurred to me that there might be a

riot if I then didn't actually do the Beatles tune the pun comes from! This is pretty much every instrument on the album doing something. The Knutsen harp mandola starts it off, while the main melody (John Lennon) features my last remaining instrument – the psychedelic Knutsen 6-string steel guitar!

The Incredible Imagination and Instruments of Chris Knutsen

Welcome to the wonderful world of Knutsen! (P.S: The "K" is pronounced) For everything you might ever want to know about the Norwegian immigrant maker of these fascinating American musical instruments, you may want to follow up with the Noe/Most book [Chris Knutsen: From Harp Guitars to the New Hawaiian Family](#) and my own [Knutsen Archives](#) on the web.

The condensed version: Chris Knutsen (born Johan Christian Kammen) emigrated to the U.S. at the age of 3 from Norway. Growing up in Minnesota and later moving to Washington State, he had only basic masonry and carpentry skills and played guitar and violin. Seemingly out of the blue in 1896 he patented a design for a 6-string guitar with a hollow arm emanating from the bass side of the body (he called it "harp shaped"). The concept had been introduced by various builders in Europe both before and after, but it's entirely possible that Knutsen dreamt it up on his own. Two years later, he was granted a second patent, this one with a longer arm on which he could affix floating "sub-bass" strings. His wasn't the first *harp guitar* in America, but it was the first *hollow arm* version and is literally the origin of all the popular hollow arm harp guitars built and played today. It led directly to the "Dyer" harp guitar – the popular vintage American instrument that so captured the imagination of today's players. This model was built for the W. J. Dyer & Bro. Company of St. Paul, Minnesota by the Larson brothers of Chicago, luthiers par excellence, who improved Knutsen's design. The Dyer firm had briefly distributed Knutsen's own harp guitars, but soon *licensed* his patent instead, so they could contract the more professional Larsons to build them. Because of this direct connection – the Larsons having first built Knutsen's own Symphony model design, then their own model with the recognizable "cloud shape" headstock – I included my Dyer instruments in this project as well (along with the best of the modern "Dyer copies" made today).

A more recent twist to the Knutsen story was the 2002 discovery that a Port Townsend neighbor named Otto Anderson built around 200 of Knutsen's first instruments, most commonly the two early patent design models. I don't own any, but was able to borrow the incredible Otto Anderson 6-string guitar described below.

Knutsen himself built the bulk of his own instruments, but is now thought to have had help from family members or local hires on occasion. It's hard to tell – Chris Knutsen's own workmanship ranged from exquisite to stunningly amateurish – often within a single instrument (his most egregious shortcuts inside the body where they weren't easily seen). Ironically, his poor construction – light and poorly braced for the amount of string tension – often yielded incredible tone. So his instruments were quite popular and appreciated...until they self-destructed! (Some of my own instruments have been re-braced in order to be functional as playing instruments.)

Knutsen was also one of the first luthiers in the States to become aware of, and immediately start building, Hawaiian guitars. The narrow-shouldered shape he used for these was later copied in Los Angeles by H. Weissenborn, whose instruments today are collected and copied around the world. We still have no idea if Knutsen came up with this iconic shape himself. America's Hawaiian music craze really took off in 1915 after the San Francisco exposition introduced Hawaiian music to the public on a daily basis. Knutsen took that as his cue to stop building standard harp guitars (though those previously built would continue to be used in Hawaiian bands for years afterwards) and concentrate on his "New Hawaiian Family" consisting of all manner of steel guitars (played on the lap with a steel slide bar), "convertible" steel guitars (played either on the lap or in standard position), along with harp mandolins, harp ukuleles and more.

My online Archives explain that Knutsen almost never used model or style or serial numbers – and if he *did* print something specific on a label (like "Sole Patentee of the 11-stringed harp guitar"), he would use that label indiscriminately in instruments with different stringing; it held no meaning other than simple advertising. So, with a random state of labels (seriously, check the Archives – he was known to cut his name & address off an old envelope and just glue that in!), and no serial numbers or consistency of any kind, I came up with "Knutsen Archives Inventory Numbers" to collect and record information on every specimen found by this maker. It's do-able because no two of his instruments are exactly alike. Many are extremely distinctive and individualistic, and even vaguely standardized models can be identified by different woods and other features. For reference, I've included the inventory #s below for my own small portion of the 400-plus instruments I've now cataloged online.

Every year or so, someone discovers a new Knutsen "one-off" – a new extreme shape or stringing arrangement or decoration. It makes studying, collecting and playing his instruments endlessly fascinating. I hope you find these examples similarly so!



27 instruments – detailed photos, stories and tunings coming soon!