

THE VICTOR SALVI MUSEUM



The **Victor Salvi Museum** is located within the Salvi Harp Company's complex which includes the factory and the business offices. To reach the museum, the visitor climbs a staircase constructed to represent harp strings. Behind the receptionist's desk, the visitor can gaze down on the floor of the harp factory to view the craftsmen at work. The museum has a large concert hall where visitors watch an orientation video which explains the manufacturing process from raw materials to magnificent instruments.

The harp of Lily Laskine As a harpist, this museum holds great meaning since it displays examples of the variety and stages of harp development. It is difficult to know why a composer chose a certain tempo or wrote a certain technical flourish or pedal progression without knowing which instrument the piece was originally written for, since all instruments have their own limitations and abilities. For example, music of the classical period was written not for the modern pedal harp, but mostly for the single action and triple harp. As the mechanism moved towards the use of modern pedals the harpist was enabled for more speed and control over the accidental changes. Because of **the rarity of these instruments** most scholars have relied on images from books to understand the technical aspects of historical harps, but now the Victor Salvi Museum allows them first-hand access where they can see the depth of the pedals, tension and spacing of the strings, range of the instruments, and the structure to see how they were actually constructed to be played.

The items that appear in the current exhibit, "**The Harp, from the Congo to Chicago: traveling among sounds, cultures and traditions**" a new exhibition featuring 50 unique harps from the collection of the Museo dell'Arpa Victor Salvi opened to the public in 2008. It will be on display through the end of the year. In addition to music, the collection also highlights the art, anthropology and origins of these fine instruments.

Also appearing, as a part of the exhibit, are special items that were created for the **Chicago World's Fair**. On display are several triple harps, many single and double action pedal harps, several small Celtic harps, a few Paraguayan and Mexican harps, and many harps from Africa and Asia. The instruments have been restored beautifully and the original aesthetics and structural elements have been kept intact. The details on the harps from the very beginning though the end of the exhibit are very special and particular to each instrument.

The museum is housed in a large room. Located to the left of the entrance to the museum the first exhibit is the **harp of Lily Laskine**. The harp is a double-action pedal harp made by Erard. Behind the harp stands the chair she used for her many hours at the harp.



Another section of the museum houses the **African harp collection**. All of these instruments look quite individual and unique. Each harp has its own character. The harps were made from indigenous materials that would have been quite easy to find in nature: gourds, wood, shells, skin, bone, and roots. They range in size from as few as four strings to twenty or so strings. It is evident that many of these harps were used as cultural symbols, artwork, and spiritual pieces and were not just made to create music. The forms of these harps are generally some sort of C-shape, to most likely be played in the lap. Others are for more aesthetic and artistic ends; they would probably be played on some sort of table or stand as they are formed in a very decorative shape. In all cases though, you can see the culture from where the harp originated in the structure and decoration of the harps.

The exhibit of single action pedal harps is amazing. From Parigi to Erard, you can really understand the harp that Naderman wrote his etudes on when you actually see his harps. One of his harps is a single-action, Parigi harp from 1785 with shallow, flat pedals, and a staved body. The artistic details are very intricate, in terms of the carving, gilding and hand painting. The harp is elaborately decorated with the bust of a woman and cherubs, which are beautifully gilded in gold. Naderman's music, for the most part, is written at fast tempi with large reaches at a forte. All of the dynamics, pedal changes, reaches, and tempi make much more sense after actually seeing the harps. Aside from the harps' technical capabilities, these harps are also gorgeous pieces of artwork: each very unique and colorful.



A visit to the museum, surrounded by the Italian Alps and the magnificent factory with its dedicated artisans leaves the visitor with a feeling of communion with the gods!

For more information or a DVD of the museum contact Salvi Harps, Inc.

A catalog of the museum is available, "**Three Centuries of Harps,**" from most harp music retailers for **\$50**. The book was written by Roslyn Rensch and has detailed photos throughout. It is excellent for both a resource and a coffee table book.