

Alfredo Rolando Ortiz • South American Harp

Follow-up material and ideas for the classroom

Material suggested: Large maps

These are general ideas and concepts which the teachers may adapt to the age and educational level of the students.

Geography:

Use map(s) to find the countries mentioned, for example:

Cuba: Does it really look like a crocodile?

Venezuela, where I began learning to play the harp and where the “National Dance” called “joropo” is “harp music.” What product do we buy from Venezuela? (Oil)

Brazil: Very large country, Amazon River, “piranhas.” Language: Portuguese.

Paraguay: Landlocked country of bilingual population - Spanish & Guaraní - and the place in the world where the harp is played most. The “Paraguayan harp” which is the type of harp I use in my performances, is the “Official National Instrument” of Paraguay. Can people go to the beach in Paraguay?

Mexico: Did you know that up to the 1930s or 1940s the Mariachis only had harps, guitars and violins and no trumpets? The music of Veracruz, Mexico, is centered on the harp. LA BAMBÁ is “harp music” from Veracruz . . . over 100 years old.

What other countries has he visited during his career as a concert artist?

Some of these may have been mentioned during the assembly and the students will enjoy finding them on a map: Australia, New Zealand, Turkey, Japan, Canada, Panama, Colombia, Mexico, Venezuela, Brazil, Paraguay, The Netherlands (Holland), Czech Republic, Austria, Germany, Italy, France, Switzerland, England, Scotland, Ireland . . .

History:

Prehistoric origin with the bow. Current presence of bow harps in African countries. The Spanish harp arrived to our countries during the centuries of colonization. Evolution through the centuries . . . many types of harps around the world . . . the “piano” is a harp inside a box.

Construction materials: Wood, metal (sometimes for the tuning pins, although other times they may be made of wood). What are his strings made out of? (Nylon today in most of our harps, gut, metal, etc.)

Musical identity: Unique music styles are part of the identity of most cultures.

Multicultural: Many of our musical styles are the result of the evolution and/or blending of musical styles of Spanish, African or Amerindian origins.

Spain: Most instruments used today in our countries came originally from Spain. In many cases they were transformed in several ways so that today we have a wide variety of instruments derived from the Spanish guitar and several types of harps derived from the Spanish harps of the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries.

Africa: Many rhythmic styles and instruments of Latin America, specially in the Caribbean and Brazil, have African roots. Some harp music, particularly in Venezuela, has African rhythmic styles.

“Amerindian” musical roots: Today, the music of the Andes has varying degrees of mixture of Spanish musical elements and the local music styles of the “Indians” which were present centuries before the arrival of the Spaniards.

Traditional learning method: Like most music all over the world, our traditional music is learned “by ear” and most performers do not know music theory.

Physics:

Relationship of length and thickness of the strings respect to the musical notes (high or low, etc.). The need of a vibrating “sound box” for the loudness of our harps.

Note: The CELTIC HARP (also called Irish harp), played from at least the 700 A.D. until the late 1700s, was a very important instrument in Celtic countries like Scotland and Ireland. It is of a different shape and it is played in a different way from that of the South American and Mexican harps. There is no direct relationship between the Latin American harps and the Celtic harps.

The PEDAL HARP, also called the CLASSICAL HARP, began being designed in the 18th century, but the way we know it today is a French design from the 19th century. The PEDAL HARP is NOT a folk instrument.

Note: The content of the educational performances may vary according to the ages, educational level or total duration of the educational performance. Use the ideas listed above, adapted to the age and grade level) to review the concepts covered during the educational performance.

Other ideas: Coloring maps.

Concepts that could be discussed in the classroom include the human aspects of the real life adventure of Alfredo: His migrations: From Cuba to Venezuela when he was 11, then from Venezuela to Colombia, arriving there just in time to celebrate his 17th birthday.

Immigrating to the United States, as a harpist and medical doctor, in 1975. Deciding between careers: Medicine and music. What did he decide to do in order to follow his love of music as well as having time for his family?

THE NEVER ENDING PROCESS OF LEARNING: How long did it take him to learn????

Visit www.alfredo-rolando-ortiz.com for information regarding his recordings, books, concerts and more.

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