

## Builds own harpsichord

# Curiosity draws a local man into musical past

Story and photos by Von Brashler

Gary Hango of Sandy always wanted a harpsichord, but lacked the \$2,000-\$5,000 required to buy one.

So he designed and built his own instrument from scratch.

"I'd always liked harpsichord music, and played the piano already," said the 1975 Sandy Union High School graduate.

Working only from a book on medieval harpsichords, he crafted his own instrument out of cedar, beech, red, spruce and cherry wood.

The woods were all available on the local market, and the cherry wood end blocks to his harpsichord's keyboard were taken from a tree in the backyard.

Hango labored three years in the construction of his first harpsichord, which he started in 1975.

The instrument resembles a baby grand piano with its wing shape, 5½-foot length and fine woods.

Actually, it's a remake of a 14th Century Italian harpsichord that caught Hango's eye in the book.

The builder's only other

experience in woodcrafting was a book stand he made for the family home near Roslyn lake.

His main occupation is drafting at his father's firm in Beaverton.

But initiative in music is nothing new to Hango.

### SELF-TAUGHT

He taught himself to play the piano from books, and now relaxes himself at home by playing "simple things" like Bach.

Today he even writes musical pieces for his harpsichord — "things that sound like Bach," he said.

Building the first harpsichord was no piece of cake, to hear young Hango talk.

"It was tough to figure out all the string lengths, and a lot of mathematics was involved."

So Hango bought a kit from a man in Portland — one of few other harpsichord builders around, and tried to find way in which he could save time with his own designs.

His second model, which also rests on a wooden stand, is built from bass wood, spruce and maple, with box wood keys.

His first model features reverse keyboards, with light

colored sharps made of beech wood and darker naturals in walnut.

In fact, both models are completely made of woods, except for metal strings, pins and other action parts.

Hango's original harpsichord varies from others on the market in that it has only two strings for each note, while some others have three or even five strings.

His second creation, built from the kit, sports a unique carved message on the keyboard: "G.L. Hango Fecit 1978."

The harpsichord was the forerunner of the piano, and varies from the piano in the way it plucks the keys rather than striking them with hammers.

### A REVIVAL

Its delicate sound, Hango said, is returning to popularity, with a worldwide revival of the harpsichord since the turn of the century.

Hango points out that the harpsichord is easier to play and more portable than the piano.

Hango labored two years on his own harpsichord before he actually played one.

Finally curiosity over-

came him, and he visited a display at the Western Forestry Center a year ago where Portland kit designer Robert Horning let him play one.

Hango taught himself to play one hand at a time.

"I first learned notes from a book, and then just sort of slowly learned the piece in my right hand. I would memorize it, and then try my left hand. Then I'd sort of combine them."

Despite being self-taught, Hango comes from a musical family in which his sister and two brothers play the piano.

In school, however, Gary played the snare drums.

Now he's teaching himself to play the recorder.

While the harpsichord kit taught him a lot of shortcuts for making his own harpsichords, Hango says he has no immediate plans to make another.

Instead, he's breaking new ground with plans to design and build a clavichord, another stringed instrument with a keyboard that preceded the modern piano.

"I've never played a clavichord before," he said with a familiar smile, "but I want to build one to try."



GARY HANGO tunes his latest harpsichord creation in a local music shop before putting it on the market.



AT THE KEYBOARD, harpsichord builder Gary Hango plucks the delicate strings.



BABY GRAND appearance of Gary Hango's crafted harpsichord comes from its wing shape, 5½ foot length and exotic woods. The design in the soundboard in the foreground is Hango's copy of a 15th century Italian harpsichord design.

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QUILL FILING is part of regular maintenance on a wooden harpsichord, an instrument that plucks the keys rather than strike them like the piano.



TUNING TIME comes regularly for a harpsichord, so Gary Hango weekly picks up tuning fork and socket wrench.