

on the lighter side

Andreas Vollenweider

by Carrol McLaughlin

In May 1985, 6200 people crowded into the Universal Amphitheatre in Los Angeles to hear a *harpist*—Andreas Vollenweider (pronounced “Fole-en-veye-der”). Months earlier, on his US debut tour, the Swiss-born musician had played to sold-out houses in New York, Dallas, Philadelphia, and San Francisco; in Europe, 188 of his last 189 concerts had been sold out.

Andreas Vollenweider does not play the harp with a traditional technique! On his right hand he uses long, artificially strengthened fingernails. As a protection heavy tape is wrapped around the second and third fingers of his left hand. Neither is Vollenweider’s instrument traditional: when asked to describe the harp he plays, Vollenweider smiled and said, “Well, it was originally a Salvi Daphne.” There are many modifications. He has designed an amplification system with a microphone for each string; he has also attached a dampening mechanism which he operates with his left knee. To achieve special sounds, Vollenweider has made some of his own strings out of materials such as silk, but on the rest of the harp, however, he uses nylon strings because of their durability when played with the nails.

Vollenweider performs on several instruments, making modifications to all of them. He plays a flute incorporating extra holes covered with fish skin to get a Chinese or Jap-



Andreas Vollenweider (photo by C. B. Holt)



Vollenweider displays the famous fingernails during his interview with Carrol McLaughlin (photo by C. B. Holt)

anese effect. He also plays piano, guitar, saxophone, and koto.

Vollenweider began playing a small Irish harp seven years ago, but soon became dissatisfied with its range and advanced to the pedal harp. He has never taken harp lessons, but did study some music with his father. He remembers asking a harpist friend in Switzerland to give him some pointers several years ago, but recalls that the experience was unsuccessful because he had played his own way too long. He believes strongly in following one's own path, stating, "The profit in going your own way is much, much bigger than to follow a given path. But you must be strong and defend your ideas—you can't switch back and forth, doing it your way, then someone else's way."

Vollenweider, now 31 years old, has been touring in Europe for thirteen years, and has written music for theater and motion pictures. When he is composing for records or concert, he thinks of himself as a storybook writer, using the instruments to make a soundtrack.

In concert, his ensemble includes gongs, tympani and mallet instruments, keyboards, guitar, wind instruments (including flute and saxophone), and harp. The music constantly evolves as the five persons in the group improvise together. Vollenweider believes in composing "not from the head, but from the heart . . . so it flows." He also requires that members of the audience become involved and use their imaginations to complete the picture he is presenting.

CBS has released three albums by Vollenweider: *Behind the Gardens—Behind the Wall—Under the Tree . . .*, *Caverna Magica*, and *White Winds*. The sales on these records have already reached nearly 2,000,000.

Vollenweider feels quite close to the harp and hopes that many people will become involved with it. "We were told 2000 years ago to see through the eyes of a child and to be children still. The harp can help us in this, with its



The Swiss harpist at work (photo by Darryl Pitt; courtesy of CBS Records)

innocence. If people would listen, there would be a lot of love. We should try it!"

When asked how he felt about his success and the extensive touring, he replied, "I don't like the travelling, but I *like* the playing!"

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On the Cover . . .

Jack Nebergall, San Francisco harpist and art collector, decided he wanted a miniature of one of his favorite harps. That decision made, he was left only with the choice of executant. He immediately called on his uncle, Bob Ferguson, of Albany, Oregon.

Ferguson, now retired, had followed his natural aptitudes and interests in art and design into a career in the designing of retail stores, banks, and offices up and down the West Coast. He developed an interest in materials and textures during his studies through high school, Oregon State University, and Chouinard Art Institute, and then carried this sense of materials into his day-to-day work. In addition to his professional work, Ferguson pursued fine arts in various forms as an avocation; now retired, he can devote all of his time to artistic pursuits.

Ferguson's studio and workshop in Albany is in a converted sheep barn. It is a spacious, well lighted area filled with the tools and materials of a devoted craftsman. The studio is known as a *Bottega*, a 15th century term originating in Florence, Italy, during the High Renaissance. It

simply means a workshop for the creation of aesthetically pleasing objects.

Ferguson is no stranger to the world of music. In his younger years he played in bands and orchestras—on wind instruments mostly—and acquired some training on the cello.

The creation of the miniature harp, pictured on the cover, was approached from the standpoint of the development of a piece of art while remaining true to the model itself. Its total height is 18 1/16 inches—one quarter scale of the concert grand harp it represents.

The project which commenced in 1982 required scale drawings of the original harp and its details; photographs from every possible angle, both close-up and full, were taken.

Research was carried out on harp construction and components. Dale Barco, distinguished harp specialist, was consulted for further information. Barco kindly supplied materials used in authentic harp construction to carry the concept through in the finished miniature.