

# In Memoriam: Mary Emma Allen Smitten

July 30, 1925–March 1, 2005

by Elizabeth Huntley

Mary Emma Allen Smitten, known to the harp world as Mimi Allen, died on March 1, 2005, at the Chateau Girardeau Nursing home in Cape Girardeau, Missouri. She was seventy-nine years old.

A native Missourian, Mimi began her study of the harp at fourteen when family friends gave her an old Lyon & Healy style 22, which had been languishing for years in their attic. As her mother was a concert pianist, Mimi had studied the piano from her toddler days. In fact, she went on to study both harp and piano at Stephens College, where she received her Bachelor of Music degree when she was eighteen.

Following graduation from Stephens, Ms. Allen moved to New York to study piano with Isidor Philipp and harp with Carlos Salzedo. On two weeks notice, Salzedo asked her to join the Salzedo Concert Ensemble, a group managed by Columbia Artists and consisting of flute, cello and two harps. Salzedo himself played first harp. Ms. Allen stayed with the ensemble for four years before moving back to Sikeston, Missouri, with her husband, Kenneth Smitten, Jr.

It was back in Missouri as she raised her two children that Mimi Allen's career as a jazz harpist blossomed. Playing what she considered classic jazz by ear, she recorded two albums of standards for Decca Records: *Strings of My Heart* and *There Goes My Harp*. Her third album, *Mimi Allen Plays Gershwin*, was released independently. She also recorded an album for children, whose proceeds went to the St. Jude's Research Hospital for Children, in Memphis.

Active in both the classical and jazz musical worlds, Mimi Allen was featured soloist in the CBS



Mimi Allen

series *Montages*. Marcel Grandjany invited her to perform at the first AHS conference in New York. She did studio work in St. Louis and Memphis, and taught masterclasses as well as privately. A sense of her jazz style may be found in her unique arrangements available from Vanderbilt and Lyon & Healy.

Mimi Allen is survived by her daughter, Linda Keefer Phelan, two grandchildren and three great-grandchildren. ∞