

on the lighter side

Pop Harpist De Wayne Fulton

by Carrol McLaughlin

De Wayne Fulton is one of the best-known names in the harp world. His work in the popular harp field has brought the harp to thousands of people who have, through his efforts, become fans of the instrument.

One of the major goals of Fulton's life has been to help the harp gain acceptance as a solo instrument. He has performed for the past twelve years at the Warehouse Restaurant in Marina Del Rey, California, and also does many harp concerts each year, either solo recitals or with a singer. Fulton is a faculty member of the Salvi Summer Festival of Pop and Jazz Harp, and he is involved in recording solo harp albums on his own label.

Fulton believes a strong technical background is imperative for any harpist interested in the pop field: his own classical background confirms this. Fulton began study of the harp with Kajetan Attl, first harpist with the San Francisco Symphony, when Fulton was in high school. Two years later he heard harpist Edward Vito perform with the NBC Orchestra under the direction of Toscanini, an experience that inspired him to study with Vito; he made arrangements to spend one year in New York, studying with Vito and attending classes at The Juilliard School. Later studies took him to Vienna, Austria, where he studied with Hubert Jelinek at the Academy of Music. Fulton graduated from the Academy with a Bachelor of Music degree in 1955.

Fulton's first professional experience came while he was in Austria. He was asked to play with the Vienna Philharmonic and the State Opera as second harp to Jelinek. Only men were allowed in the orchestra at that time, and because Fulton was Jelinek's only male student, he was allowed to take the position of second harp when Jelinek's older brother retired from that position. Also while in Vienna, Fulton made his first record, an album of popular music with Gretta Keller, a well-known European chanteuse.

After completing his studies, Fulton became first harpist with the Istanbul Symphony and taught harp for three years at the Istanbul Conservatory. Fulton also performed with a flutist and toured throughout Anatolia and Turkey. Many unconventional ways of moving the harp had to be devised, including the use of camels, broken-down jeeps, and strapping the harp to the back of a Turkish porter!

In 1958 Fulton auditioned for Von Karajan in Germany and received the honor of being appointed first harpist with the Berlin Philharmonic. He was the first American to be accepted into the orchestra.

One year later he was offered the position of first harpist with the Honolulu Symphony, and it was there that Fulton became involved with the harp in the field of popular music. He met the entertainment director of the Sheraton Hotel Corporation, who was opening a new restaurant in Waikiki Beach called the Captain's Galley.



De Wayne Fulton

Fulton had heard several people play pop harp, including his one-time teacher Edward Vito (although they had worked together only on classical material) and Jack Nebergall who was performing in San Francisco. Fulton himself had very little experience in the field at that time, and recalls knowing only three pieces when he was first hired at the Captain's Galley. He began by playing *September Song*, *The Third Man Theme*, and *Ebb Tide* over and over again. He steadily increased his repertoire, using a knowledge of chords that he had learned earlier on the piano, and asking pop pianists and arrangers for new ideas to use on the harp.



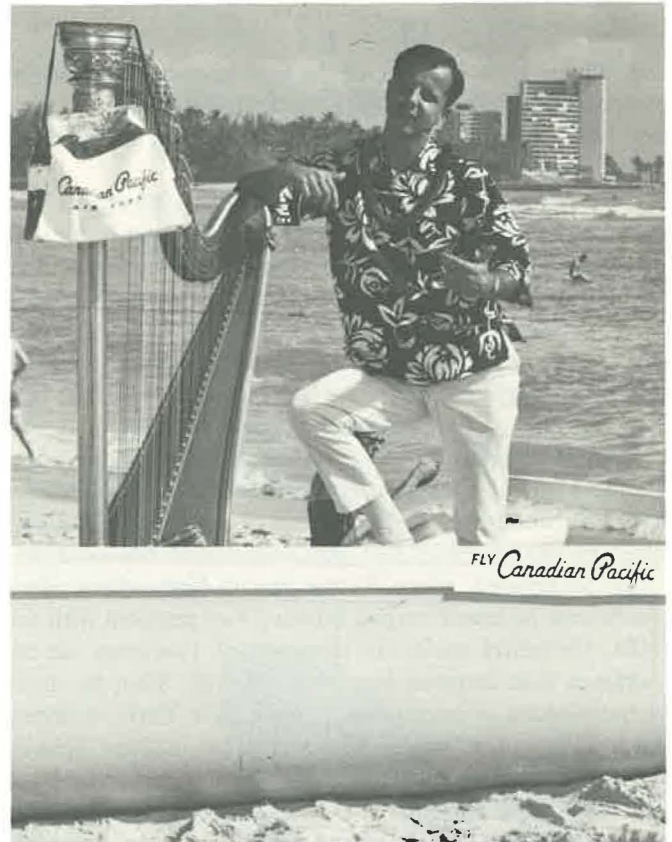
With Nicanor Zabaleta at a master class given by Zabaleta at Sienna, Italy

In 1964 Fulton traveled to Japan to play for three months at the Palace Hotel in Tokyo. While in Japan he made many special appearances, including performances for NKH television and the American Embassy in Japan. Fulton's tour was so successful that he returned three years in a row to perform in Japan.



Fulton on board ship between Istanbul and Genoa, on his way to the newly-opened Salvi factory where he purchased the first Salvi concert grand harp to be built

One of the secrets of Fulton's popular success is his large number of harp recordings. His first solo pop harp album, made in Hawaii, was called *The Harp Wears a Lei*. While in Japan, Fulton recorded a total of five albums with Japan Columbia. In 1966 he established his own label and began to produce his own records, which are on sale at clubs or concert halls where he performs. He has recorded a total of sixteen albums, of which seven solo albums and two recorded with singers are still available.



Posing for a travel advertisement

De Wayne Fulton now resides in California, and, performs five nights a week at the Warehouse Restaurant in Marina Del Rey (adjacent to Los Angeles). The owner of the Warehouse, Burt Hixson, had first heard Fulton perform in Hawaii. Hixson designed the lounge of his restaurant in California to be a showcase for the harp, specifically to highlight the talents of De Wayne Fulton. The lounge features a large amplification system which Fulton designed, using Barcus-Berry transducers on the harp. During the course of his experimentation with amplified harp sound, Fulton has used phase shifters, tremolo, reverb, and other kinds of electronic devices.

The work of De Wayne Fulton at the Warehouse Restaurant has stimulated much interest in the harp through the exposure of audiences to the beauties of harp playing, and through the establishment of new jobs for other harpists by restaurant and hotel owners who have observed his success. Fulton has been extraordinarily successful at what he calls his "missionary work," to bring the harp to popular acceptance as a solo instrument.