

In Memoriam: Victor Salvi OMRI, Hon RAM

March 4, 1920—May 10, 2015

by Marco Salvi

VICTOR Salvi was the youngest son of the Venetian instrument maker Rodolfo Salvi, who moved his atelier from Venice to Viggiano, a small town in southern Italy with a deep musical instrument-making history. Later, in order to support the musical career of his eldest son Alberto, Rodolfo moved to Chicago where Victor was born in 1920. Young Victor was naturally drawn to the harp, as he grew up among them. Rodolfo's laboratory was already building harps, as well as other string instruments, and Victor's first teacher and sister, Aida, was a professional harpist with the Chicago Civic Opera. Also, his older brother Alberto was already a world-renowned harp soloist and virtuoso by the time Victor was born. Victor himself became a professional harpist in 1938 when he began touring with an ensemble playing concerts from the Midwest to the East Coast until the United States entered World War II. He then joined the US Navy where he did routine maintenance work until it was discovered that he was a harpist and was transferred to Illinois' Great Lakes Naval Station to join their concert band. After the war, Mr. Salvi successfully auditioned and toured the United States as a soloist with the St. Louis Chamber Ensemble and later performed with the New York Philharmonic and NBC Symphony Orchestras under such conductors as Toscanini, Szell, Monteux, Mitropoulos and de Sabata. Once in New York City, he began to think about how the harp could be improved, and following his father's steps he opened a harp repair shop and began the designing and building of the "new" Salvi harp.

In 1954, Mr. Salvi, with the collaboration of a few craftsmen, aspired to create a harp with a different type of sound, and, after much experimentation, he constructed his first prototype. In 1956, he moved to Italy and founded his new company at the 16th century Villa Maria, in Genoa. The Salvi harp met with increasing success and after about a dozen years, the company outgrew the site, and moved north to the



Victor Salvi in the 1950s.

Italian region of Piemonte known for its Baroque furniture made by master carpenters, wood sculptors and inlayers. In 1970, Mr. Salvi was awarded the first prize at the Exhibition of Crafts (*Mostra del Artigianato*) in Florence. In 1974, he moved his firm to Piasco, a small town in the southern Varaita Valley near the city of Turin, where it remains today.

As a harpmaker and innovator, Mr. Salvi attributed the sonority of his instruments to the unique single-shell construction of their bodies and their reinforcement by wooden ribs. Later, he moved the construction of the harp mechanism to the village of Sainte Croix, in Switzerland, a town renowned for precision mechanics, active in watch-making and precision machinery such as typewriters and music boxes. He is credited with contributing numerous significant mechanical advancements to the harp including the first to use a rust-proof linkage system as

well as a method to strengthen the neck. His strong belief in research and development is still a cornerstone of the Salvi company today.

In 1987, Mr. Salvi surprised the harp world when he acquired his main competitor, Lyon & Healy Harps, saving this company from a very uncertain future so that it could continue to focus on making the Lyon & Healy harp as it had since 1889. Also in the 1980s, the Salvi company expanded to music publishing, and string manufacturing by acquiring the British company Bow Brand.

Having started with a few skilled workers and the desire to create his own harp, the group of harp manufacturing and associated businesses that Mr. Salvi has assembled over his lifetime now employs over three hundred employees worldwide.

Over the years, Mr. Salvi acquired the most comprehensive collection of antique harps in the world, including rare harps manufactured by Cousineau, Nadermann, Renault, Erard, Egan, and Pleyel as well as the first Lyon & Healy ever constructed. These instruments have been given a permanent home in the first museum solely dedicated to the harp at the Victor Salvi Museum in Piasco.

Through the Victor Salvi Foundation, works by renowned individual composers were commissioned by Mr. Salvi, including Valeri Kikta (harp and voice; harp and cello; harp and violin; harp and viola), Kenji Bunch (violin and harp), Zhou Long (flute, harp and string orchestra), Thomas Rajna (harp and violin), James Bassi (harp and chorus) and Paul Sarcich's *Uncover the Harps*, commissioned for the 50th Anniversary of Salvi Harps in 2004. The Foundation presented HRH The Prince of Wales with a specially crafted harp made in his honor by Salvi Harps for use by the Royal Harpist. It has also given grants to the International Harp Archives at Brigham Young University and promoted many young harpists with debut recitals and recordings.

Victor Salvi is recognized and respected worldwide for his innovations and for his support of harpists and harp-related activities. In 2004, Mr. Salvi was made an Honorary Member of the Royal College of Music (Hon RAM) by HRH The Prince of Wales. He was recognized with the Distinguished Award for



Victor Salvi.

Service to the International Harp Community by the World Harp Congress in 1993 and was celebrated for his contribution to the harp by the American Harp Society in 2007. In 2013, he was made a Knight of the Order of Merit of the Italian Republic (Cavaliere dell'Ordine al Merito della Repubblica Italiana [OMRI]) by the President of the Italian Republic. He was awarded honorary citizenship in the towns of: Piasco, Costigliole di Saluzzo, Viggiano, Chateaufort de Grasse (in France, where he lived), and Cartagena (Colombia). He also received many other awards and recognitions throughout the world, as an entrepreneur and as a philanthropist.

Mr. Salvi, according to his wishes, now rests in Piasco, next to his factory, and his harps. ☞

AHS, Inc. Social Media - Stay Connected



#HarpElevated

#HarpSociety

@HarpSociety

@AHSSummerInst

@AHSConference