

ALFREDO ROLANDO ORTIZ

Holiday Harps

Art Form: Music

Style: Traditional and Contemporary

Culture: South American

MEET THE ARTIST:

Alfredo Rolando Ortiz was born in Cuba in 1946. Composer, lecturer, author and recording artist, he emigrated to Venezuela in 1958. He began learning to play the Venezuelan folk harp from a school friend in 1961. He commenced his studies with Alberto Romero on the Paraguayan harp a year later. Within three years, Alfredo was performing professionally, recording his first album, and beginning his medical studies in Medellin, Colombia. Music, which eventually would win Alfredo international acclaim and become his life's focus, supported him through his medical studies. Like his background, Dr. Ortiz's harp music is rich and eclectic. His repertoire covers the folk, classical and popular music of many countries. This multi-talented artist is a master on the Paraguayan harp, a warm and accessible educator, and an engaging performer for audiences of all ages. He is also a prolific recording artist and composer whose work has been performed and recorded by classical and folk harpists in many countries.

ABOUT THE PERFORMANCE:

Holiday Harps is both an interactive mix of holiday music and informative look at the Paraguayan harp. The performance features the music played for festivals celebrated during wintertime, such as Christmas, Chanukah and New Year's Day, and an informal discussion about the history and development of this popular and special instrument. Like the many-stringed harp, the performance incorporates music of different cultures, countries and religions and is held together by the solid frame of beautiful melodies. Songs include lively traditional tunes from Latin America, as well as standard favorites such as Jingle Bells. Students are encouraged to ask questions and join in the celebration of the music.



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PREPARING FOR THE EXPERIENCE:

A number of cultures celebrate holidays in December, January and February, including Chanukah, Christmas, Kwanzaa, New Year's Day, the Chinese New Year and Winter Solstice. Some of these holidays have religious roots. Others have ancient cultural roots. Each is marked by festive gatherings with family or friends, by special food or delicious meals, by giving and receiving, or simply reflecting on what it is we have. All of these holidays have deep meaning and importance to those who celebrate them and are enriched by age-old traditions of storytelling, music-making or dance.

Music is an important element in the history of a culture. The harp was first brought to South America by the Spanish in their early days of exploration and conquest, and evolved into an important instrument in folk and popular music. In 1588, Jesuit missionaries arrived in Asuncion, Paraguay and converted many Guarani Indians. The Jesuits built villages and taught the Indians wood carving for church ornamentation and music for church services. They were expelled by King Charles III of Spain in 1767, but the Guarani continued to build and play the harp and guitar, blending their own music with Spanish melodies to create a new musical sound.

In South America, harps are played for festivals and celebrations by street musicians, concert artists, and in ensembles with guitars and violins. They vary in design from region to region, but the Arpa Paraguaya is the most popular. Hand crafted from wood and very light (10-15 pounds), it produces a bright, powerful sound. It has 36 nylon strings. The right hand plays the melody while the left is used to play the accompaniment on the lower strings. The right plays with the fingernails, while the left with fingertips or fingernails. The harp is tuned to the diatonic major scale or natural minor scale. Paraguay has recognized the importance of music by designating a national musical instrument - the harp.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- What did you think of the harp? Do you think the size, shape, and number of strings affect its sound? How so?
- Discuss the 'full' sound of the music played on the harp. What happens to the way a song sounds when the harpist can both play the melody and accompany it?
- What parts of the performance did you find most interesting? Were any of the songs that were played familiar to you? What were your favorite songs?
- What kinds of songs or music do you sing or hear during winter celebrations?
- What are the origins of South American harps?
- How did harp music develop and evolve in Paraguay?

FRAMEWORK FOCUS - LANGUAGE ARTS:

There are many folk tales, myths, and legends linked to the winter months. It is important to note that some places are cold in winter months and some are warm. Ask your students to create a story that could happen only in winter in a cold climate. For example, Frosty the Snowman couldn't take place in July. Students may begin by making a list on the board of potential 'winter' characters and seasonal events for cold climates. Individuals can use these suggestions or their own imaginations to write an original story. Two or more students can work together, students may work in small groups, or the story may be planned and verbally told by the entire class. Younger students can draw a series of illustrations of a winter story created and told by the class. If possible, students should try to include a song heard during the performance or a song that has relevance to their story.

- Legend:
- 🎨 Artistic perception
 - ❖ Creative expression
 - ▶ Historical & cultural context
 - ⇒ Aesthetic valuing
 - * Connections, Relations, Applications

ACTIVITIES TO ENHANCE THE EXPERIENCE:

- ▶ On a map that includes both South and North America, research, identify and label the places that Spain explored and then conquered and colonized in the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries.
- ⇒ Have the students explore the origins of the popular music of another South American or Latin American country that the Spanish colonized. Once they have selected a country or type of music, ask them to think about the ways in which both cultures' (Spanish and indigenous) music might have been changed, affected or blended by their common exposure.
- 🎨 Listen to the two types of Paraguayan music which are traditionally performed on the harp: the *galopa*, a lively dancing rhythm, and the *guarania*, a slow flowing melody. Ask the students to draw a non-literal picture while listening to each type of music, using the music as a source of inspiration for their artwork. Encourage students to experiment with the elements of line, shape and color as they express their ideas and feelings.
- ❖ Families often have their own traditions at special times. Encourage students to share their traditions with the class. These traditions may include visits to relatives, shopping sprees, vacation trips, preparing food, attending festivals, or other family events. Students should include details about any special foods or events they particularly enjoy. They may want to bring to class an object, photo or food to share that represents a part of their family's tradition.
- ⇒ Investigate and report on other holidays that occur or start during the wintertime such as Boxing Day, Twelfth Night, or Winter Solstice. Describe any special foods, music, rituals, dance, or traditions that might be a part of these holidays.



BIBLIOGRAPHY/WEBLINKS:

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Funk & Wagnalls, Mahwah, NJ, 1995.
- Ortiz, Alfredo Rolando. *Latin American Harps: History, Music and Techniques*. Corona, CA., 1984.
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