



Journées Internationales de la

harpe

By Patrice Fisher



Spectacular sunset from the balcony of the
Salle de la Guinguette concert venue.
Saint Pierre, Martinique.
Top left: Harpist Clare Le Fur

When we arrived in Fort de France, Martinique, as we left the airport we were enveloped in a blanket of tropical heat. We were opening a door to a new world and leaving our normal life behind. Sylvie Becrit, a member of the Glissando Association, picked us up and drove us to her house at the top of a hill in Le Francois. Sylvie, as well as many of the members of the Glissando Association, are the parents of Martinique harp students. There are many hills on this mountainous island and many small coastal towns. One of the most wonderful respites from the heat is to sit on Sylvie Becrit's veranda. You can gaze at the bay at the bottom of the hill and feel the gentle trade winds blow across her dinner table, while you have long conversations about life with the musicians of the festival.

We were here to participate in the *Journées internationales de la harpe dans la Caraïbe et en Guyane* or Caribbean Days of Harp. Now in its 30th year, the festival was founded by French harpist, Claire Le Fur, and produced by the Glissando Association. Claire lived in Martinique from 1989 to 1997. She produced the first *Journées de la Harpe* festival during a weekend in 1993, to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the birth of her French harp teacher, Lily Laskine. She brought together instrumental ensembles from Martinique and Guadeloupe to perform in Fort de France. Claire says, "When I arrived in Martinique in 1989, I initially met only the traditional musicians of the island, because there was no harpist." She worked with Martinique flutist and composer, Max Cilla, and numerous Martinique percussionists, including Sissi and steel drum player, Guy Louiset. This began Claire's love affair with the Beguine and the music of the French Antilles. She says, "I dreamed that the harp could really now be part of the culture of the West Indies." Claire taught me a Martinique Creole Beguine, "*La Belle Amelie*," written in 1931, by Ernest Léardée. I wrote an arrangement of this traditional favorite for two harps. On page ____, you will find the arrangement for Harp 1.

The French Island of Martinique is in the Lesser Antilles of the West Indies, in the eastern Caribbean Sea. It is known as the "Island of Flowers" and one of the immediate things that impresses you, as you drive through the hills, is the lush green vegetation and abundance of flowers. This three-week festival takes place in many cultural centers, schools, churches, and senior homes throughout the Caribbean islands of Martinique, Guadeloupe, and French Guyana in South America. Claire says, "Our mission is to make the harp known to everyone, because it brings joy, peace, and happiness to people of all ages. Since the first year, we have performed

in the small villages in all corners of the island. In Martinique, there are many winding mountain roads, and it is dangerous to drive at night, so we need to go where the people live. It's a "nomadic" festival.

We had a whirlwind tour of daily concerts. Each event was in a different town. One evening, the concert might be in a beachfront hall, at the foot of St. Pierre volcano and the next at the top of a hill, in an ancient monastery. Saturday's church concert featured a full orchestra and Creole choir of Martinique musicians. Claire says, "We have always included nursing homes, schools, churches, and hospitals, because the harp is very soothing. Young children are passionate about the harp, and they remember their school encounters with harpists for the rest of their lives. In senior homes, they no longer feel pain and the music brings them joy. They even come and try the harp at 100 years old!"



A concert in Guadeloupe.

Harpist, Claire Le Fur, has performed for more than 30 years with *Les Alizes* (the Tradewinds), an eclectic group of French musician friends, including Raymond on the guitar, Franck on clarinet, Francois on flute, and Cecile on violin. *Les Alizes* are the core musicians of the festival. Our Louisiana group of musicians played alone and, as guests, with *Les Alizes* and with different soloists. One of our musical highlights was working with 87-year-old Guadeloupe clarinetist, Eddy Gustave. Many Martinique musicians participated, including Sissi, an Afro-Creole percussionist, Jean Luis, a jazz harmonica player and vocalists, Roseline, Marguerite, Coretta and Gertrude, as well as the Hubert Désir Choir, and the Crescendo Orchestra.

Just like the concert venues, the Tradewinds group is a nomadic collection of musicians of widely different backgrounds. Claire masterfully combines

these Caribbean, classical, popular and jazz musicians with the harp. Every concert features a different mixture of small ensembles, where the harp is always an important part.

All types of harps are featured. There are folk harps of all sizes, Venezuelan Llanera harp, and pedal harp. There is even a carbon fiber, single action, harp that Claire plays underwater. Over the past 30 years, a whole host of world class harpists have come to the French Antilles to participate in the *Journées de La Harpe* festival. Claire says, "Many great folk harpists have participated in the festival, like Geber Fernandez (Venezuela), Carlos Orosco (Colombia), Gerard Zarate, Ramon Romero, and Ismael Ledesma (Paraguay), Lynn Saoirse (Ireland), Remi Myrdhin, Jakez François, Clotilde Trouillaud (Brittany), and Kora player, Djeli Mussa Conde (Mali).

Festival poster



Journées Internationales de la Harpe
dans la Caraïbe et en Guyane

30 ans de festival 1993-2023

De l'Orient à l'Occident
De la Chine à la Nouvelle Orléans

Martinique du 16 au 31 octobre 2023
Guadeloupe du 18 au 24 octobre - Guyane du 2 au 11 novembre

La harpe s'entoure des instruments du monde

Mardi 31 octobre - 19h30
SCHOELCHER - La Batelière
Tel : +596 596 61 49 49/ 06 11 62 65 64

Concert de clôture du festival en Martinique

Le quatuor ARPA de la harpiste Patrice Fisher de NOUVELLE ORLEANS
Musique jazz, Cajun, Créole, latino et antillaise

Hommage à
Mel BONIS (1856-1937)
Leona Gabriel (1891 - 1971)
Christiane EDA-PIERRE (1932-2020)

- Les martiniquais : Sissi percussion, Coretta JEAN ALEXIS, Roselyne CYRILLE, Gertrude SEININ
- Les guadeloupéens : Eddy GUSTAVE et son groupe, Erika LORMEL, Jean-Claude ANTOINETTE
- Les guyanais : Fernando FERRER, Patricio MALCOM VALDES, Anne VERGER
- Bun Ching LAM (Chine), Emma THOMAZEAU (Suisse), Patrice FISHER et son groupe (Nouvelle Orléans)
- Claire LE FUR et les Allazés : F. DETTON, C. DE ROCCA, J.E. THIRIAULT, R. GRATIEN et leurs invités...

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LES HARPES CAMAC • HARPOSPHERE • AIR CARAÏBES

Paraguayan harpist Ismael Ledesma and harpist Claire Le Fur.

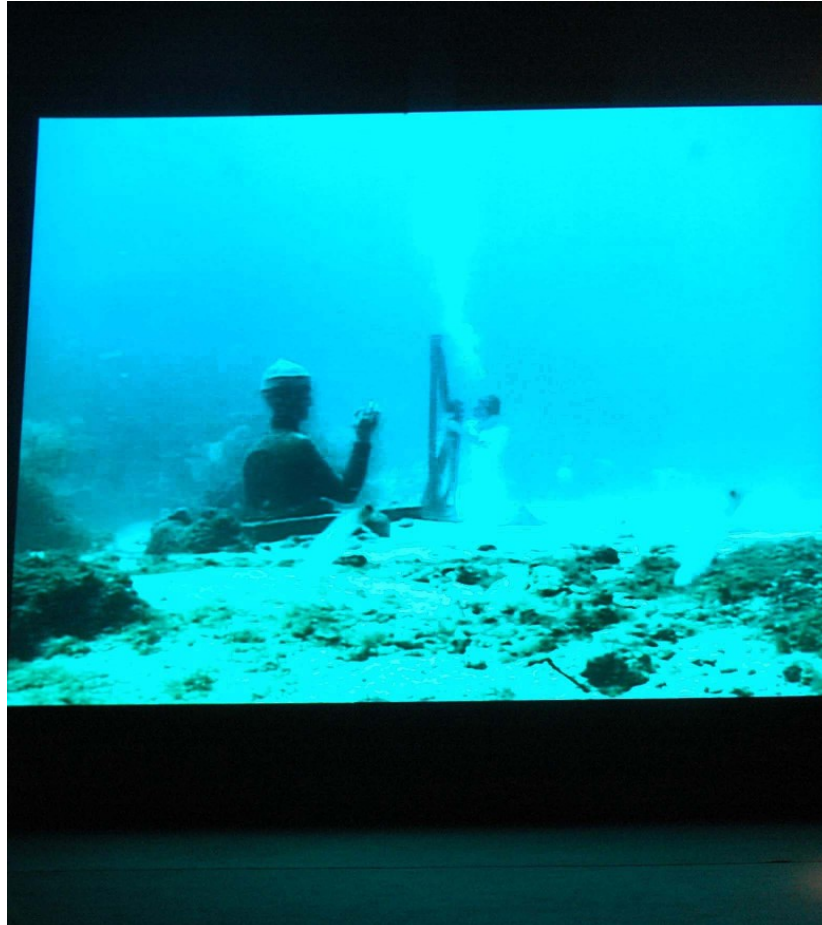
Great classical harpists have participated in the festival, including Marielle Nordamm, Huguette Géliot, Marie-Claire Jamet, Sylvain Blassel, Jean Michel Damase, Marie Pierre Langlamet (France), Anabelle Gutierrez (Cuba), Alessandra Magrini (Italy), Tajana Vucolic (Croatia), Ben Creighton Griffiths (Wales), and Vanja Ferrera (Brazil), as well as a host of internationally known composers, conductors, instrumentalists, and vocalists.

Every day is an adventure. We don't know what awaits us, until we arrive at each location. We try to follow Claire's lead and find ways to incorporate these French musicians into our Louisiana music group. We came with Cajun flutist, Betsy Braud, New Orleans jazz pianist, Fran Comiskey, my Guatemalan husband, Carlos, on *Cajon Peruano*, and myself, playing my compositions and arrangements on electro acoustic lever harp. It is a good thing that we are used to improvising, because, every day, we learn new music and work with new musicians.

Most of the concerts end with everyone playing together on one or more pieces from the French Antilles. These happy tunes are always greeted by the audience with spontaneous clapping and singing along and even dancing. You can listen to us playing together on "*Sa Ou Pe Ni Mano*," the composition of Clarinetist, Eddy Gustave, at Tinyurl.com/4c2n84u6. In the background, you can hear the audience clapping along with the music.

Our last concert was a three-hour event at the Hotel Batelière, with all the musicians playing little sets, against a spectacular view of the sunset over the Caribbean Sea. The hotel was a festival sponsor and provided accommodations for us. Claire says "We are helped a little bit, every year, by the French government, but much less since the pandemic. Our Glissando Association is small, and it is made up entirely of volunteers. We have sponsors like Air Caraïbes, for air travel, harp stores, like Harposphere, Salvi, and Camac, hotels and many friends who help us." Sylvie Becrit, Glissando Association member and harp mother, told me that, "Claire has 20 angels sitting on her shoulder, watching over her." We don't know how Claire does this; and except for a four-day pause caused by Hurricane Tammy, more than 20 concerts came together, with few resources and with a lot of love.

One of Claire's projects has been working together with French filmmakers, Michel Metery and Albert Falco, captain of Commander Cousteau's Calypso. She arranged music to accompany their underwater films. Her live music concerts, with film, are a part of the festival. Claire says, "When I arrived in Martinique in 1989, the harp fascinated



everyone. I had a brand-new composite carbon fiber harp with me called Pandora, invented by Didier Budin, founder of Harposphere. I also loved scuba diving. I wanted to combine my two passions, so we immersed the Pandora harp underwater. The sound was heard only by the fish, who immediately approached the instrument. The feeling of weightlessness and calm is exceptional under the sea. We now regularly accompany underwater images, choosing music adapted to the rhythm of the fish. We want to raise awareness about the protection of the underwater world."

You can see a video of Claire playing underwater with the fish at [Youtube.com/watch?v=BeBQMySqDOg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BeBQMySqDOg).

One of my favorite memories of our Martinique trip was getting up every morning and swimming on a sheltered beach, down the hill from the hotel. On some days, there were scuba divers venturing out. On other days, there were groups of ladies doing exercise classes in the water. On my last day, I had the beach to myself and my daydreams of playing music for the fishes.

You can learn more about the *Journées internationales de la harpe dans la Caraïbe et en Guyane*, at their Facebook page or their website Tinyurl.com/4tfkwe3e. You can contact Claire Le Fur by email at claire.lefur@free.fr.



Above: Harpist Clare Le Fur plays for fish and a human audience.
Top right: Venezuelan harpist Geber Fernandez with students.
Right: Paraguayan harpist Ismael Ledesma and Clair Le Fur with students.
Below: Glissando Association Student Harp Ensemble.





**At Eglise Saint Michel with Arpa musicians Patrice Fisher, Fran Comiskey, Betsy Braud, Eddy Gustave, and Carlos Valladares.
At Fonds St Jacques Arpa Monastery with Arpa musicians, and Claire Le Fur.**



Patrice Fisher Patrice is a Latin jazz harpist and composer, who favors the music of Latin America. Patrice lives in New Orleans, where she has been composing and performing since the 1980s. She has appeared at numerous international jazz festivals with her group, Arpa, and has published three books of her original compositions and other arrangements. You can find more information at PatriceFisher.com, as well as Facebook, Instagram, and her YouTube channel.

La Belle Amelie

Harp 1

Martinique Creole Beguine
by Ernest Léardée
Arrangement by Patrice Fisher

F F/C C7/E C7 C7/E C7 F F/C

F F/C C7/E C7 C7/E C F C7

A1 F F/C F F/C F D7 Gm D

Gm Gm/D Gm Gm/D C7/G C7 F C

A2 F F/C F F/C F F7 Bb Bb/F

Bb Gm F/C Bb C7 F C7

CHORUS

B1

F F/C C7/E C7 C7/E C7 F F/C

Musical notation for the first system of the chorus, measures 1-4. The treble clef has a key signature of one flat and a common time signature. The bass clef has a key signature of one flat. The melody in the treble clef consists of eighth and quarter notes. The bass line consists of quarter notes.

F F/C C7/E C7 C7/E C F C7

Musical notation for the second system of the chorus, measures 5-8. The treble clef has a key signature of one flat and a common time signature. The bass clef has a key signature of one flat. The melody in the treble clef consists of eighth and quarter notes. The bass line consists of quarter notes.

B2

F F/C C7/E C7 C7/E C7 F F/C

Musical notation for the third system of the chorus, measures 9-12. The treble clef has a key signature of one flat and a common time signature. The bass clef has a key signature of one flat. The melody in the treble clef consists of eighth and quarter notes. The bass line consists of quarter notes.

F F/C C7/E C7 C7/E C F

D.S. al Fine

FINE

Musical notation for the fourth system of the chorus, measures 13-16. The treble clef has a key signature of one flat and a common time signature. The bass clef has a key signature of one flat. The melody in the treble clef consists of eighth and quarter notes. The bass line consists of quarter notes. The system ends with a double bar line and the word "FINE".