

*Journal of the
American Musical
Instrument Society*

VOLUME XXVIII • 2002



Copyright by the [American Musical Instrument Society](#).
Content may be used in accordance with the principles of fair
use under [Section 107 of the United States Copyright Act](#).
Content may not be reproduced for commercial purposes.

Darcy Kuronen. *Dangerous Curves: The Art of the Guitar*. Boston: MFA Publications, 2000. 224 pp.: 180 color photographs. ISBN: 0-87846-478-6 cloth; 0-87846-485-9 paper. \$45.00 cloth; \$29.95 paper.

The design of the guitar has always been one of great beauty and dignity, not only in recent years, but throughout the life of the instrument. Furthermore, not only can a fine guitar produce exquisite sounds, but the idea of creating music and visual art simultaneously has prompted guitar builders and craftsmen to take the instrument to higher levels of artistic expression. By looking at the guitar and its ever-changing face, one can sense a musical history unfolding—in some way, etched into the grain of the wood are years of personality, desire, and soul from builders, players, and listeners. As author Darcy Kuronen states in his preface: “it has been interpreted with extraordinary variety of form and decoration, always reflecting the aesthetics of the time. . . . It is specifically because the guitar has avoided strict association with classical music and the concert hall that luthiers have been free to adopt such a wide variety of shapes and decorative schemes for the instrument’s construction” (p. 11). *Dangerous Curves* offers a beautifully illustrated and extremely intelligent look at the art of the guitar over the past four hundred years. The book was written in conjunction with an exhibit of the same name, held at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, from November 5, 2000, to February 25, 2001. Collaborating with various private collectors, working musicians, and other museums, Kuronen and others at the Museum planned and created an extraordinary and unique exhibit—devoted solely to the guitar, illuminating the length and breadth of the instrument’s long life.

Although not all the instruments included in the exhibit are pictured in the book, 110 important specimens are included. The volume opens with a short statement from Malcolm Rogers, Ann and Graham Gund Director of the Museum, followed by acknowledgments and a preface by Mr. Kuronen. In the acknowledgments, Kuronen recognizes the many people who helped create the exhibit, including the collectors, scholars, performers, and makers who contributed instruments and provided information about them. Following the preface is a foreword by rock guitarist, writer, and teacher Lenny Kaye, who played and toured with Patti Smith for many years. His essay is a loosely constructed history of the guitar from a performer’s point of view—written in a rapid-fire, hip style

that conveys his passion for the instrument along with his knowledge of its many forms.

Kuronen's approach to the book's organization is easily understandable for all types of readers. Proceeding in a broadly chronological order, the book opens with chapters organized by type of guitar, each of which consists of an introductory section relating developments in the design and building of guitars, followed by photographs and descriptions of individual instruments. The first chapter covers Baroque guitars, light and delicate instruments with four or five pairs of gut strings; in chapter two Kuronen describes the transition to six-string guitars in the late eighteenth century. Succeeding chapters cover lyre guitars and other hybrids, classical and flamenco, harp, flat-top, arch-top, Hawaiian, resonator, and lap steel guitars. Then follow chapters covering the decades from the 1950s through the 1990s, each of which opens with a short but well-researched synopsis of the period and the events that inspired the guitar designs—modern electric, modern acoustic, and other hybrid and custom-made instruments. In the 1980s chapter, for example, Kuronen notes the dominance of the solid-body electric guitar, as heavy-metal music gained popularity and synthesized British pop music took over the airwaves.

Each guitar is represented by one or two color photographs: in addition to a full-length shot, many are also shown in a close-up that accents a special feature of the instrument. (Some of these close-ups are enlarged to the full ten-inch-square page size, providing a spectacularly detailed view.) It would be impossible to include every significant guitar in one book, but this volume does a superb job of presenting a majority of the most important designs in the history of the instrument. Almost every commercially successful guitar maker of the twentieth century is represented in some way. Following the photographs and descriptions of instruments, the book concludes with a glossary of terms relating to the guitar, a checklist of the instruments, and a brief bibliography. The checklist includes more detailed information on each instrument (such as materials used, measurements, and current owner) than is given in the narrative sections.

Because of the emphasis on photographs, one might at first glance judge this to be a coffee table book or a novelty piece for guitarists, but Kuronen's masterfully written text—composed with insight, precision, and wit—along with his careful choice of instruments to include, make

this a valuable study. For the general reader it offers the basics of guitar history in an easy-to-understand manner; for the guitar enthusiast, it offers a wealth of unusual instruments and well-researched information.

To many guitarists in the world, the guitar symbolizes freedom and creativity. For years it has been the instrument of the common people, and it has often been scorned for attracting non-professional and dilettante players. For some, the guitar is a loud, screeching extension of a yell or cry; for others, it is an instrument of grace and beauty. Whether played by Jimi Hendrix or Andres Segovia, the guitar will always be a powerful tool of human expression. Kuronen's book effectively documents this expression.

Jeremy Tubbs
University of Memphis

Rudolf Hopfner. *Streichbogen: Katalog; Sammlung alter Musikinstrumente und Sammlungen der Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde in Wien [im Kunsthistorischen Museum Wien]*. Tutzing: Hans Schneider, 1998. 257 pp.: 134 black-and-white illustrations, 58 charts. 21 full-size drawings in separate portfolio. ISBN: 0-8108-3448-0. €126.80 (cloth).

John Huber. *The Development of the Modern Violin, 1775–1825: The Rise of the French School*. Stockholms universitet: Studier i musikvetenskap / Studies in Musicology 6. Frankfurt am Main: Erwin Bochinsky, 1998. vi, 315 pp.: 57 charts. ISBN: 3-923639-21-X. €39.00 (paper).

Josef Focht. *Der Wiener Kontrabass: Spieltechnik und Aufführungspraxis, Musik und Instrumente*. Tübinger Beiträge zur Musikwissenschaft 20. Tutzing: Hans Schneider, 1999. 338 pp.: 67 music exx. ISBN: 3-7952-0990-0. €67.50 (cloth).

Considering the importance of the violin family in Western music, it is surprising how few and far between are scholarly treatments of topics relating to the history of bowed strings. A variety of factors have contributed to this. In contrast to other instrument families, violins and their relatives have been much more susceptible to periodic "modernization," which not only limits the number of first-rate examples that survive in or near their original condition, but also can make it difficult to discern what is original. Because of their mutability, most extant old violins are still in use, dispersed around the world, in private hands, which