

The NEVELTEC harp in 12 questions

Interview with Frédéric Nicolet, co-founder of NEVELTEC Sàrl

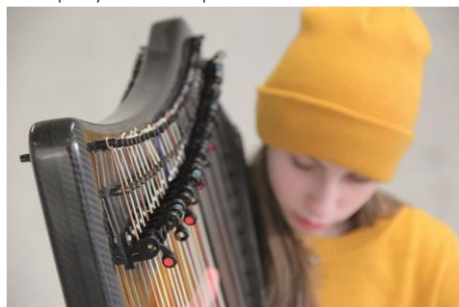
by Anne-Sophie Vrignaud

1. Where did the idea to manufacture electric harps come from?

My wife Anja had a beautiful concert harp but becoming a mother of 4 unfortunately didn't have the time to play it any longer. We decided to sell it. I play bass and guitar. Singing being also very important in my wife's daily life, she would often ask me to accompany her as she could not do this herself as she no longer had an instrument. After some research I discovered the electric harp. This instrument looked like a better fit for our musical needs (we played as a band) than a Celtic harp but was rather expensive. I started a DIY demo project with some planks and bass guitar strings whilst developing a dedicated microphone but the result wasn't as good as expected. I basically just wanted to build my wife a harp, not thinking about making a production out of it. As it took time, we bought a small Kortier electric harp which had a good sound but was too heavy to be carried to be played. I studied this harp design and carried on with my research. As an electronic engineer, I was more familiar with microphones, wires and amplifier than structure and the rest. A first home made carbon fibre frame designed to be light weight collapsed ... My friend Jean Claude, a composites specialist helped in making a mould to make it possible to easily duplicate the frame just in case. However we faced many problems with the frame twisting due to the tension in

the strings. Another acquaintance working in aeronautics, Francois, proposed to help and used a 3D modelling software. This and his experience enabled us to review and improve the design.

It soon became clear that the investment in a full development would not be sensible for a single harp. As we were convinced that this product would meet the needs of many harpists, we took the step of starting a company to develop manufacture and sell



2. What was the reaction of harpists at your first model?

Esther Sévêrac was the first professional harpist to test our prototype. Her very positive feedback and comments proved a great encouragement for us. Several others have since confirmed their enthusiasm so we decided to finalize and launch the harp last spring. Reactions have often been a case of love at first sight. Another Harpist, Anja Luna played it whilst being hung 10m over the floor in her

acrobatic show. This extreme testing proved useful to develop a harness which could withstand the movements of an inspired musician on stage. Our goal has always been to make the harp extremely portable; this was our original vision but it is of course equally nice to see it being played with less movements standing on its tripod

3. What other support did you get beyond artists testing your instrument?

Canton Jura Economic development department provided financial support for the microphone patent. It took indeed seven years in all to finalize the development of this specially shaped microphone, present at the base of each string. Mr Huguenin, my ex-teacher at the HE-Arc engineering also helped in the definition of the pre-amplifier. My wife and partner as well as my children have been fully supportive in times of doubt and sacrificed the time needed to progress in the development of this superb innovative instrument.

Francois, our friend and partner provided extensive help in creativity and know-how whilst remaining focused on achieving a satisfactory design. We hope his speaking Russian will help us reach out to eastern markets.



4. What is the NEVELTEC electric harp made of?

The Carbon fibre composite harp frame is equipped of Savarez Alliance strings. Their spacing is linear and progressive, it is similar to strings on a concert harp with a bit more room between the higher pitched notes. Taper pins and pins are specially adapted to composite materials. Half-tone levers have a modern design, they are ultra-light and their manipulation is easy and comfortable. The strings remain in position irrespective of the lever position.

How much does a NEVELTEC harp weigh? The NEVELTEC harp weight is 3.6kgs - It can be played standing or seating or even moving about on stage. The tripod adaptor nicknamed « the socket » by harpists is very stable. The harp slides easily into place and is removed equally easily. The weight is the same as what I was at birth – indeed this innovative, unique instrument came after 7 years on intense labour

5. What are the benefits of playing an electric harp in your view?

The Electric harp opens a new dimension in the evolution of the noble instrument akin to a rediscovery. Certainly, for those who want to explore new sound domains, to move away from their comfort zone. Being amplified it frees the instrument from its traditional discrete presence in a band, so it can be heard along with and despite drums and other electric musical instruments. Harpists can therefore freely play all musical styles without limits: rock, gospel, classical music, jazz, Irish music, electro, ...all that is required is a desire to

explore and imagination. The harp features 3 sound controls allowing variations at the source: you can control fade in and out with the volume button and change for a more metallic or soft sound adjusting bass and treble buttons. The harp natural sound is naturally very pure which is the essence of what harpists look for.

6. Does the playing technique differ from a standard Celtic harp?

The NEVELTEC harp is very close to a Celtic harp in shape but with a classical harp feel at the fingers. Strings are placed so that their mid-points are on a line thus making harmonics (octave) easy to find. The harp is held securely against your body via the adjustable harness. After a short period of adaptation, you will be able to play on the move and feel the freedom

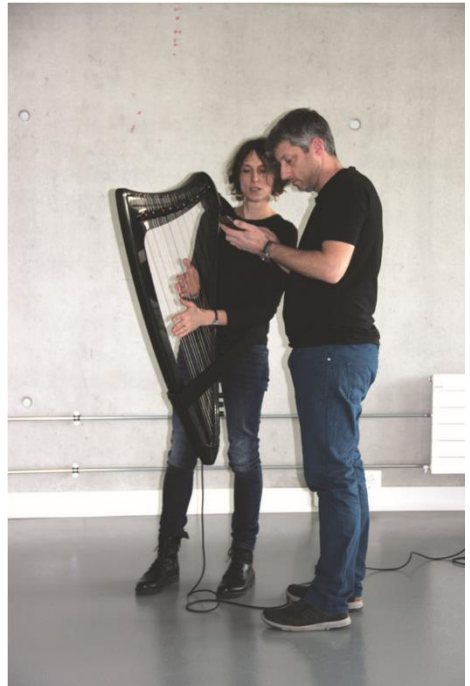
7. Are specific equipment or training required to play on a NEVELTEC electric harp?

Obviously, an amplifier is needed. The desire to discover is an advantage. Exploring new sounds or effects will increase your creativity. To play in a band, you may find it useful to learn how chords are formed since most of the music available is written for the guitar. You can train to replicate phrases typically played on the guitar or keyboards and you will find that improvisation comes naturally. For the harpist it will be like a rediscovery, like being suddenly able to play a different instrument without having to study! It is so simple to use: plug the jack to an amplifier, power on and it works ... Wireless transmitters can be used to eliminate any hindrance due to lying cables. The whole range of accessories and special effects equipment for guitar and bass guitar are

compatible with the NEVELTEC harp (sound effects, loops, tuners ...)

8. Where are the instruments manufactured?

Our harps are designed, assembled and controlled in Switzerland to guarantee the level of quality expected by demanding musicians. Half-tone self-locking composite levers are bought from a French supplier (Sakem). Some components which cannot be realistically produced in Switzerland are procured in Asia. Our aim is to increase the level of Swiss made parts as the company grows and investments can be made with local partners



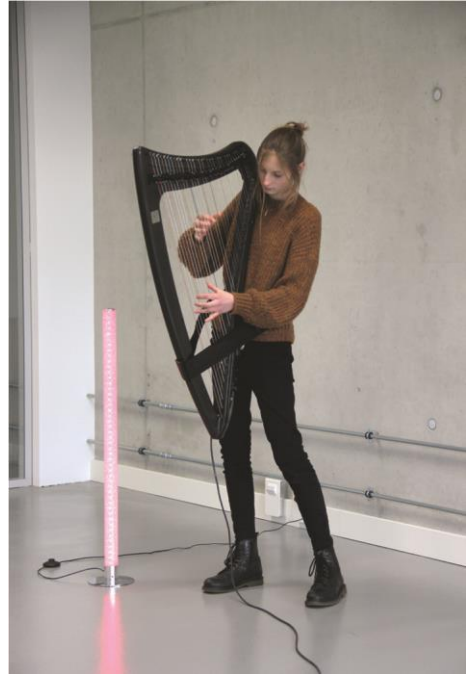
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9. How much does a NEVELTEC harp cost?

The 34 string NEVELETEC Harp costs 10'250 CHF (2023) with accessories tripod, harness and a quality travelling soft case. The amplifier is not included. All sizes and qualities are available on the market. We particularly like the SCHERTLER amplifiers for their excellent quality and their availability (in Mendrisio). The harp is regularly presented to music teachers and students in music schools and we can welcome you to visit us and try the harp at our facility near Delémont (JU). A nice coffee will be the ideal way to get acquainted and discover what the harp can do for you.

10. Does the sound quality change from one harp to the other as is the case in acoustic harps?

Unlike wood which can create subtle differences in sound from one harp to the next, the carbon fibre material used is neutral and insensitive to changes in humidity and weather conditions. The harp can be ordered over the internet and comes with a 2-year warranty. All parts are accessible under an easily removable lid which makes changing a broken string or broken component easy without tools thus extending the useful life of the instrument. The main acoustic difference is that playing percussion on the harp body will be almost silent. On the other hand, the material will resist shocks such as a tuning key falling without marking.



12. What does the name NEVELTEC mean?

The word NEVEL comes from the Hebrew and describes a stringed instrument ancestor of the harp. It is mentioned in the book of Psalms and was played by King David. TEC is there to express the technological content. Our logo also uses the 3 script Hebrew letters N, V, L in a graphic interpretation.