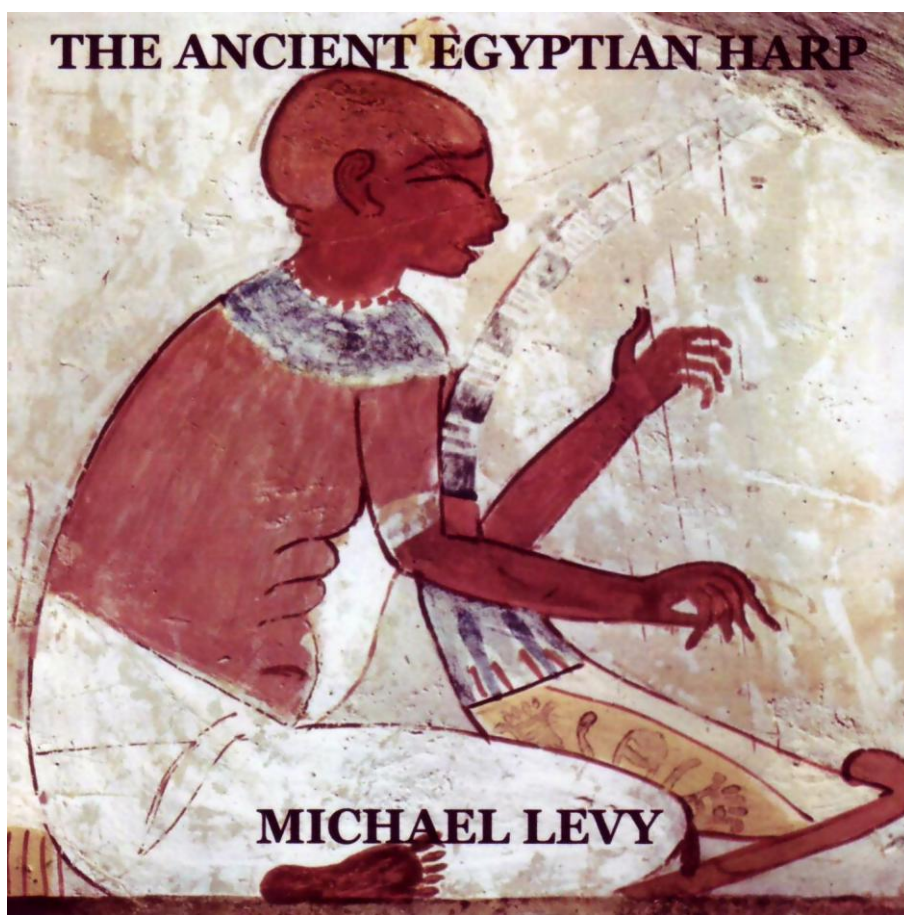


THE ANCIENT EGYPTIAN HARP



This album is my attempt to recreate the lost sound of the archaic arched harp – the harp played over 4500 years ago in ancient Egypt, from the Old Kingdom’s basic bow harp to the beautifully ornate arched harps of the New Kingdom, 3500 years ago – some of which are miraculously preserved in museums around the world...



Incredibly, an almost exact descendant of the ancient Egyptian arched harp is still played on the African continent today, in the form of the 9-string Adungu harp of Uganda (the instrument on which I recorded this album)...



Preserved in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York is an ancient Egyptian arched harp from the 18th Dynasty (1390–1295 B.C) whose similarity to the Ugandan Adungu arched harp is quite stunning:



Here are some detailed explanatory notes about this exhibit, quoted from the Metropolitan Museum of Art's website:

“Egyptian arched harps from Dynasty 4 onward coexisted with a great variety of harps in different shapes and sizes. Two harp types were most common—the arched harp with a curved neck, like this one, and the angled harp with a neck sharply perpendicular to the body. Unlike most European versions, ancient Egyptian harps have no fore pillars to strengthen and support the neck. Older forms of arched harps had four or five strings, this harp has twelve strings. Skin once covered the open, slightly waisted sound box. Rope tuning rings under each string gave a buzzing sound to the soft-sounding tone produced. Topping the arched frame of the harp is a carved human head.”

This type of portable, boat-shaped arched harp was a favourite during the New Kingdom and is shown in the hands of processional female musicians performing alone or in ensembles with singers, wind instruments, sistrums, and rattles. Prior to the Middle Kingdom, depictions of harpists feature men as the chief musicians. Harps and other instruments were used for praise singing and entertainment at ritual, court, and military events. Today, arched harps derived from these ancient Egyptian forms are still used in parts of Africa and Asia”
(<http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/43.2.1>)

Like the Adungu arched harp, this preserved example of an ancient Egyptian arched harp, also had a soundboard of taut leather. Just as on the Adungu, the strings are attached to the body of the harp on a wooden pole beneath the leather soundboard – the tension of the strings pulling on this wooden bar keeps the skin soundboard above it taut. Many examples of the Adungu harp also have similar rings behind the strings to produce a buzz (although the Adungu harp I was lucky enough to find in order to create this album does not). My arched harp has 9 strings, made of some sort of natural fibre (possibly silk), which produces a very gently tone, quite different to the brighter, more resonant tone of modern high tension nylon harp strings.

THE TRACKS

1. “Ancient Harps of Kemet” – an original composition based upon an actual ancient Egyptian scale. Although the ancient Egyptians did not have any form of written musical notation, they did have an ancient form of musical notation now known as chironomy, whereby specific hand gestures represented specific changes in the pitch of a melody. The minor pentatonic scale on which this composition is based, was deciphered from ancient Egyptian chironomy gestures, by the late Professor Hans Hickmann of the Museum in Cairo.

Incredibly, along with remnants of the actual ancient Egyptian language, chironomy is still practiced today in the Coptic Church – an incredible musical legacy, maybe dating back some 5000 years!

In the title of this track, “Kemet” is the transliteration (k.mt) of the actual ancient Egyptian word for the land of Egypt. “k.mt” actually translates as “Black Land” – which to the ancient Egyptians, meant fertility: referring to the colour of the fertile black soil deposited each season by the Nile floods.

2. “The Celestial Nile” – to the ancient Egyptians, the Celestial Nile was that pathway of stars through the Heavens, known to us today as the Milky Way.

On this great star-spangled river, the soul of the Initiated, sailing in a Ship of Light, travelled through the Gateway of the Zodiac to the domain of Isis.

3. “Ode To Osiris” – Osiris was the ancient Egyptian god of the afterlife, the underworld and the dead. He was the oldest son of the Earth god Geb, and the sky goddess Nut, as well as being brother and husband of Isis, with Horus being his posthumously begotten son.

4. “My Hear Was Burnt By Love” – a traditional Egyptian folk melody from Port Said, arranged for archaic arched harp. A different arrangement of this tune, on replica 3000 year old lyre, can be heard on my album, “An Ancient Lyre”

5. “Awe of the Aten” – Aten was the ancient Egyptian name for the Sun disk, venerated during the Armana period of the 18th Dynasty, under the reign of the Pharaoh Akhenaten – the actual time when the ancient Egyptian arched harp preserved in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, may last have been played...

