

An old treasure in a new light

weekend-reports /

The last Thuringian cittern-luthier is the Suhl resident Hilmar Günther

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Suhl

The barely hidden giggles and rather nonchalant remarks of so called modern people - all this is going to stop at last while listening to the sound of the ancient instrument. Thus the cittern-enthusiasts prefer to pluck them and enjoy the sound instead of debating the confusing names of the instrument including "Walddoline", "English Guittar" "Portuguese Guitar". One would be inclined to think of the traditional Salzburg zither, well-known to be played until nowadays. But the name originally descends from the renaissance epoche and is probably more related to the lute. The Waldzither - a complicated thing? Listening to it - no. Or knowing the origins of the name, probably a short version of the "Thüringerwald-Zither", meaning its regional roots. Especially at Suhl, where the last contemporary cittern-luthier lives. Hilmar Günther is 77 years old and got connected with the cittern like many others, too, - by chance.

The professional joiner with an academical degree in cultural science happened to inspect a folk-club called "barn". In the attic he found a series of instruments - all damaged. The cittern he found touched a sense of care, knowing it from his own family, where the violin was played and the cittern as well. Considering how the damaged instruments could be restored to their full function again, he remembered his joiner abilities. "Well, do it yourself, I thought, and this was the beginning of a wonderful pastime", Mr. Günther remembers. He's been building cittern ever since the middle of the 1980ies. Sometimes the pensioner spends a whole day in a former caretaker's workshop in the cellar of his housing area. He's made about 35 cittern by now. But he would refuse to perform. "I just play a little for my own entertainment". Perhaps he won't be shy if his vision came true, that in every tavern and pub there was a cittern or guitar available as it used to be in earlier times, just waiting to be plucked by anyone who'd like to.

Cittern-Virus

Thus every one of the (about) 45 participants of the 3rd Waldzithersymposium can tell his or her own story. Like Martina Rosenberger, organizer of the cittern-enthusiasts-meeting, songwriter and professional mastergoldsmith. Her father used to play the Waldzither. "I told myself, if you won't learn to pluck it, there will be no one later to teach". But actually it took her own growing children to revive her skills for playing to sing with them accompanied by the Waldzither. Meanwhile her self-education produces own songs, including a blues called "ThousandWonderWoman", inspired by her son.

Those two people are exemplary for several others who came across the instrument like a hidden treasure, having already been a cultural standard by our ancestors - in Thuringia - and

naturally at Suhl. This is going to be proved during the 3rd Waldzitherconference, having started yesterday. Here people meet who were attracted by the Waldzither in their own personal way, having tested the sound, often charmed in an instant forever. For the lack of tutors, every one seeks his own way and is eager to share experience with others, given the chance at this meeting, that was realized in co-operation with the local arms-museum, where new aspects are available for all. And when the concert starts this evening at the Hotel Thuringia, "then you shall imagine, that no one will do a standard performance. The last two times there rose so much energy from that, that we already feared the hotel might get the special amplitude and crash," Mrs. Rosenberger tells. But there is less danger in the spreading Waldzither-virus. On the contrary. Contamination welcome.

(Translated by Martina Rosenberger)