Medieval, Renaissance and Baroque Musical Instruments

Thoroughly researched and individually hand-crafted by master luthier, Paul Baker.

Catalogue Spring 2021

www.diabolus.org    01384 295210
In this catalogue, I only show the “standard” model of each instrument, and give brief details. Because they’re individually made to commission, custom options are always possible. More information can be found on my website at

www.diabolus.org

Look for Instrument Making Workshop.

Most of the instruments I make are shown here, but I’m happy to consider commissions for instruments not in the catalogue.

Ordering:

Alas, the days when I occasionally had instruments in stock are long gone. I now have a reputation and a waiting list. You’ll need to contact me to discuss the beastie for which you’re hankering, then pay the deposit of £150. That secures the order and your place in the workshop list. Waiting time is currently around 10 months, but please check the website for updates.

Prices are valid for orders placed up to the end of March 2021.
“Cantigas” Gittern

The gittern was a very popular instrument from the 13th to 15th centuries. It can be seen in numerous paintings and carvings, and it is mentioned by Chaucer. This gittern is based on an illustration in the mid-13th century “Cantigas de Santa Maria”. It has four single-strung courses, tuned a d’ g’ c”. This is an authentic tuning (Berkeley Manuscript, 14th century), but other tunings are possible.

Price: £1000 with simple scroll head
With a hard case: £1180
Carved head: from £150, depending on complexity. Eagle as shown: £250

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14th Century “Martini” Gittern

The gittern was a very popular instrument from the 13th to 15th centuries. It can be seen in numerous paintings and carvings, and it is mentioned by Chaucer. This gittern is based closely on one depicted in Simone Martini’s “Saint Martin is knighted”, c.1320. String length is 45.5cm. Tuning is derived from the Berkeley Theory Manuscript, which contains the sole surviving documentary evidence for gittern tuning: a A' d' d g' g c'' c'. Other tunings are possible. There is no surviving music specifically for gittern, but it is a versatile instrument, ideal for exploring a large range of medieval repertoire.

Includes carved lion head as shown.
Custom carved head - contact me for a quote.
15th Century “Oth” Gittern

The gittern was a very popular instrument from the 13th to 15th centuries. It can be seen in numerous paintings and carvings, and it is mentioned by Chaucer. This gittern is based closely on the sole surviving example, by Hans Oth of Nuremberg, c.1450.

It is a late 5-course gittern, produced when the plectrum was giving way to more complex finger technique. There is evidence that an authentic tuning is dd gg bb e’e’ a’a’, but other tunings are possible. There is no surviving music specifically for gittern, but it is a versatile instrument, ideal for exploring a large range of medieval repertoire.

Price : £1300
With a hard case : £1480
Includes acorn head as shown.
Custom carved head - contact me for a quote.
Elblag Koboz

This is a reconstruction of an instrument found in an archaeological dig in Elblag, Poland. Initially identified as a gittern, Ian Pittaway and I have concluded that the wide string spacing and lack of frets make it a medieval version of the East European Koboz, which is still played regularly, and can be heard on many YouTube recordings. A re-assessment of the iconography of “gitterns” shows that it was a very popular instrument, and not just in the East.

The original tuning is unknown. Ian has experimented with various options, based on modern Koboz tuning and historical gittern tunings, and arrived at a very workable schedule which makes the instrument sing. It is double-strung on the lower three courses, with a triple top course:

\[ g \ g' \ d \ d' \ g' \ g' \ c'' \ c'' \ c' \]

but, of course, that can be changed to your preference.

**Price : £1100**

With a hard case : £1280
Citone

The citole was a popular instrument in the 13th and 14th centuries. Pictorial evidence is confusing. There may have been several types, but luckily, there’s a surviving example in the British Museum. Conversion to a violin in the 16th century destroyed the original soundboard, but the body is intact, and I have reconstructed the soundboard from iconography. This is, therefore, a close replica of the British Museum citole, except that I’ve simplified the dauntingly intricate carving of the original. More information on my website.

Price: £5000
With a hard case: £5180
This includes carving similar to the example shown, with your choice of themes. A less ornate (and somewhat cheaper) version is possible.
Renaissance Guitar

Based on the drawings in Syntagma Musicum (Michael Praetorius, 1612) and Guillaume Morlaye’s guitar book of 1552. A really useful workhorse for 16th and early 17th century music.

There is a small lute-like repertoire available in tablature, but it is equally at home strumming chords. It’s easier to play and more portable than a lute, but excellent for accompanying other instruments and the voice. It blends with everything from choirs to bagpipes. Tuning is similar to a modern ukulele.

Price: £1000
With a hard case: £1180
Vihuela
The instrument that 16th century Spain was using when everyone else in Europe was playing lutes. It has its own repertoire, but it can also play the extensive 6-course lute repertoire. It’s easier to hold and carry than a lute

Price: £1300
With a hard case: £1480.
Add £100 for a 7th course. There’s no definite evidence for a 7-course vihuela, but it’s not wild speculation, and it allows access to the vast 7-course lute repertoire.
Orpharion

The Orpharion (from Orpheus and Arion) was mainly a late 16th and early 17th century phenomenon. Its low-tension brass and iron stringing, with an angled nut and bridge, gives it a resonant, ethereal sound. It was a popular alternative to the lute. It uses the same tuning, and can play the same repertoire, which is extensive.

This instrument is closely based on a 1617 original by Francis Palmer. I have reduced the original 9 courses to 7, to provide more space on the fingerboard.

Price: £2700
With a hard case: £2880
Mandore

The Mandore is, alas, a largely forgotten instrument. It came into being in the early part of the 16th century, and survived for about 200 years, gradually increasing in size. There is a respectable surviving repertoire for it, including some attractive French and Scottish music.

This is a close copy of a surviving mandore in the Victoria and Albert Museum. Contrary to the inked "Boissart 1640" inscription on the body (now invisible), I believe it to be made around 1570, restored in 1640. I have built the copy to the later configuration - five single-strung courses. The basic tuning is g c' g' c'' g''. It will accept being retuned to g c' g' c'' e'' and f c' f' c'' f'' without having to change strings. That covers most of the tunings in the surviving sources.

Note: this is a tiny instrument. Overall length is 440mm approx.

Price: £2100

With a hard case: £2280
Baroque Guitar
Based closely on the 1688 Stradivarius guitar in the Ashmolean museum.
The 5-course baroque guitar has an extensive published repertoire, from c. 1600 to 1780. It was also used for continuo, and, from its earliest days, for strummed accompaniments.
Strung in natural gut or NylGut.
Price: £1800
With a hard case: £1980

Original Tunings

Timeline

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Symphony

The symphony was a box-shaped version of the organistrum, which was an early form of the hurdy-gurdy. It can be seen in a number of illustrations and carvings from about 1200 to 1400.

I have created a typical instrument, with a single chanterelle, two drones, and a diatonic keyboard. It has a gentle, contemplative sound, ideal for accompanying the voice, although it’s perfectly capable of playing estampies and saltarelli if you want to liven the mood.

Standard tuning is C Ionian (ie. C Major) - chanterelle in g’, and drones in c’ and g. But it can be re-tuned in various modes.

Price : £1100
With a hard case : £1280
Rutland Organistrum

This is a conjectural reconstruction of an instrument depicted in the Rutland Psalter, c. 1260. It is a useful, manageable instrument, with a deep, rich tone, ideal for accompanying the voice or other instruments. It has a single chanterelle, and two drones.

The keyboard is diatonic, covering the range g to d”, but I have designed the layout with re-tuning in mind. Several of the tangents can be set to a higher or lower semitone, so it will accommodate various modal tunings without re-tuning the drones.

The original type of handle - a plain, bent steel shaft - works remarkably well, but it makes the instrument rather long, so a more modern hurdy-gurdy style handle with a rotating knob is an option.

Price : £1500
With a hard case : £1680
“Royal College” Hurdy-Gurdy
16th/ early 17th century hurdy-gurdy, closely based on a surviving instrument in the Royal College, London.
Two chanterelles, mouche, trompette, 2 bourdons, 1 keybox drone.
Chromatic keyboard, 1½ octaves, g’ to d”.
Perfect for Renaissance and Jacobean dance music - Susato, Attaingnant, Arbeau, Playford, etc.
Sounds wonderful with a renaissance guitar.
Price : £2500
With a hard case : £2700
Basic straps and a tuning peg (tourne a gauche) are included.
“Cantigas” Psaltery

This is a reconstruction of an instrument from the "Cantigas de Santa Maria", a huge collection of poems, written and set to music during the reign of Alfonso X 'El Sabio' (1221-1284), King of Galicia, Castile and León. It is a simple form of the psaltery, easy to tune and play. It has 13 strings, giving a diatonic range of g’ to e”

A tuning key and a pair of goose quills are included.

Price : £250 with plywood soundboard and back
With a hard case : £430
Add £70 for a natural wood soundboard and back.
Pigsnout Psaltery

The psaltery was a popular instrument for several centuries. It was made in various shapes, but the "pigsnout" was the most common. This reconstruction is based on a number of historical illustrations and carvings. It has 23 strings. As supplied, it is tuned diatonically in C major (ie C Ionian), giving a 3-octave range from a to b'', but it can be re-tuned to give a range of modal tunings.

A tuning key and a pair of goose quills are included.

Price : £500
With a hard case : £680
Dulcimer

The hammered dulcimer was closely related to the psaltery, but continued in use much later. Dulcimers were made in various shapes, but this “trapezoid” type is one of the most common. It is based on a number of medieval and renaissance illustrations and carvings. It is triple-strung, and has a 13-note diatonic range from b to g". Options include a double-strung instrument with greater range, or a central bridge, giving two rows of notes on opposite sides. A tuning key, authentic brass hammers, and modern wooden hammers are included.

Price: £600
With a hard case: £780

“Le Livre des Echecs Amoureux”, c.1496
Mersenne, “Harmonie Universelle”, 1636
Manchester Cathedral, c.1490

Timeline
Medieval Lap Harp

Harps of various shapes and sizes have been common from medieval to modern times. This is a small and simple lap harp, based on a number of medieval illustrations and carvings. It has 17 strings, and it features brays, which give the strings a “buzzing” sound, especially popular in the 15th century. These can be turned on or off by turning them.

Standard tuning is diatonic, a to c'', but that can be altered to suit your preference. Includes a tuning key.

Price: £900 with nylon strings.
Natural gut or Nylgut at cost.
With a hard case: £1080