

Extra-Reed Harmonicas: Another Pioneer Discovered:

by Brendan Power

Last year I devoted a few articles in this magazine to uncovering the fascinating history of the Extra-Reed Concept for harmonicas. In case you are still wondering what that means, it involves adding extra passive reeds in the resonance chamber to give more interactive-reed bending possibilities. The extra reeds (or x-reeds for short), make the harmonica much more expressive, and capable of chromatic playing through simple blow and draw bending alone.

It was a complicated story already, dating back to about 1980. As far as I knew there were two people who thought of the concept and made working prototypes independently (Will Scarlett and myself), and a significant third person who was shown the basic idea (by Will) but then developed it extensively on his own (Rick Epping). Unfortunately Will and Rick fell out badly over it at the time. I gave them the opportunity to tell their own sides of the story in separate Harmonica World articles, and it made absorbing reading. I told my history with the idea as well; if you want to follow this up, the three strands are woven together on my website in the *Geek Zone* section under the link: [World's First Working 30 Reed 10 Hole Harp -1989](#).

It should be noted that Pat Missin

and Richard Sleigh also dabbled with the x-reed idea in the 1980s, but didn't feel they had made enough progress with it to be significant.

Now, out of the blue, it appears there was another x-reed inventor no one ever heard about before! I was doing a show in Budapest last month, and a fan who'd driven all the way from Austria showed me something that made my jaw drop: a home-made x-reed harmonica dating back to 1989. It looks like a precursor of the Hohner XB-40:



Here are the internal components. The comb slots are for valves:



His name is Christian Sandera,



and here is his story in his own words:

At 1987 I started to play with the country band "Johnny and the Credit Cards" western swing. The problem was that I could not play all these melodies cause of the missing tones.

So approximately at 1989/90 I tried to fix the problem and started the project. A lot of work, cause there were no material or harps they were built in these way.

I bought a lot of harps of different models and find out that the "Marine Band Full Concerto" has a complete harp on one side. That's what I need, 'cause at this time I was not able to make my own

customized reedplates.

Of the other side of my special comb I placed the missing reeds I needed.

On the first hole I wanted to have the possibility to play a full step and I wanted also to bend the fifth draw note, a little different to your models. So I created a special separation, made slits and valved it, 'cause there are now two reeds with the same response.

After hell of work and thoughts I've got my chromatical harp and it worked very good.

Unfortunately nobody in Austria and also Hohner were interested to help me or they didn't understand what I wanted, so I tried to be better on the normal models and didn't continue my work on the special harp.

The photos I sent you (opposite) probably will say more about the idea and the realization.

My first working x-reed prototype made in New Zealand dates back to 1989, so it turns out Christian and I were developing the same idea at the same time on opposite sides of the world without realising it.

Neither of us knew that Will Scarlett had got there first in California about 8 years earlier!

It's a funny old world...

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