

Armstrong's 'Celestial' sounds to leave Aurora



By Brock Weir

For the past 15 years, eerily beautiful sounds have emanated from a whitewashed brick farm on Edward Street, a nice antidote to the clatter of traffic passing by.

But the sounds of astrologer Robin Armstrong's one-of-a-kind 'Celestial Harp' are about to be muffled in Aurora. Mr. Armstrong, who has run his astrology business in that unusual location for the better part of his time in Aurora will be moving his harp and his myriad extraordinary musical instruments to Etobicoke after officials discovered his workplace-cum-home was not zoned for residential use.

Nearly 50 years ago, Mr. Armstrong spent two years meditating in a cave in India without any worldly possessions, let alone clothes, before coming out into the light on July 20, 1969 when fellow Armstrong Neil - no relation - set foot on the moon.

The date is a recurring one in Robin's life. 46 years later, on that very day, his world was upended when he was told he had to move. 'I was in shock,' he said. 'I am in my 70th year and I wasn't thinking I had to move. It was an emotional experience. I have had my life here for 15 years wiped out.'

Walking through the doors of the converted barn is like stepping into another world.

Filled with Mr. Armstrong's published astrological writings in the front with every corner of the back half filled with every variety of musical instrument you can imagine - and some you can't - there will naturally be a lot to dispose of as he completes his move to much smaller digs in Etobicoke, but taking pride of place in the studio - and going with him - is his 'Celestial Harp'.

The four-sided musical instrument is a sight to behold.

No less than 72 strings are arranged around a central pyramid in various lengths, conspiring to make a very unique sound that has been the subject of nearly a dozen albums recorded right here in Aurora.

'It's the only one in the world,' said Mr. Armstrong of his creation. 'I spent a couple of years in the 1960s meditating in India and at the end I had visions. They were partly about astrology, but mainly about the musical instrument and how you can make an instrument that has four sides that three or four people can play at once.'

'It would change the way we relate to music because we're so used to having music in a straight line. This is a circle where there is

no beginning or end.?

Each string section is arranged according to the signs of the zodiac, so the idea was to "play the horoscope of the moment." Six years of design and two years of construction later, it was finally finished in 1979. Then came the important part: 10 years of developing a tuning system that worked for it.

"I thought it was too incredible," said Mr. Armstrong of pursuing his vision to completion. "It was inspiring. It was an adventure into understanding music, understanding instruments, and the cosmologies behind it. The inspiration came and it just stayed with me. It was almost like if you can build it they will come, but I had to do it. After all, when was the last primal instrument invented?"

When Mr. Armstrong first learned he would have to leave his studio, one of his chief concerns was finding a new home for the Celestial Harp. In the meantime, however, space has been found in Toronto that will keep instrument and creator together, but the same cannot be said of his hundreds of musical instruments, including valuable African drums, that need to find new homes.

If interested, contact Mr. Armstrong at ra2@on.aibn.com.

"Thanks, Aurora!" said Mr. Armstrong. "I've had a good time!"