



## Deborah Henson-Conant & San Antonio Symphony

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Deborah Henson-Conant plays the harp - the solid-body electric strap-on harp - and she'll be joining the San Antonio Symphony for three concerts this September 20th – 22nd.

As an instrumentalist Henson-Conant been compared to Chuck Berry, Jimi Hendrix and Elvis. Her voice has been compared to Carly Simon and Joan Baez. Her onstage persona has been described as “a combination of Leonard Bernstein, Steven Tyler and Xena, the Warrior Princess” (Boston Globe).

**Pops Show:** “Hip Harp Fantasies.” At 8:00 on Friday, Sept. 20 & Saturday, Sept. 21, Deborah’s symphony pops show will feature musical styles from driving samba to sultry blues, along with well-known pieces like “Take Five” and “The Wizard of Oz,” with conductor Michael Krajewski.

**Family Show:** “The Frog Princess” At 2:30 PM on Sunday, May 22, Henson-Conant and the S.A.S. will present Henson-Conant’s symphonic fairy tale “The Frog Princess,” as part of the S.A.S.’s *Interactive Classics* series. Families will learn what happens AFTER “happily ever after” as Amphibia (daughter of the Frog Prince) takes over the kingdom of Lilypadia and learns to embrace her own inner frog (for more on “The Frog Princess” see attached information sheet or visit our website, [www.HipHarp.com](http://www.HipHarp.com)).

### Who • What • When • Where

#### San Antonio Symphony

With special guest

#### Deborah Henson-Conant

Michael Krajewski, Conductor

#### Presents:

#### “Hip Harp Fantasies”

Friday, Sept. 20 - 8:00 PM

Saturday, Sept. 21 - 8:00 PM

#### &

#### “The Frog Princess”

An “Interactive Classics” Presentation  
 Sunday, September 22 - 2:30 PM

The Majestic Theatre

226 East Houston Street, San Antonio

**Tickets:** \$26 - \$55

#### Tix/Info

San Antonio Symphony Box Office:

210-554-1010 or [www.ticketmaster.com](http://www.ticketmaster.com)

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Online at <a href="http://www.HipHarp.com">www.HipHarp.com</a> & available upon request	
• Deborah’s upcoming Tour Schedule ( <a href="http://www.hipharp.com/where_you_goin.html">http://www.hipharp.com/where_you_goin.html</a> )	• Recent Reviews ( <a href="http://www.hipharp.com/reviews/html">http://www.hipharp.com/reviews/html</a> )

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## **WHO IS DEBORAH HENSON-CONANT and WHAT IS SHE DOING TO THAT HARP!?! (A Short Biography)**

Deborah Henson-Conant sings and plays the harp, tells stories and composes symphonic music that runs the gamut from bombastic to tender. She has been described as “the wild woman of the harp” by bandleader Doc Severinsen and “the talented love-child of André Previn and Lucille Ball” (NPR). Her playing ranges from raucous to delicate and her performances blur the line between musical performance and theatrical event.

Illustration credit: Friday



Deborah herself is impossible to categorize. She has made her own path, composing musical theater since the age of 12, first studying classical harp, then developing her own version of swing and Latin jazz and finally synthesizing all three elements into a new genre of musical performance. Her shows mix jazz, folk and flamenco with a theatrical narrative of storytelling and humor.

As a child, Deborah was passionate about music, but disdainful of lessons, Deborah spent her time composing. Her parents tried every instrument they could think of to lead her to serious study, with mounting frustrations from both sides. When a rented harp showed up in the living room just as Deborah hit puberty, she grudgingly took a half-dozen lessons, then wailed, “This is a sissy instrument! And no-one will hold hands with me if I have calluses on my fingers!”

For the next ten years, Deborah didn’t touch a harp. Then suddenly her college band needed a harpist and those six lessons made her the resident expert. She studied music by day and played popular harp music in posh dining rooms by night.

Then one night she’d had enough of both classical music and background performances. She dragged her six-foot gilded harp from a Boston hotel restaurant into an adjacent jazz club and said to the bandleader, “Can I sit in?” She started jamming on the blues and has never looked back. She’s now made more than a dozen recordings from jazz to children’s music and has become synonymous with her website: “HipHarp.com.”

Deborah Henson-Conant has toured with the Boston Pops as a guest soloist, premiered her own orchestral works with symphonies throughout the US, toured jazz clubs in Germany and Celtic Festivals in France, opened for Ray Charles at Tanglewood, starred in the PBS special Celtic Harpestry; been featured on NBC, CBS, CNN, NPR and has hosted TV shows for BET and BBC Affiliates. She’s been interviewed by Charlie Rose, Joan Rivers, Billy Taylor, Studs Terkel, Scott Simon, Jamie Gangel, and Susan Stamberg. If you’re one of those people who thinks a harp is meant to soothe the savage beast, think again - this time it’s the savage beast who’s PLAYING the darned thing!

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### **LOVE / HATE: Deborah’s relationship to her harp**

Deborah never wanted to play the harp (she called it a “sissy” instrument when she first saw it), yet her own struggle with it is, in part, what has created her persona.

The lack of music written for the harp forced her to become a prolific composer (she now composes 95% of all the music she performs).

When she found herself chafing under the confines of the classical music world, she developed her own style of swing and Latin jazz by emulating jazz pianists, guitarists and horn players. She explored her instrument’s fascinating roots in other cultures, from Mexico to the Celtic Isles. She then incorporated these elements into her own compositions, landed a record contract with the pre-eminent contemporary jazz label at the time (GRP) and became known as the world’s premiere jazz harpist.

When jazz itself began to confine her, she expanded to incorporate flamenco, blues and folk, and when the harp constrained her physically, she had a new instrument built for her, a solid-body electric “Body Harp” that combines the portability and volume of an electric guitar with the technique of a harp (more about the “Body Harp” below).

When symphonies asked her to perform as a soloist, and she had no “orchestra charts,” she began to orchestrate her own works and has now created a body of music for solo harp virtuoso and orchestra.

In short, the very “limitations” of her instrument have led to the richness of her performances and have helped her create a genre that is hers alone.

**THE BODY HARP:** In 1998 she convinced French harp builder Joel Garnier to create an instrument for her that she could strap on her body. This electric blue harp-with-the-soul-of-an-electric-guitar is now her signature instrument. With each string individually electrified, the “Body Harp” allows her to soar over the brass section of an orchestra, or play exquisitely delicate solo passages.

### **WHAT CAN I EXPECT AT A PERFORMANCE?**

Deborah plays the harp, tells stories and sings. Her pieces range from the haunting, Celtic-influenced “Nightingale” to a raucous musical science project called “The Danger Zone” inspired by the 1956 research paper, “Stress Analysis of a Strapless Evening Gown.” She also loves the blues and Latin music, so you’ll hear big-band style blues with a full orchestra and powerful Latin-influenced pieces like her “Baroque Flamenco,” a tale of time-traveling Flamenco dancers run amok in Marie Antoinette’s boudoir. Henson-Conant is known for her on-stage humor and an ability to interact with an audience of thousands as though they were sitting together in her living room. A “triple-threat” composer, arranger and performer, Henson-Conant likes to lead unlikely members of the orchestra into unconventional solo forays – so don’t be surprised if she invites the orchestral harpist and the snare drummer to join her in a Celtic Jig and Reel, or plays a duet with the timpanist – or the Tuba!

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## WHAT IS “THE FROG PRINCESS?”

In the mid ‘90’s Deborah took an intensive storytelling workshop. In the midst of the workshop, an opening line came to her: “Once upon a time there was a princess who thought she was a frog. She didn’t look like a frog. She was just convinced that, deep down inside, she really was one.”

From there, the story of Amphibia, continued to spin in her head. Completed in 2000 and premiered with the Buffalo Philharmonic, “The Frog Princess” is now a standard part of Deborah’s Family shows, and will be featured at this year’s Chicago Humanities Festival on the theme “Brains & Beauty.”



To imagine *The Frog Princess*, think “Fractured Fairy Tales” meets “Peter and the Wolf.” But with a lot of frogs.

In this sequel to the famous “Frog Prince” fairytale, a young girl dreams of being King, just like her father. But she’s afraid that ‘just like her father’ she’ll turn into a frog someday! Amphibia is heir to the throne of Litypasia and her father, the erstwhile Frog Prince, is about to die. With a little help from her evil governess, Amphibia is convinced that, because of an ancient curse, the day she puts her father’s crown on her head, she, too, will turn into a frog, like her father once did.

“Let me get this straight,” says the cockney-voiced Fool, “you’re afraid there’s an ancient curse in your family, handed down from generation to generation and suddenly one day you’re going to find yourself completely humiliated in front of the whole world? But ... I mean...EVERYBODY’S afraid of that.”

Despite the Fool’s conviction that he can concoct a “Curse Reverse,” and despite a romantic encounter in the old tower with a kindly, mysterious stranger, Amphibia discovers that she must face her inner frog herself.

## A STORY-TELLING HARP PLAYER?

“In the olden days,” Deborah begins, “long before there were movies or films, the ancient ‘bards’ or ‘troubadours’ would travel from town to town with their harps slung over their backs.

“The movie screens of those times were the people’s imaginations, and on those magic screens, scenes of wonder appeared that even Steven Spielberg couldn’t create. It is the harper’s tradition to spin such tales, beginning with the magic words: ‘Once upon a time...’”

“The Frog Princess” is a lushly orchestrated one-woman show, with Deborah playing a cast of characters, from the gruff, bumbling King to the wise-cracking fool, the evil governess, the handsome captain of the guards, the romantic Josquin and Amphibia herself. The supporting cast (thousands of frogs) is performed by the audience.

**GRAPHICS & AUDIO:** line drawing illustrations of the “Frog Princess” are available at our website or by emailing Nora Sawyer at [info@hipharp.com](mailto:info@hipharp.com). CDs of “The Frog Princess” are available on request. *Please credit David Omar White for illustrations.*

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<b>ASK DEBORAH ABOUT: (possible interview questions)</b>	
	Trying to crawl into the stereo as a kid – and how she finally got inside.
	Why she refused to take harp lessons when she was 12.
	Among other people, you’ve been compared to Joe DiMaggio and Michael Jordan. Why do you think you are compared to sports heroes?
	How did the traditional Celtic harpists take to you jazzing up their sacred instrument? What gave you the idea to ‘strap on’ the harp?
	How do you reconcile your “wild woman” image with the painstaking, detail-oriented work of writing music for symphonic orchestras? Is there some sort of Jekyll & Hyde gene in your makeup?
	What kinds of musical games did your family play when you were a child? How do you interact musically with your fiancé’s kids?
	Your children’s story for orchestra, “The Frog Princess,” is a very modern fable about the search for identity, breaking through traditional gender roles and overcoming seemingly insurmountable fears in order to achieve ones’ dreams. You’ve said that “The Frog Princess” is your autobiography. What fears have you overcome?
	You were once summarily dismissed from participating in a jazz cookbook when the photographer looked at the “Museum of Burnt Food” in your kitchen. Now your museum’s been visited by the Food Network TV, “Splendid Table” radio and NPR’s Scott Simon. Are you really that bad a cook? What gave you the idea to preserve your culinary disasters?
	Your website recently stated running a page entitled “A Musician’s Diary,” which includes your musings on everything from the events of September 11 <sup>th</sup> to dealing with your fiancé’s children. Where do you draw the line between your life and your art? Is there a line?

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**HOW CAN I GET A PHOTO, VIDEO OR AUDIO OF DEBORAH FOR MY PUBLICATION or BROADCAST?**

**PHOTOS & ILLUSTRATIONS:** Photos of Deborah and line drawings from “The Frog Princess” are available for download off our website: "<http://www.hipharp.com/publicity>"  
Photos are also available in a full-color slide, black and white glossy, or on CD-ROM.

**Please credit our photographers & illustrators - credits are included on our website.** (Illustration at right: David Omar White)

**FOR VIDEO & AUDIO:** We can supply audio CDs of many of Deborah’s pieces as well as B-Roll video on VHS or mini-DV (these contain live concert footage and studio performances) Please contact Nora Sawyer at 781.483.3556 or [info@hipharp.com](mailto:info@hipharp.com).



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