

Gino Bordin

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GINO BORDIN (1899 - 1977) by Cyril Lefebvre
(translated by Les Cook from French into English)



GINO BORDIN

When Bougainville reached Tahiti in 1768 and spread the word of his adventures, every Frenchman and the entire Western world knew that the Garden of Eden described in the Bible was actually to be found on the remote islands of the South Seas. But they had to wait a century and a half before hearing any music from this newly found Paradise on earth. The moving sounds of the Hawaiian guitar only managed to reach Paris in 1920. Immediately it provided the perfect soundtrack to those dreamy pictures which had been silent for so many years.

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The end of World War I had seen an influx to Paris of artists, writers and musicians, especially from the USA. In addition to the arrival of jazz, authentic Hawaiian players came to perform in Paris. The records of Frank Ferera became hugely popular, as they did in the USA and other countries. It wasn't long before many French guitar players started learning to play by sliding a bar on the strings of their instruments. They played ALOHA OE and some Hawaiian waltzes, but more often than not they slipped the steel into tango, paso, jazz, biguine, musette and all those forms of music which took hold during the Roaring Twenties in Paris. And they produced a large number of gems for the record companies. Some of the leading players at that time were Edouard Jacovacci, Alexandre Manara, Mori Totti, Daniel Arnau, Rose Cornaz and Jean Nony. One man, however, stood above them all. His name was Gino Bordin.

Gino Bordini was born on the 4th of February 1899 in Vicenza, northern Italy. As a young man he kept company with musicians who gathered around Luigi Mozzani, guitar player and luthier who had a school and workshop in Centa, near Bologna, 160 km from Vicenza. There he became friends with Mario Maccaferri (born in May 1900 in Cento) who was learning how to play and build guitars with Mozzani. Gino himself played guitar, Hawaiian guitar, musical saw and 6-string banjo with local bands like the Ottorino African Jazz Band, named after his elder brother Ottorino Bordini, a professional inventor. In 1926 Gino left Italy for France like many other Italians did at the period, fleeing the bad economic conditions in Italy. His debuts as a professional musician in Paris were not easy as he did not read music fluently. But he was already playing so well on many instruments that he soon found work in orchestras and as a solo act. He first appeared at casinos in Dinard, Monte Carlo, and then in the numerous cabarets, brasseries, music halls which were then establishing the city its PARIS BY NIGHT reputation. He accompanied accordionists on 6-string banjo, dressed as a gaucho to play Spanish guitar in tango bands, and donned the white suit and silk lei of the Hawaiians in exotic formations where authentic musicians of the South Seas scraped on their ukuleles behind haole hula dancers. One of those dancers was Marguerite Pepin, a young beauty from Lfle-sur-Sorgue who was to become his partner in life.

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Gino Bordini, now called Bordin, was a virtuoso in many styles. He played on the Parisian music scene and on recordings on guitar and banjo with the greats of musette, with Louis Ferrari, Frédo Gardoni, Léon Raiter, and soon his name appeared under their names on 78rpm labels like other great banjo players of the time such as Manuel Puig, Latorre and Jungo (as Django Reinhardt was then spelled

on musette records). Gino was also playing guitar behind chanteuses and chanteurs, from Azzali, Bruno Clair or Guy Berry to Lucienne Delyle or Lys Gauty. For a while, he was the guitar player for Tino Rossi and toured with him in Europe as far eastwards as Greece and Egypt in 1938. He even composed *TE CHÉRIR UNE NUIT* and *CANTA POUR MOI*, two of Tino's greatest hits.

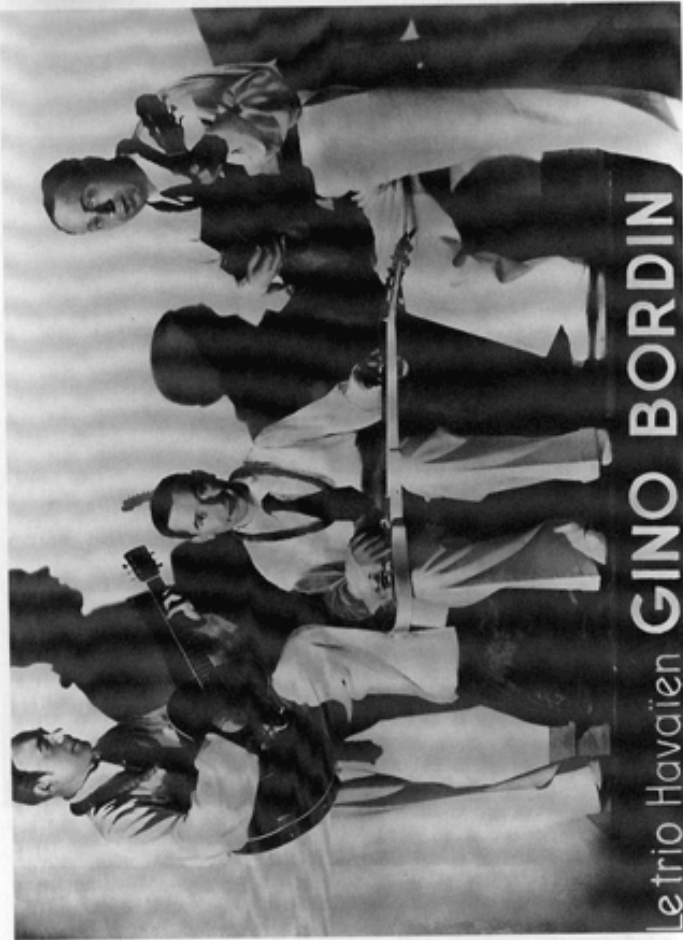
Gino wrote several other popular melodies, teamed up with excellent lyricists such as André Viaud, and he maintained an enduring collaboration with the composer/arranger/multi-instrumentalist and conductor Boris Saarbekoff (sometimes shortened to Sarbek).

While he continued to play the musical saw (even recording some sides under his own name or the pseudonym of Mac Gony) and the guitar in the classical manner throughout his career, it is really the Hawaiian guitar which would make him famous.

In January 1928, *HALLELUJAH!* by Youmans was recorded at Pathé, interpreted by the Hawaiian Trio made up of Bordin, De Liguori and Kamenetzky. This record marked the beginning of Gino Bordin's prodigious career on the Hawaiian guitar. In this field, Gino was to dominate the entire French stage from 1930 to 1940.

The total number of his recordings on Hawaiian guitar under his own name, or under pseudonyms like Mac Gony and INOG, is quite considerable, yet they were always of high musical quality, whatever the genre or format of the orchestra, whether as a simple duo with accompanying guitar, or piano, and even the most pompous orchestrations. He recorded for major record companies such as Odéon, Pathé and Parlophone during this period, as well as labels like Salabert, Perfectaphone and (probably) Pagode. Many sides were made of Hawaiian guitar duets with his friend Alexandre Manara who teamed up with him until the 1950s.

Gino Bordin even contributed to the improvement and evolution of the instrument, being the first in 1931 to add an extra bass string, to use 7th tuning, then 6th tuning. He inspired Maccaferri to build a double-chamber 7-string Hawaiian model for the Selmer company which was produced in 1931 at the same time as the first jazz models for Django and other Paris jazzmen. They became the instrument of choice for the leading Hawaiian guitarists in Paris along with the double-top instruments devised by Gélais.



Le trio Havaïen GINO BORDIN

And in 1934 Gino was the first to play the electric lap steel guitar in France. At Gino's request Maccaferri had brought back from the Chicago Exposition two 7-string National steel guitars for him.

Bordin was also a notable teacher. In 1935, he published a NEW METHOD FOR THE SEVEN-STRINGED HAWAIIAN GUITAR with great clarity, published anthologies of arrangements for the instrument and gave lessons at his home (rue Audran) in Paris, in schools and on radio. He continued to give lessons until near the end of his life.

By the end of the 30's Gino had become a star with his own shows on French radio and also a star in Holland and Germany, but his days at the top were numbered.

In May 1940 the Germans occupied France. Gino enjoyed continued popularity during this period, and some of his records even became quite popular in Germany. He managed to work in Parisian hotels and nightclubs but the liberation in August 1944 marked the end of Gino's days as a star attraction. New players with a more modern style of playing were soon on the Paris scene, like Gino's student Ida Brun, Marcel Bianchi and Harry Hougassian. While struggling to find work and revive his career Gino suffered a major heart attack. However, slowly recovering from his coronary, he would before long put together a trio of Hawaiian guitars in 1949 with Alex Manara and Ida Brun to back up popular singers Patrice and Mario, and created with Zephyr the comic cabaret duo of Mac Gony and Andre. He would still accompany singers, accordionists, etc. and would record for Vogue, Pacific, and would continue to give music lessons. And he continued to produce sheet music of his compositions, sometimes from his home at rue Audran, Montmartre, and sometimes in partnership with old friends like accordionist Fredo Gardoni. Nevertheless, his glory days were over. Gino eventually retired to the South of France and after several stays at the hospital in Marseille he passed away on July 14th 1977. His final resting place is at L'Isle-sur-Sorgue, where he had chosen to end his days near his wife Margot, and the little French hula dancer he met at the casino of Dinard in 1926.

Gino Bordin was responsible for the popularity of the Hawaiian guitar in France. He also introduced the instrument into orchestras as a regular instrument, so it became more than an exotic sounding device with which to play

South Sea serenades. He played the steel guitar beautifully - the instrument he dubbed the "Magic Guitar" - for all kinds of music from tango to musette and also behind many singers whose music celebrated the pleasures of Montmartre rather more than those of Waikiki.

Note: Some of Gino Bordin's early recordings are available on a CD produced by Cyril Lefebvre and Dominique Cravic titled "Paris, Plages d'Hawaii" on the Paris Jazz Corner label.

Cyril is also currently working with Grass Skirt Records in England on a whole CD devoted to Bordin's work.



Thanks, Les, for this very interesting article on the famous Gino Bordin who certainly left his mark on the development of Hawaiian music in France in the early days!

The CD referred to on page 18 has a different take on the acoustic Hawaiian steel guitar. Mainly devoted to the best known of the Paris based players, Gino Bordin, Paris Plages d'Hawaii features 24 vintage sides from the 1930s and splendidly capture the feel of the French approach to steel guitar. Compiled by Cyril Lefebvre and Dominique Cravic the disc also includes offerings from Alex Manara, Daniel Arnau, Mori Totti and Edouard Jacovacci. Waltzes, Tangos and a hint of musette are the order of the day here rather than hulas, and all beautifully played. Packaged with a splendid Robert Crumb cover and deluxe booklet crammed with 1930's photos, record labels and highly informative notes (in French) by Monsieur Lefebvre.

Available from Elderly Instruments, 1100 N Washington, Lansing, MI 48906. Phone: 888-473-5810. Their website is: www.elderly.com Cost of the CD is \$13.95

Or visit Paris Jazz Corner's website at: www.ParisJazzCorner.com

Ask for information on: Paris Jazz Corner 983 643-5

