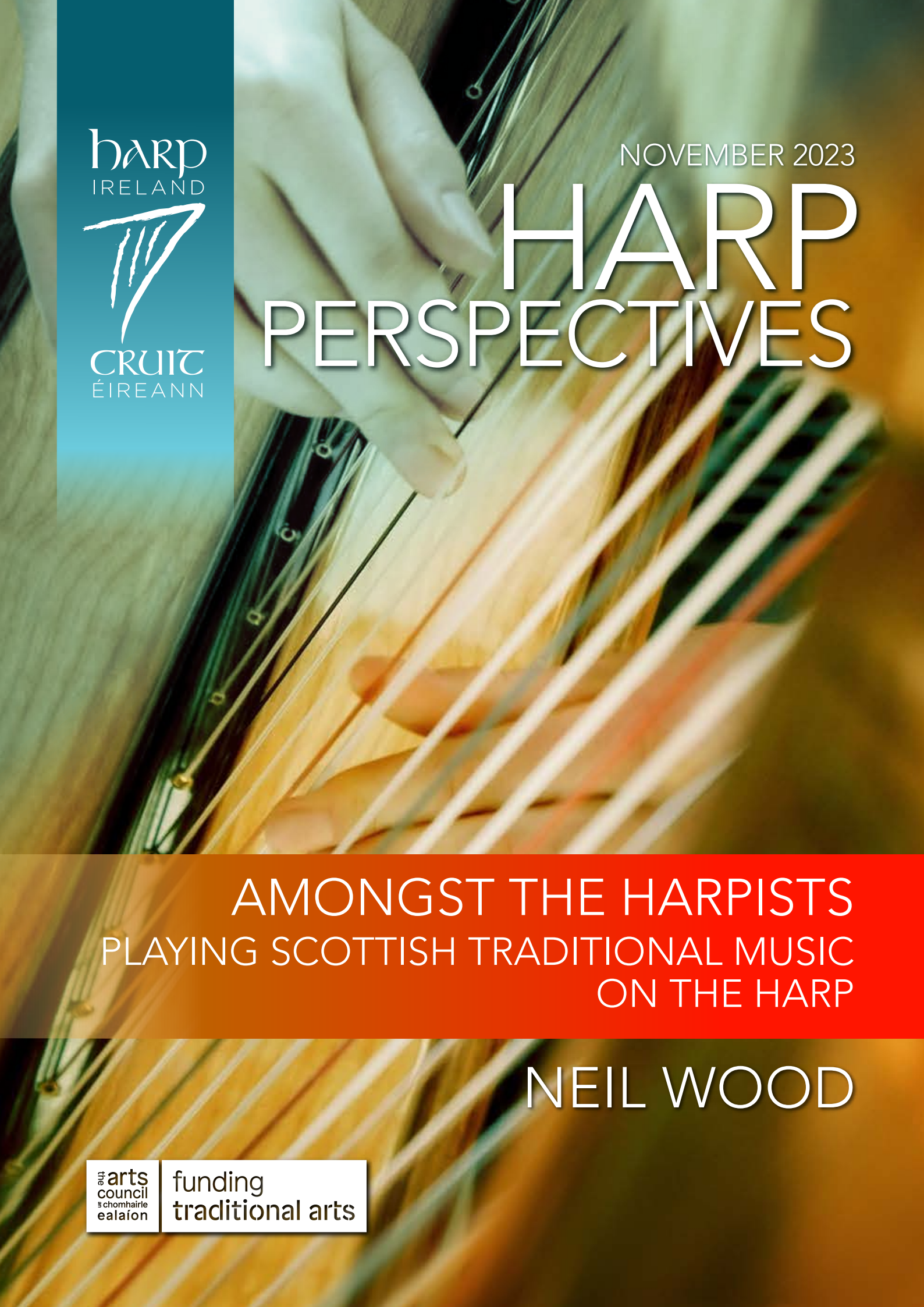

harp IRELAND
CRUIT ÉIREANN

NOVEMBER 2023

# HARP PERSPECTIVES

## AMONGST THE HARPISTS
### PLAYING SCOTTISH TRADITIONAL MUSIC ON THE HARP

NEIL WOOD

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Welcome to *Harp Perspectives*, Cruit Éireann, Harp Ireland's online journal. One of our strategic aims is to establish thought leadership across the harp sector by building up a body of thinking about the harp and harping through a historical and contemporary lens.

*Harp Perspectives* is a conversation about harping and features key informants, harpers and non-harpers, sharing their authentic views and ideas. We believe that this combination of scholarly research and personal insights will highlight the harping legacy inherited from our tradition bearers and help forge a contemporary harping identity, secure in its understanding of its origin and how it wishes to evolve.

In our November edition, Scottish harper Neil Wood discusses the Scottish harp's vibrant and diverse musical community with its wide range of styles, influences and creative identities and how it can emerge as a stand-alone musical practice and perhaps even a new tradition, in its own right.

Our thanks to each of our contributors for their willingness to add their voices. Their contributions will no doubt enrich and inform our thinking.

Aibhlín McCrann and Eithne Benson
Editors
November 2023

# AMONGST THE HARPISTS
## PLAYING SCOTTISH TRADITIONAL MUSIC ON THE HARP

Neil Wood

## Introduction

I am an early career professional harper based in Glasgow, Scotland. I have always identified principally as a Scottish traditional musician, that plays the harp, rather than a harpist who plays Scottish traditional music. I view the harp as my tool for exploring and engaging with Scottish traditional music and I look to emulate and integrate with other instrumental and vocal practices within the tradition. I have no pedal harp experience and have always been more comfortable working aurally. I have often felt that the commonly adopted approach to technique, and the overarching style within Scottish harp practice is not conducive to my intention of creating a sound which reflects that of the wider Scottish traditional music idiom. The commonly adopted musical aesthetic and approach of Scottish harp, to me, has often felt to be more like that of art music or contemporary music.

Throughout this essay I will mainly use the term Scottish harp, this generally refers to the modern lever harp practice which is commonly associated with traditional Scottish music, often known as traditional Scottish harp or clarsach. The term is not intended to include other harping practices which take place within Scotland, for example, the work of Scottish based pedal harpists. While I acknowledge that there is a global diaspora of musicians playing Scottish harp, I have generally limited the scope of this essay to those working and performing in Scotland. I have also opted to use the term pedal harp to refer to musical practices associated with both the single and double action pedal harp, sometimes referred to as concert harp.

## Reinventing the Scottish Harp

The harp has been present within the fabric of Scotland's music and culture for over a millennium, with the role, repertoire and physical construction of the instrument being

shaped and influenced by the historic sociocultural changes of the nation.[1] Despite this long historic lineage, the modern instrumental practice common today was only established in the second half of the 20th century.

The origins of the contemporary iteration of Scottish harp begin in the late 19th century with the reestablishment of a Scottish harp practice following its near total disappearance during the 18th century, largely as a result of the cultural changes that took place within the nation. There were several unsuccessful attempts to revive Scottish harp during the 19th century, it was not until the 1890s that a successful attempt took hold. While much of the historic symbolism and significance of the harp remained, due to a century of relative disappearance of the historic Scottish harp practice prior to its revival, it was effectively being reinvented.[2]

It should also be noted that separately to Scottish harp practice, the single and later double action pedal harp was being purchased, taught and performed throughout 19th Century Scotland.[3] There has been a continued presence of pedal harp practice around Scotland since this point. During the 19th century there was also a fashion for traditional music being collected, arranged and performed on the pedal harp as art music.[4]

Lord Archibald Campbell, first president of An Comunn Gàidhealach[5] is recognised to have been a key driving force in the reintroduction of the harp within a Scottish traditional music context. This came as a result of his eagerness for there to be a self-accompaniment of Gaelic song on the harp category at the inaugural competition of the Mòd.[6] The harp has a longstanding association with the accompaniment of Gaelic

1 *Tree of String* provides the most comprehensive account of the history and development of the harp in Scotland from the perspective of both a historian and a harper from the earliest known iterations of the instrument to the emergence of the contemporary practice: Keith Sanger and Alison Kinnaird, *Tree of Strings* (Midlothian: Kinmor Music, 1992).

2 Further reflections on the revival and reinvention of the harp in Scotland can be found in the forthcoming chapter *A Harper's perspective on the revival (or rei-invention?)* of the Scottish Harp which I co-authored with Professor Joshua Dickson which appears in: Sandra Joyce and Helen Lawlor (eds.), *Harp Studies II* (Dublin: Fourcourts Press, forthcoming)

3 Sanger and Kinnaird, *Tree of Tree of Strings* p. 205.

4 The Maclean Clephane sisters of the early 19th century are an example of this, as outline in: Karen E. McAulay, 'The Accomplished Ladies of Torloisk' in International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music 44:1 (June 2013)

5 Founded in 1891, An Comunn Gàidhealach is an organisation which encourages the teaching, learning and use of the Scottish Gaelic language and the study and cultivation of Gaelic literature, history, music and art.

6 The Royal National Mòd is an annual festival founded in 1892 run by An Comunn Gàidhealach which promotes Scottish Gaelic language, arts and cultural heritage primarily through a range of competitions, there are also now a network of provincial Mòds.

song in Scotland. This revival was aimed at reinstating the instrument in this role, rather than establishing an instrumental music practice. The first instruments used in the competition were commissioned for this purpose and were inspired by the historic Queen Mary harp.[7]

The accompaniment of Gaelic song on the harp in Scotland continued to grew into the 20th century, developing as a performance practice, as the instrument being used began to develop in size and range. During the 1931 Mòd held in Dingwall, Comunn na Clàrsaich[8] (The Clarsach Society) was formed. The organisation began to grow and encourage the development of Scottish harp, facilitating learning and teaching and supporting the construction of instruments suited to the developing practice. Comunn na Clàrsaich is now the single largest organisation promoting Scottish harp with an ever-growing fleet of rental harps and facilitating the running of the annual Edinburgh International Harp Festival, which will mark its 43rd year in 2024.

In the second half of the 20th century, there was a notable shift in Scottish harp practice from being primarily associated with the accompaniment of Gaelic song, to the development of an instrumental practice alongside the general folk revival happening in Scotland at the time. This shift was reflected in a 1973 change in the stated aims of Comunn na Clàrsaich.[9] Harpers were now performing solo, self-accompanied arrangements of new and traditional material as well as appearing within folk band and ensemble contexts. Recordings, performances, workshops, teaching books and folios were becoming readily available.

## Organology

Towards the 20th Century the modern lever harp became the standard instrument used within Scottish harp practice; fully fitted with semitone levers, typically with a full-sized range of 34 strings with wound mental bass strings with mid and treble strings of gut or increasingly, synthetic materials. This common lever harp is manufactured across the world and used within a wide range of contemporary and traditional harp practices, including Irish harp.

7 Stuart Eydmann, *In Good Hands: The Clarsach Society and the Renaissance of the Scottish Harp* (Edinburgh: The Clarsach Society, 2017) p. 17.

8 A comprehensive history of Comunn na Clàrsaich can be found in: *ibid.*

9 Sanger and Kinnaird, *Tree of Tree of Strings* p. 211.

To a lesser extent, the wire-strung harp is also played within contemporary Scottish harp. This instrument differs from the lever harp in that it is generally unlevered and with a smaller range, solid metal strings and metal string shoes. In terms of the sound produced it generally has a brighter, bell-like sound with a significant sustain in comparison to the lever harp. While being a vibrant musical practice in and of itself steeped in research and often historically informed practice, the wire-strung harp is far less prevalent within a mainstream traditional Scottish music context.

## Technique

The commonly adopted technical approach within Scottish harp sees minor variation between players but it is generally in line with other modern harp practices: harp on right shoulder, right hand treble, left hand bass, finger pads, no pinkies, thumbs up and fingers down. Given that Scottish harp is a relatively recently established practice, it is likely to have been influenced by the technique of longer standing practices, most notably the pedal harp.

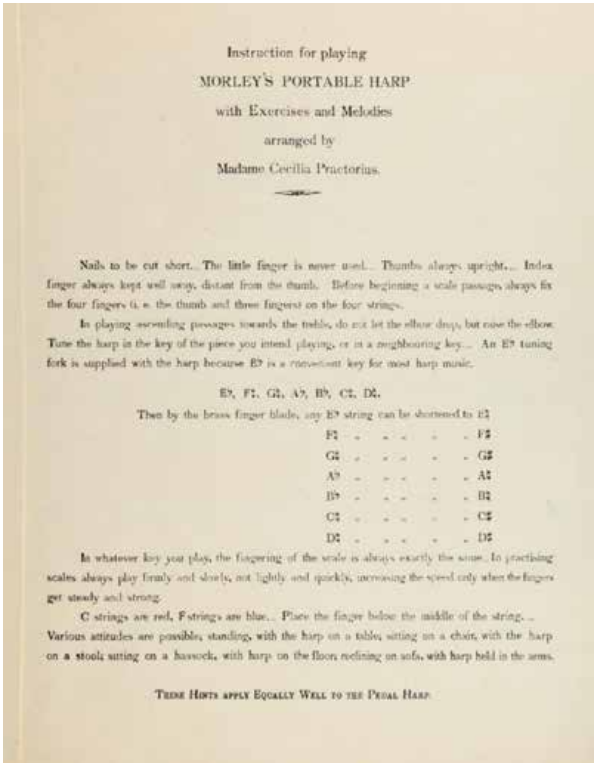

*A Simple Method of Learning to Play the Old Irish Harp*, an 1890 publication by London based harp maker J G Morley

*A Simple Method of Learning to Play the Old Irish Harp* is an 1890 publication by London based harp maker Joseph George Morley. Morley was mainly a maker of pedal harps, having been an apprentice to Erard. He did however also manufacture what was being advertised as an 'Irish harp' - a bladed instrument similar in shape and size to Egan's Portable Irish Harp as well as to the harps being played in Scotland in the early 20th century. The method book is written by Cecilia Praetorius who was a respected pedal harpist, married to Morley. The opening page contains a description indistinguishable to

that widely seen in modern Scottish harp:

> 'Nails to be cut short. The little finger is never used. Thumbs always upright. Index finger kept well away, distant from thumb. Before beginning a scale passage always fix four fingers...THESE HINTS APPLY EQUALLY TO THE PEDAL HARP'[10]

This is an example of a London based, pedal harp playing musician, suggesting technique to be used in the playing of Irish Harp, at the point in time where Scottish Harp was being reinvented. It is likely that this melting pot of harp practices would have extended to the development of Scottish Harp. These similarities suggests that the commonly adopted technique is routed in a general approach harp practice, rather than being specifically developed for the purposes of Scottish harp.



Instruction for playing
MORLEY'S PORTABLE HARP
with Exercises and Melodies
arranged by
Madame Cecilia Practorius.

Nails to be cut short. The little finger is never used. Thumbs always upright. Index finger always kept well away, distant from the thumb. Before beginning a scale passage always fix the four fingers (i. e. the thumb and three fingers) on the four strings.

In playing ascending passages towards the treble, do not let the elbow drop, but raise the elbow. Tune the harp in the key of the piece you intend playing, or in a neighbouring key. An E♭ tuning fork is supplied with the harp because E♭ is a convenient key for most harp music.

E♭, F♮, G♮, A♭, B♭, C♮, D♮.

Then by the brass finger blade, any E♭ string can be shortened to E♮

F♮ . . . . . F♯
G♮ . . . . . G♯
A♭ . . . . . A♮
B♭ . . . . . B♮
C♮ . . . . . C♯
D♮ . . . . . D♯

In whatever key you play, the fingering of the scale is always exactly the same. In practising scales always play firmly and slowly, not lightly and quickly, increasing the speed only when the fingers get steady and strong.

C strings are red, F strings are blue. Place the finger below the middle of the string. Various attitudes are possible; standing, with the harp on a table; sitting on a chair, with the harp on a stool; sitting on a hassock, with harp on the floor; reclining on sofa, with harp held in the arms.

THESE HINTS APPLY EQUALLY WELL TO THE PEDAL HARP.

Opening page of *A Simple Method of Learning to Play the Old Irish Harp*

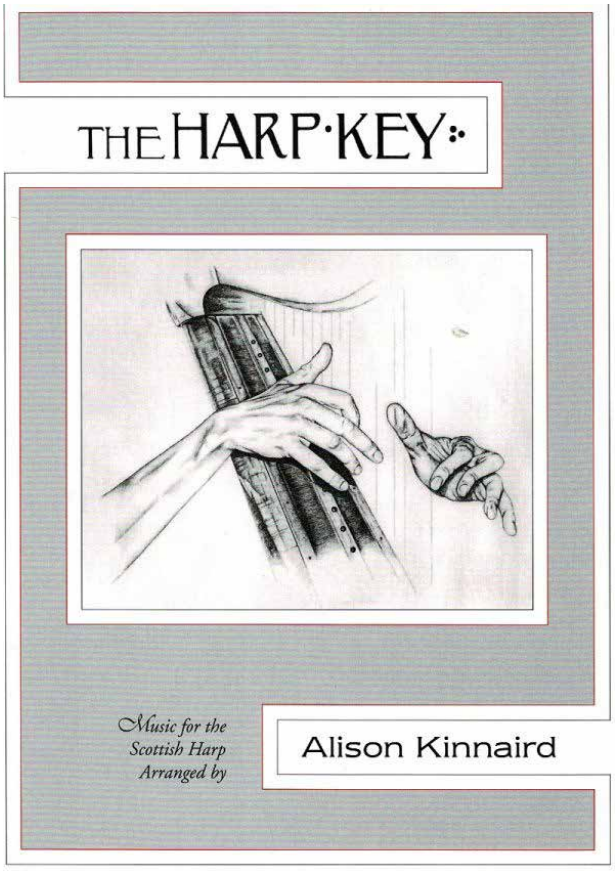
## Repertoire

The repertoire performed during the early period of Scottish harp history, pre the 18th century lull in the practice, is often declared lost by modern players due to its largely aurally transmitted nature. However, through the work of the likes of Alison Kinnaird[11] and William Matheson[12] this is a body of repertoire with accompanying research, evidenced to have been played during this early period. This historically significant repertoire is not particularly prevalent within the contemporary Scottish harp canon. The wide ranging and at times disparate repertoire performed within Scottish harp music today is representative of the vast spectrum of creative identities held by Scottish harpers. What began as the chordal accompaniment and arrangements of traditional

10 Cecilia Praetorius, *A Simple Method of Learning to Play the Old irish Harp* (London: JG Morley, 1890).

11 Alison Kinnaird, *The Harp Key*, (Midlothian: Kinmor Music, 1986).

12 William Matheson, *The Blind Harper: The Songs of Roderick Morison and His Music* (Edinburgh: The Scottish Gaelic Texts Society, 1970).




Alison Kinnaird

songs in early 20th century has developed into a continually growing body of repertoire which majors heavily on new compositions and the arrangements of contemporary, traditional and traditional style melodies with often complex harmonies and extended techniques.

Having emerged at a time of increasing globalisation and fusion of the music, the diverse soundscape of Scottish harp reflects its wide range of influences from not only other harping practices but other musical genres entirely. The harp's ability to self-accompany often encourages self-contained solo performance and I believe that this, combined with Scottish harp's closeness to other non-traditional harp practices such as pedal and contemporary lever harp has seen a culture of the performance of pre-determined arrangements of traditional tunes or scored compositions.

New Scottish harp compositions also contribute significantly to the repertoire played within the emerging, international contemporary lever harp repertoire. This stretches from the works of Savourna Stevenson of the 1980s and continues with the work of harpers, such as Catriona McKay.

Catriona McKay

## Nomenclature and Identity in Scottish Harp Practice

The musical diversity of Scottish harp can not only be heard by listening to the eclectic range of music being written and performed by Scottish harpers today, but is also demonstrated through the variety of often nuanced nomenclature chosen in the description of the instrument, its repertoire and the wider practice.

In recent analysis of the online professional profiles of 16 Scottish based harpers who identify as being involved with traditional music, the following 12 different terms were identified being used to describe the physical instrument played by the musician or their musical practice:[13]

| | |
|---|---|
| *Celtic harp* | *harp* |
| *clarsach* | *lever harp* |
| *clàrsach* | *Scottish harp* |
| *contemporary clàrsach* | *small harp* |
| *contemporary Scottish harp* | *wire-strung harp* |
| *gut-strung harp* | *wire-strung clarsach* |

While some musicians appeared to use a variety of terms interchangeably, suggesting that they either do not have a strong affinity with or preference for a specific term or that they feel their creative practice can be described by multiple terms, the majority of musicians kept to a single or similar description. The wide range of nomenclature is indicative of the undefined and divergent nature of Scottish harp today and the often-slight differences between chosen terms are either a result of a lack of standardisation in terminology or indicative of differences amongst the creative identities held within the Scottish harp community.

While some of the sample group analysed may not have chosen a term specifically to describe their practice, each differing term has distinct connotations and possible inferences of meaning.

Some musicians simply choose physical descriptions of the instrument they play such as *lever harp*, *gut/wire-strung harp* and *small harp* – the latter framing Scottish harp in relation to bigger, presumably pedal, harp.

13 Neil Wood, *Harper's Identity Survey* (June 2023) – I will publish my full findings in my PhD thesis.

Other terms used are perhaps more indicative of idiom like *clàrsach*, *Scottish harp* and *Celtic harp*. The term clàrsach, Scottish Gaelic for harp, is often used by those whose practice relates to Gaelic song or sits within in a wider Gaelic arts context. The term has also entered Scottish English, loosing the grave over the a, often used as a general term for the Scottish harp with a suggestion of the harps historic past, particularly within Gaelic culture. I have also encountered musicians who differentiate between the clarsach to mean wire-strung and harp to mean a modern gut strung instrument. In its English title Comunn na Clàrsaich uses The Clarsach Society, as it is most commonly known. However, this is a title coined in the early 20th century by the organisation when the revival of a Scottish harp was intertwined with the wider promotion of Gaelic language and culture.

*Celtic harp* is sometimes used as an umbrella term to collectively describe the harping traditions of the Celtic nations. It is also used to describe an emerging musical genre which sees the assimilation of these regional or national harping practices and traditions into a relatively loosely defined Celtic inspired lever-harp practice which draws upon elements of each requisite harp style and the traditional music of their wider contexts.

The term *harp* is used by some musicians either as a shorthand, following a more detailed description of their practice or in some instances as the sole chosen term. This might imply that they do not intend for their practice to be defined to a specific harp style or musical genre.

*Scottish* could be used to describe the location or nationality of the musician, but it could also be used to set their practice in the context of Scottish traditional music or the Scottish harp.

The term *tradition* poses several potential inferences of meaning. This could suggest that the practice of the musician is to be viewed as part of the long and historic lineage of Scottish harp or it could imply an association with Scottish harp as a recently established traditional practice. It could also be used to suggest an association with Scotland's traditional music more widely.

The term *contemporary* also sees a duality of meaning, this term could be used literally to indicate a current iteration of the musical practice or it could be used in relation to contemporary music, referencing the emerging global contemporary lever harp practice with an ever growing canon of repertoire.

In terms of the title adopted by the musicians themselves, the term *harper*, one common within Irish Harp, is sometimes used by Scottish players to signify an affiliation with tradition and history, to distinguish from *harpist*, the title of choice for many members of the pedal harp community.

This variety in nomenclature continues to vary beyond a Scottish harp context within lever harp practices across the world as discussed by Anne-Marie O'Farrell, who concludes that lever harp is an agreeable term which simply describes the physical instrument by the mechanical difference which sets it apart from other types of harp, without any indication of style of genre.[14]

This wide variety of terminology is indicative of a range of musical identities with Scottish harp and suggest there is not a commonly shared identity.

## My Journey in Scottish Harp

There is a vibrant landscape of learning and teaching within Scottish harp, with a range of tuition available to both adults and young people. Work is being carried out to continually increase access to the instrument with expanding low and no cost tuition options (primarily for young people), supported by the growing fleet of rental harps provided by The Clarsach Society.

I grew up in the aptly named village of Neilston, on the rural outskirts of the City of Glasgow, in Scotland's densely populated Central Belt. I began playing the harp at the age of seven after taking part in a local Fèis[15], this was an unlikely beginning as Fèisean are far more prevalent in the Gaelic speaking Highland and Island communities of Scotland – the Neilston Fèis only survived for a handful of annual events.

14 Anne-Marie O'Farrell, The Chromatic Development of the lever harp: mechanism, resulting technique and repertoire in Sandra Joyce and Helen Lawlor (eds.), *Harp Studies* (Dublin, 2016) p.219.

15 A national network typically week-long, Scottish Gaelic arts summer school for young people with an emphasis on language and music, co-ordinated by Fèisean nan Gàidheal.

Following this initial encounter, the first decade of my music education journey was spent in one-to-one harp lessons with Scottish harper Rachel Hair. These lessons were in line with the commonly adopted Scottish harp pedagogy, as a traditional musically inclined harper, Rachel supported my interests in exploring music from the wider idiom. While I studied some of the rite of passage compositions, my teenage aversion to contemporary lever harp compositions and sight reading often prevailed and much of the music I played with routed in Scottish West Coast, Highland and Gaelic musical traditions.

In my local area, traditional music, let alone playing the harp, was not a recognised activity among my peers. I had little access to traditional music community activity such as sessions due to their scarceness in the area, with the majority of those being fast paced, taking place in the city and in pubs inaccessible to young people. There was also no accessible traditional music youth ensemble in the area at that time. I did engage with the monthly regional branch meetings of The Clarsach Society, an organisation which without its harp rental scheme, I would not have been able to take up the instrument in the first place. However, my involvement with these workshops began to self-consciously dwindle as a male, teenage learner amongst a membership of primarily female, adult learners. Engaging with Edinburgh International Harp Festival, organised by The Clarsach Society provided me with an annual boost of enthusiasm, knowledge and ideas. EIHF acted as my primary point of contact with harp players, workshops, performances and makers throughout my childhood and adolescence - it was through the festival that I was first introduced to many of my future inspirations, collaborators and mentors.

Scottish harp is the only practice associated with Scottish traditional music with a hugely higher proportion of female than male participants. This is of course no bad thing, given the backdrop of gender and wider equality issues currently being addressed within Scottish traditional music and the music industry more widely. However, one of the few drawbacks to this gender imbalance within Scottish harp is the lack of male role models for younger players. I think this phenomenon was one of the main reasons that I wanted to disassociate with Scottish harp as a teenager and headed towards Scottish traditional music.

Aside from irregularly attending traditional music concerts, again, with limited access to these due to age and location, my primary means of engaging with and exploring the traditional music community was through recordings. In an age before online

streaming, this was often through CDs but latterly became largely through amateur recorded performances on Youtube. This digital exploration and transmission of traditional music offered an alternative to what might traditionally take place during in person gatherings of a community where traditional music was more prominent. It allowed me to build a bank of repertoire and experience both regional styles and the styles of individual musicians. Most of the music I was listening to was not harp music and I was developing ornamentation and accompaniment which emulated what I was hearing within other instrumental and vocal practices. Beyond triplets[16] and cuts[17], I had come across very little ornamentation in common usage within mainstream Scottish harp.

At the age of 18, I decided to embark on a career in music and enrolled on the BMus Traditional Music course at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, during which my principal study was Scottish Harp '(normally gut-strung)', as described by the course's online prospectus.[18] This degree programme, reflecting the wider Scottish harp community, is heavily orientated towards players of the standard, typically 34 string lever harp, using conventional finger pad technique. Many of those studying on this strand of the course come from a harp background, often with less experience of traditional music than players of other instruments, I feel that this is in part-due to the fact it is one of the few degree level qualifications available specialising in lever harp.

I began on this lever harp pathway, studying with Scottish lever harpers Corrina Hewat and Heather Downie. However, in the second year of the four years of the programme, at my request, I had the opportunity to undergo some tuition in wire-strung harp under the guidance of Karen Marshalsay,[19] [20] a Scottish harper who performs on lever and wire-strung harp as well as the bray harp, unusually using primarily fingernails across all three harps.

Through working with Karen, I made the initially uncomfortable and challenging transition to the use of fingernails in the playing of the wire-strung harp, as is common

16 Most commonly played as three of the same note repeated in quick succession, typically using fingers 4 3 2.

17 A single acciaccatura grace-note from above the melody note.

18 www.rcs.ac.uk/courses/bmus-traditional-music

19 Karen Marshalsay, *Key Techniques For Harp*, (Edinburgh: Marshap Music, 2012) - contains an extensive list of the techniques and ornamentation she introduced me to with accompanying exercises and example tunes suitable for both wire and non-wire strung harps.

20 Much of Karen's work is adapted from the research and practice of Bill Taylor, in particular his interpretation of the 1613 Welsh Robert ap Huw manuscript. This is documented in Bill Taylor, *Fingernail Harp Techniques from Wales and Ireland*, (Strathpeffer: Wire-branch of The Clarsach Society, 2003).

in the practice. I then began to take the fingernail techniques and approach common to wire-strung playing back into my lever harp playing. I then made a transition to wire-strung harp as my principal study and lever harp as a second study, performing recitals on both harps for the second half of my degree. I believe I was the first student and remain the only student on the course, to major in wire-strung harp. Under Karen's guidance I began to adopt the same hybrid approach across both lever and wire-strung harp which she employs using almost entirely fingernails apart from in the lower octaves of the wound metal bass strings of the lever harp, for which the finger pads are often used.[21]

## Developing My Practice

I found that the use of fingernails, combined with the ornamentation from wire-strung practice I was exploring, enabled me to get closer to realising my creative intentions, of emulating the sound and style of other Scottish traditional instruments and repertoire, than what previously had been possible using conventional harp technique. Following the first few years of this exploration I began to make a few key observations including:

1. The increased level of string damping typically used within wire-strung playing, when employed on lever harp, creates a sound and timbre which emulates the stopped[22] sound found in other instruments commonly heard within Scottish traditional music. The open stringing of the harp does not naturally lead to this effect. This in turn helps emphasise the 'rhythmic polarity' as described by Simon McKerrell[23] that is central to the style of a large portion of Scottish traditional music - particularly in the performance of reels and strathspeys, the strathspey being a uniquely Scottish musical form.
2. The fingernails provide a more percussive and less rounded sound than that produced by conventional finger pad technique. This results in a harsher tone, akin to the difference often heard between a fiddle player and a violinist.
3. Using fingernails, in place of finger pads, requires less purchase on the string, similarly to a plectrum, which aids the playing of fast melodies and intricate ornamentation.

21 This is an approach which Karen adapted from the teaching of Alison Kinnaird who uses nails on wire-strung and pads on gut-strung harp.

22 As a result mechanism of sound production in instruments such as pipes and fiddle the sound of preceding note is immediately halting that of the previous note.

23 Simon McKerrell, *Scotland: Modern and Contemporary Performance Practice, in The Sage International Encyclopaedia of Music and Culture Sage* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2019) p. 3

4. The ornamentation commonly used within mainstream Scottish harp practice is limited, however there is a wide range of ornamentation available through drawing upon other harp practices which can be matched to emulate the sound and function traditional Scottish instrument ornamentation. There is also the opportunity for further development and experimentation with ornamentation within Scottish harp practice.

These initial observations have led to the PhD research which I am currently undertaking at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland with a working title: *An Approach to Sounding Scottish on the Harp: an exploration of the incorporation of fingernail techniques into contemporary Scottish traditional harp practice*. Through this research I aim to develop a technical approach to playing the harp which is led by a desire to emulate the sounds of Scotland's traditional music, rather than playing Scottish traditional music with a pre-established technique. There are several significant questions to address before I can undertake the practice-based portion of this research, including defining what is intended by the term Scottish traditional music, while developing a deeper understanding of Scottish harp and its relationship to traditional music.

## Conclusion

I do not seek to challenge or change the practice of any individual or group within Scottish harp, which as this essay has demonstrated is a vibrant and diverse musical community hosting a wide range of styles, influences and creative identities. I hope my research work will offer an additional approach to Scottish harpers who like myself, might look to have a practice which emulates the sounds of Scottish traditional music.

Perhaps the crisis of creative identity that I find myself in is because I want to play Scottish traditional music on the harp; this being a separate endeavour to the continually developing Scottish harp practice which, while being rooted in Scottish traditional music, is emerging as a stand-alone musical practice, and perhaps even a new tradition in its own right.

My intentions echo those of harper Alison Kinnaird, who has been cited regularly in this essay and of whose teaching greatly influences that of Karen Marshalsay of which I continue to learn from. Alison was a lead proponent in the establishment of the harp

as an instrumental practice within contemporary Scottish traditional music during the wider traditional music revival of the 1970s:

> *'As the harping tradition was broken at the end of the 18th century, my music does not attempt to reconstruct this lost music but to fit into traditional music as it is played and sung today'*

Kinnaird goes on to propose that the best way to ensure that the Scottish harp can be reintroduced into Scottish traditional music is for harpers to engage with the performance and approach of musicians of other traditional Scottish instruments.

And this is what I hope to continue.

## Neil Wood

Neil Wood is a Glasgow-based, Scottish harper currently studying a PhD in contemporary Scottish traditional harp practice at The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. He is an active performer, playing both gut and wire-strung harps and educator, with a keen interest in widening access to the harp and Scottish traditional music more widely. He is the founding director of The Folks' Music Project CIC, a Social Enterprise which facilitates low and no cost community based traditional music activities and tuition to people of all ages in Greater Glasgow. He is also the Outreach Co-ordinator for Edinburgh International Harp Festival and currently sits on the Executive Council of the Clarsach Society.