

harp
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CRUIT
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HARP PERSPECTIVES

THE HIGHEST HARP CONCERT
Connecting Cultures Through Music

SIOBHÁN BRADY

the arts
council
na chomhairle
ealaíon

funding
traditional arts

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, Siobhán Brady documents her journey from the Himalayas in 2018 to the summit of Mount Kilimanjaro in 2023 to perform the Highest Harp Concert. Siobhán's inspiring achievement reveals the extraordinary feat she and her team achieved at altitude. It underscores the universal language of music and its unparalleled ability to unite cultures and raise awareness for critical causes.

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

Editor

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THE HIGHEST HARP CONCERT

CONNECTING CULTURES THROUGH MUSIC

Siobhán Brady



In the early hours of July 25, 2023, a remarkable musical event unfolded on the summit of Mount Kilimanjaro in Tanzania. Siobhán Brady performed the Highest Harp Concert in the World at 5,895 meters (1934 ft). This performance was more than just a bid to break the Guinness World Record—it was a heartfelt effort to connect cultures through music and raise awareness and vital funds for Cystic Fibrosis Ireland, while bringing the symbol of Ireland to the summit of the highest free-standing mountain in the world.

The team included 19 Irish members and an African-based support crew of about 60 people. Preparing for this high-altitude concert was intense, involving many months of physical training and careful planning. The harp itself, a Camac Janet lever harp, was transported in a specially designed robust case to withstand the journey. The team received a lot of support for this fundraiser in both Ireland and in Tanzania and indeed across the world. The Irish Ambassador for Tanzania Mary O'Neill and, Tanzania's Permanent Secretary of Natural Resources and Tourism, Hassan Abbas, spoke live on national TV before the climb and the team received congratulations and special acknowledgment from the president of Tanzania, Samia Suluhu Hassan.

The climb took ten days with the final ascent to the summit at high altitude bringing strong winds, freezing temperatures, and the low oxygen levels. Despite these challenges, the team's determination and spirit prevailed, culminating in a concert that was both a personal triumph and a significant cultural event.



Ambassador Mary O'Neill, Permanent Secretary of Natural Resources and Tourism, Hassan Abbas and Siobhán Brady live on national TV



Siobhán's journey to Kilimanjaro was not her first high-altitude performance. In 2018, she set the previous record by performing at Singla Pass in the Himalayas at 4,954 meters. That concert was orchestrated by Desmond Gentle, an advocate for the power of music to bridge cultures and raise awareness for important causes. Tragically, Desmond Gentle died 10 days after returning to the United Kingdom from this trip. Throughout his life, Desmond Gentle raised awareness that music can bring cultures together, nourish children's cognitive, motor and emotional development, provide creative impetus for charitable fundraising, and draw attention to other issues.



The Singla Pass concert featured a range of music such as traditional Irish dance music, slow airs, the premiere of 'By Strangford Waters', by Janet Harbison and a new composition

called 'Badal Badaal' which translates to 'Clouds' in Hindi. Desmond Gentle's legacy continued to inspire Siobhán and her team, who planned the charity fundraiser on Mount Kilimanjaro in Desmond's memory.



The 20-minute concert at the summit included an eclectic mix of traditional Irish tunes and contemporary pieces, reflecting the cultural diversity that music can celebrate and promote. To open the concert, Caroline Heffernan, a CF representative, read 'The Prophets Are Weeping', a poem by Irish President Michael D. Higgins. One highlight was the inclusion of 'Sante Sana', meaning 'Thank You' in Swahili. This piece was written by Anne-Marie O'Farrell and symbolized gratitude and respect for the local culture and the mountain that hosted this extraordinary event. This concert also featured a world premiere of an Irish composer, Rory Moloney. His piece 'Scamail', meaning 'Clouds' in Irish, concluded the performance.

Another poignant moment was the performance of Ed Sheeran's 'Little Bird'. This song holds a special place in the hearts of the cystic fibrosis community, particularly due to its connection with Triona Priestley, a young woman who passed away from CF in 2014. Ed Sheeran had performed the song for Triona over the phone in her final moments, and it has since become an anthem of love and remembrance for those affected by the



disease. ‘Little Bird’ was played to honour Triona and every person who had lost their fight to cystic fibrosis.

The Highest Harp Concert on Mount Kilimanjaro was more than just a musical performance; it was a testament to the power of music to connect people, raise awareness, and inspire change. The funds raised from this concert will support Cystic Fibrosis Ireland, continuing the mission that began with Siobhán’s first high-altitude concert.



The memory of Desmond Gentle and his belief in the broader impact of music lives on through these events. The team also collected resources to donate to The Plaster House, a local charity which aims to improve the lives of children living with treatable disabilities across Tanzania. Due to

the generosity of Irish people and companies, The Plaster House was able to receive vital medical supplies, clothes, educational materials, a donation of 1 million Shillings (€350), and even Irish hurleys and sliotars.

A dedicated film team accompanied Siobhán and her team on their journey to capture every moment of the Highest Harp Concert. The footage of this amazing story, from the Himalayas in 2018 to the summit of Mount Kilimanjaro in 2023, is set to be transformed into a documentary with the help of Guinness World Records Studios, aiming to share this inspiring story with a global audience. The film will not only highlight the extraordinary efforts of Siobhan and the many challenges that the team faced at altitude but also underscore the universal language of music and its unparalleled ability to unite cultures and raise awareness for crucial causes.





Siobhán Brady

Siobhán Brady began her musical journey with the piano at age 5 under the guidance of Stuart O'Sullivan at the Limerick School of Music. At 11, she discovered her passion for the harp, studying with acclaimed harper Janet Harbison. Under the mentorship of Anne-Marie Papin Labazordière, Siobhan received a First Class Honours Music Degree in the pedal harp from MTU Cork School of Music. Siobhan has had the opportunity to perform with several ensembles such as the Irish Harp Orchestra, CSM Symphony Orchestra, North Star Chamber Music Orchestra, Cork Concert Orchestra and UL Orchestra. Siobhan is a two-time Guinness World Record holder, having

performed the world's highest-altitude harp performance to support Cystic Fibrosis and received a Mayoral Award for Musical Achievements.