

Celtic Harp Music by Anne Roos

Information About the Celtic Harp

Few instruments can be traced back to 4000 BC or are rooted in cultures spanning the globe. The harp holds a special place in the Old Testament, played by Jubal and King David, and in classical antiquity, played by Orpheus. Harps existed in Babylonia and Mesopotamia, depicted in drawings on the tomb of Pharaoh Ramses III. Harps are also found in carvings from the Middle East and in Greek sculptures. Also found in Africa, the harp traveled north to Spain and soon spread throughout Europe. The harp later arrived in South America brought there by the Spaniards.

The world's harps vary according to size, structure, decoration, and woods and materials used for the body of the instrument and the strings. But there is one thing they all have in common: their strings run vertical (rather than parallel) to the sound box. The correct term for describing a person who plays any harp other than an orchestra harp is "harper", not "harpist".

Early Irish harps were quite different from the large pedal harps that are used in modern orchestras. They were much smaller, originally held on the harper's lap. They had no pedals, and were carved in one piece from bogwood.

Griffith of Wales employed harpers in his court at the end of the 11th century. Both Irish and Scottish harpers were greatly admired for their skills throughout Europe, and they commonly visited each other's countries to study, learn, and exchange tunes. The Trinity College Harp and Queen Mary's Harp are the oldest surviving Celtic harps and both date back from the 15th or 16th centuries. These harps were wire strung, rather than gut or nylon strung as they are today. The word "harp" has its roots in the Anglo-Saxon, Old German and Old Norse words, and means "to pluck." In Gaelic, they were known first as cruit and now as clarsach or clairseach.

Harpers were highly trained professionals who performed for nobility and enjoyed political power. In the 16th Century, Queen Elizabeth I decided to put a stop to this and issued a proclamation to hang Irish harpists and destroy their instruments.

The harp later became Ireland's national emblem, and it still adorns its flag, Irish Euros, and, of course, bottles of Guinness beer. Ironically, even with these great reminders of Ireland's love of the harp, most of the ancient airs and melodies once played on the harp are gone to the ages. Today's harpers are now taking up the challenge to reintroduce the Celtic harp to the modern world.

The Celtic harp produces pretty bell-like tones, which lend authenticity to a repertoire of traditional Irish and English music, and adds a unique sound to all music played on it. The Celtic harp is a naturally acoustic instrument, but it can be amplified when the need arises. This beautiful instrument is handcrafted of fine hardwoods. It can be easily carried; it can go where concert harps cannot. Its versatility and transportability make the Celtic harp suitable for a variety of occasions, events, and venues. The dynamics and beauty of the Celtic Harp lends charm and elegance to any event.

Anne Roos is available for booking for your event. Contact her at anne@celticharpmusic.com and by phone (within the continental U.S.) at 800-255-6318. Visit Anne's website at www.celticharpmusic.com to listen to samples and view her extensive music list.

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