

SOME OF WHAT HAS BEEN SAID ABOUT THE HARP ORCHESTRA

"As Riverdance popularised Irish dancing and Brendan Voyage brought the uilleann pipes to a wider public, so the Belfast Harp Orchestra is animating a huge interest in the Irish harp. And it's almost entirely due to Janet and her modern mix with tradition...."

ANNE HAILES, The Irish News

"There is, perhaps, no other event in the opening festival of the Belfast Waterfront Hall which reflects so accurately the wishes of the organisers that the prestigious new venue should provide something for everyone in our divided community as much as the concert by the Belfast Harp Orchestra, with guests Tommy Sands and the Fieldmarshal Montgomery Pipe Band. While uniting the audience in an evening of music, song and dance, the seemingly opposing elements of our musical traditions .. also unite with one another in a universal celebration of cultures."....

DAMIAN MURRAY, Music Critic, Irish News

"a spectacular success story" ...

"Janet Harbison is an indomitable lady. Having assembled a cast of more than 70 for the Belfast Harp Orchestra's showcase at the Waterfront, she was not going to let a serious dose of 'flu stand in her way [the whole cast] more than achieved their stated aim of presenting the music, song and dance of Ulster in magnificent fashion."

GEOFF HARDEN, Music Critic, Newsletter

"The Belfast Harp Orchestra are carrying on a long association between the harp and the city [of Belfast]. They have performed to great acclaim in France and America and have just returned from a tour of England. Their presiding genius is Janet Harbison who is one of Ireland's most accomplished - and I can say, radical traditional harpists. "

SEAN RAFFERTY, BBC

"The CD Carillon is entirely professional, faultless, has perfect sound and acoustic presence and is highly delightful and charming. The music is wonderfully attractive, so intelligently arranged and laid out, and the performances are technically impeccable, neat and always most subtle, musical and expressive. It's fun to listen and imagine its only one harp playing for tuning and ensemble are so good that one can do just that, and one realises that if it were only one solo harp, then what the heck of a good player he or she might be!! "This CD is now certainly one of the loveliest musical treasures we have. I expect it to automatically win many big prizes, to be very well received everywhere and to emboss [Janet Harbison's] illustrious name firmly throughout the world."

DEREK BELL, Harper with the Chieftains

"Janet Harbison: the human dynamo dedicated to spreading the gospel of the harp"

Irish Music Magazine

"Janet Harbison is one of Ireland's greatest champions of harp music..."

SEAN RAFFERTY, BBC

The
BELFAST HARP ORCHESTRA
celebrates
the music, song and dance
of Ulster

On stage we feature:

- A company of champion harpers, musicians, singers and dancers aged 11 upwards
- including Fife and Lambeg Drum, Scottish Bagpipes and Uilleann Pipes, Fiddlers, Fluters, Concertinas, Singers and Dancers
- from both communities in Northern Ireland
- vibrant and unique, the music is a mix of traditional music, ancient and modern
- directed, taught and presented by Dr Janet Harbison, harper and composer
- Grammy award winners with the Chieftains
- 8 albums to date including recordings with RCA Victor and Polygram
- featured on an award winning U.S.A.-wide PBS special
- world traveled with concerts in
 - New York's Carnegie Hall,
 - Washington DC's Kennedy Centre
 - Royal Festival Hall, London
 - Barbican Centre
 - Birmingham Symphony Hall
 - National Concert Hall, Dublin
 - Munich Philharmonic Hall
- Prime features at
 - Milwaukee Irish Fest
 - Somerfest, Bonn
 - Festival International de l'Harpe Celtique, Brittany
 - Lorient Interceltique Festival
 - Carolan Harp Festival
 - Granard Harp Festival
- Numerous national and international television and film features including BBC' special millennium celebration broadcast from Belfast City Hall with Brian Kennedy and the 27 minute interval film for the BBC Young Musician of the Year, 1999 which was broadcast for the first time from Belfast.

But the movement is more than this.....

THE BELFAST HARP ORCHESTRA

is the most visible project of

The Harp Foundation (Ireland) Limited

(established as an association in 1993 and a charitable company from 1997)

The Harp Foundation (Ireland) Limited is a registered charitable company established in March 1997 with origins dating back to 1983 with the founding of the Harpers' Association (or *Clairseoiri na hEireann*). The Harp Foundation was founded with the aim of

**Promoting excellence in musicianship, friendship and mutual respect
through celebrating all of our cultural heritage**

The story of the Belfast Harp Orchestra (1992 – 2002) is given from page six of this booklet so it is only appropriate here to give a background to the Harp Foundation movement itself.

Background

The background to the Harp Foundation, or the Harpers' Association as it was to begin with, goes back to 1981 when Janet Harbison decided to take time out from her performing career to research the Bunting Manuscript Collection (a collection of 18th century harp music manuscripts), firstly at Cork University under the tutelage of Michael O Suilleabhain (1981-84) and in Belfast at the Institute of Irish Studies where she held a position of Research Fellow, and as a doctoral student with Professor John Blacking in Ethnomusicology at Queen's University (1984-86). She started teaching the harp in the Cork School of Music, but when she came to Belfast in 1984, to cater for her many harp students dispersed through the southern part of Ireland, she established a monthly harp session in Dublin at the Piper's Club in Henrietta Street. This session went on for many years (up to Janet's marriage in 1990) and the Harpers' Association (or *Clairseoiri na hEireann*) was established in 1983 with a constitution exactly modeled on that of the Pipers' Club, with the word 'harp' simply substituted for 'uilleann pipes'. This provided a structure for the harping organisation and its growing activities including our annual summerschools in Cork; Ballycastle in Co. Antrim and Glencolmcille in Co. Donegal.

After her two years in Queen's University, Janet took up the position of Music Curator at the Ulster Folk & Transport Museum, a position she held from December 1986 to June 1994. Here she had responsibility for advising, educating, recording and documenting Ulster's musical heritage under the government initiative of Education toward Mutual Understanding. When lecturing on many topics around Ulster's cultural heritage(s), Janet commonly resorted to the harp to illustrate musical points and in doing so, realised how unfamiliar the harp was in Ulster despite its historical and emblematic relevance. At this time, there was less than half a dozen players of the instrument in the Ulster province. One issue constantly arose: to which tradition did the Irish harp belong? It was common to both cultures in its political significance, but, perhaps because there was no tourism industry or harp concert tradition to support or exploit the tradition, it had become rare and remote. By being common to both traditions, Janet identified that the harp could serve as an effective musical activity that could bring people together from both political traditions, to play and celebrate what was common to them and at the same time revive a very particular and illustrious tradition that had everything to do with Ulster. In 1986, the directors of the Belfast Linen Hall Library who were celebrating their bicentenary in 1988, invited Janet to arrange a concert celebrating their history with the harp. Janet proposed to teach the harp to a group of catholic and protestant Ulster children to perform together in a concert featuring a musical programme drawn from the familiar repertoire of both political traditions along

with specially arranged musical material dating from the Belfast Harper's Assembly of 1792 (and the Bunting manuscripts.....) Thus the orchestra was born.

Finance

In the background to the activities of what was to become the Harp Orchestra, the work of the association provided for the training and facilitation of young people in harp classes, first based in Belfast and Antrim, but from September 1994, based in Newry, Belfast, Antrim, Holywood, Garvagh, Limavady and Derry city. In the summertime, we ran summerschools in Glencolmcille, Co.Donegal which brought harpers from the Republic as well as the North of Ireland, the excess funds of which allowed us to buy old harps which were then loaned to new students during the winter-times and to foreign visitors or beginners at the summerschools. Much of our other funding was raised from sponsorship from the British Foundation for Sports and the Arts, Community Relations and a number of the local councils for specific projects. To date, the work of the Harp Foundation and the Belfast Harp Orchestra did not answer the criteria for Northern Ireland Arts Council funding. This was due to the fact that we did not fit as 'Irish traditional' (since we played harps which were associated with the 'Big House' and anglo-irish tradition) or as 'classical' (since we learned folk music by ear). The difficulty about categorizing our activity has often proved to be a particular challenge.

Fundraising

So, we had to get creative about fund-raising. We constantly need to raise funds to support our students (many of whom emerge from disadvantaged backgrounds) as well as cover our rising administration costs. All of our administration and much of our financial support was provided by the work of Belfast Harps, Janet's trading company, which operated an entertainment agency engaging our harpers to provide music at dinners, trade fairs, weddings etc. as well as processing all her individual musical activities. Having started out as a small company temporarily employing part-time secretaries and reception staff as needs evolved, our financial needs became more pressing as Janet's own performance and creative activity reduced as she found herself more and more involved in the admin needs. In 1994, the "Reverence for Difference Award" for Janet's work with the orchestra, gave us a grant of £2,000 and offices with expert office support in Brookfield Mill on the Crumlin Road which were financed by the Ireland Fund for one year. Within the year however, the in-house expert business and admin support provided by LEDU was withdrawn due to cutbacks, and suddenly we were required to fund our office rental and supporting utilities. Having just departed her post at the Ulster Folk & Transport Museum to work full time with the Harp Foundation and Belfast Harps, Janet quickly found her full-time energy devoted to building the work of the organisation. During 1995 we had a bonanza year with many foreign students coming to our summerschools and festivals, the production of our first CD and high profile concerts tours through the UK. But the short peace we enjoyed was also reflected in the many cancellations after the bombing and troubles started up again in February '96. The disruptions of early July each year was also having detrimental financial effects on our summerschools and festivals, so, much of our activity was moved south of the border (to Glencolmcille, Co.Donegal). However, now the fluctuation of the British pound against the Irish pound was to have an effect as the changes in currency between the printing of our summerschool brochure and the actual events caused significant rises in costs and reductions in our finances. So, we got creative about merchandising and started producing more CDs! Year 2000 brought more challenges when the Foot & Mouth disease stopped most of our activities, but happy to relate, with the rising activity in Europe of the Irish Harp Orchestra, our professional stage production company, and our recent purchase of The Old Schoolhouse in Castleconnell, County Limerick for our Harp Centre, we are busy again with increasing activities both sides of the border. Fund-raising is as much a challenge as it ever was, but with the addition of Mr Malcolm Gullis on our permanent staff (CEO of the Harp Foundation from September 2001) Janet is once more able to concentrate on teaching and stage production.

So, from a beginning in a stark and ambiguous environment, the harp is now re-established and is flourishing in a province which had become world famous for its harpers in times past. In fact, the harp has a very particular history with Ulster and Ireland:

Some historical facts:

- The Irish tradition of harp playing was internationally renowned from as early as the 12th C.
- It was King Henry VIII who formally established the harp as the emblem of Ireland in the 16th century.
- It remains in the British Royal Standard as the emblem of the Irish province in Great Britain
- It was adopted as the official emblem of the Irish nation upon independence and is the presidential seal
- The motto of the United Irishmen, the Presbyterian nationalists of the 1790s, was: "The harp is restrung and shall be heard!"
- Festooned with shamrock, it continues from the time of the R.I.C. to be the emblem of the R.U.C.
- Most of the famous harpers in history hailed from the northern half of Ireland
- The single most important historical event in Irish music history was the Belfast Harpers Assembly in 1792

So....

In fostering the harp, it has become clear over the years that its story and music have had much to offer the reconciliation process in Northern Ireland. Rather than shying away from the politically sensitive material, our choice of music has always been direct and uncompromising – deliberately taking the most extreme political tunes and presenting them in a sensitive, balanced and informative way – thus both player and audience member can revel in the tunes from their own tradition while also learning more about the equally passionate tunes of the other. And from 1995, the dramatic expansion of the orchestra to include the fife and lambeg drum, the tin whistle and the bodhran, the Scottish bagpipes and Irish uilleann pipes as well as dancers and singers from both backgrounds, brought the mix of traditions to an even more daring and exciting level.

Thus, dealing in an even-handed way, with equal respect, energy and intensity, all cultural voices are embraced, Loyalist and Nationalist, extremist and moderate. In this way, the Harp Orchestra has actively cultivated a more proud, positive and harmonious image of ourselves, firstly for ourselves, and ultimately, for the world at large.

Irish Harp Centre, Limerick

In July, 2002, Janet and Malcolm will move to reside at the Irish Harp Centre, Castleconnell, County Limerick where our training school and rehearsal centre is closely situated to and associated with the Irish World Music Centre at the University of Limerick (director: Micheal O Suilleabhain) and the Peace Institute (director: Dorothy Cantrell). The work of the Belfast Harp Orchestra with all our associated teaching and musical activities is continued with Janet working 8 days per month in Northern Ireland with an administrative centre in Upper Crescent, Belfast.

From July 2002, local Belfast Harps, Belfast Harp Orchestra and Harp Foundation activities in **Northern Ireland** are managed by:

Ms Geraldine O Neill (with Dr Janet Harbison and Mr Malcolm Gullis periodically in residence)
Belfast Harps / The Harp Foundation (Ireland) Ltd, 13 Upper Crescent, Belfast BT7 1NT
Tel. (028) 90333121

and in the **Republic of Ireland:**

Mr Malcolm Gullis / Dr Janet Harbison

The Harp Centre, The Old Schoolhouse, Castleconnell, County Limerick, Republic of Ireland

BELFAST HARP ORCHESTRA

Activity Dates

July 2002 – August 2003

2002

July	21 st	Concert	Phoenix Park, Dublin Mid-afternoon open air concert in aid of the medical charity: A Nurse for Daniel
July	21 st - 29 th	Harp Festival Glencolmcille	BHO Training Week & Teacher Training Course,
July	27 th - 29 th	10th Anniversary	BHO Celebration Weekend, Glencolmcille
July	28 th	Concert	Oideas Gael College, Glencolmcille, Co.Donegal Closing Glencolmcille Harp Festivals and Opening Glencolmcille Cultural Festival
August	15 th	Concert	Closing concert of Cambridge Music Festival
September	22nd	Sunday Session	OPEN DAY, Belfast: Camphill, Glencraig
October	5 th	Concert	Garvagh Harp Festival
October	6th	Sunday Session	Garvagh Community Building
November	3 rd - 5 th	Hallowe'en	Rehearsal Sun – Tue
November	6 th – 9 th	Concert tour	Wed – Sat

2003

February	2nd	Sunday Session	Venue tbc (Monaghan?)
March	3rd	Sunday Session	Belfast
March	17 th	Concert	St.Patrick's Day
April	6th	Sunday Session	Garvagh
April	15 th – 19 th	Easter	Rehearsal Tue - Sat
April	22 nd – 26 th	Concert Tour	Tue - Sat
May	25th	Sunday Session	Venue tbc (Monaghan?)
July	6 th – 10 th	July	Rehearsal Sun - Thu
July	11 th – 15 th	Concert tour	Fri - Tue

The Orchestra Movement

The Belfast Harp Orchestra draws together young harp players and other instrumentalists, singers and dancers from all over the province of Ulster.

Our main membership ranges in age from 11 to 17 years and through their experiences with us they:

- Excel in Irish harp and other traditional instrument playing
- Mix with all other instruments in a celebration of traditional music
- Gain in self-confidence and leadership
- Perform to national and international audiences
- Participate in major stage productions
- Record for TV and in studio
- Create friendships across all divides
- Enjoy adventures to local and international places
- Learn about our cultural heritage
- Learn about stagecraft, costume and self presentation
- Launch a career in music

Every young musician with us represents a network of people who are drawn into our movement! Every time we run a harp day in Belfast for instance, all our members arrange the accommodation of the more distant members from Belfast among themselves and their nearest neighbours. Whole families get involved as Mums and Dads arrange lifts from trains or pick-up points, provide our catering at rehearsals and go on to provide the essential support on tours with selling merchandising, helping with stage management, driving the buses, helping with costume changes, loading the harps and packing the backdrops.

Our monthly rehearsal days are on Sundays (after churchtime) and are rotated between three centres at Belfast and Garvagh (near Coleraine). We have three main periods in the year when we undertake a residential rehearsal for 3 to 4 days, then go on tour for up to 5 days. These tours take place during Easter Holidays, the 12th week in July and during the Hallowe'en half-term break from school.

Many of our members form their own ensembles in their locality, and many of our past members have established their own harp schools which will be training up more young players who will audition with Janet on the orchestra Open Days when we are open to new members. Open Days occur twice yearly. Members pay an annual membership fee which is often sponsored by one of our support groups in America for less well-off members.

Our next Open Day is Sunday September 22nd.

For the latest news and schedule, look us up on the internet at:

www.belfastharporchestra.com

The Music

At our monthly Sunday Sessions (rehearsals), half our time is spent teaching traditional music for social play, improving our member's appreciation of the language of the tradition, developing repertoire and playing in session.

The other half of our time is spent in perfecting special arrangements for concert play so that in the course of a player's first year of membership, they are learning the basic repertoire and during our 'touring weeks', selected members are specially preparing a concert production which is taken on tour.

Our basic repertoire is well-known music from the core of the tradition:

Misc Harp compositions and marches:	Dance tunes:
Give me your Hand	The Harvest Home
The Western Wind	The Blackthorn Stick
Brian Boru's March	Rights of Man
O'Donnell's March	Fairy Hornpipe
The Minstrel Boy	Drowsy Maggie
Planxty Irwin	Miss McLeod's
Fanny Power	Larry O'Gaff
Carolan's Concerto	various slides & polkas

Added to this will be a small number of more modern compositions or arrangements from the orchestra director, such as

Bright New Morning
Earth, Wind, Fire and Water
Laganside song
Ulster Symphony, and
Theme to the Titanic

Orchestra members are interviewed / auditioned on **Orchestra Open Days**

Monthly rehearsals which we call our **Sunday Sessions** are on alternating Sundays in Belfast and Garvagh (Coleraine) and distant travelling members are invited to arrive on Saturday evening for a social get-together at whoever's house is accommodating (or organising the accommodation of) the out-of-towners!

Twice a year we will have long **residential (holiday) weekends** in Northern Ireland (First weekend in October in Garvagh) and the Republic of Ireland (Whit June bank-holiday weekend in Castleconnell) where the Junior Irish Harp Orchestra and the Belfast Harp Orchestra will meet and mix.

The Belfast Harp Orchestra tours at Easter time

For 3½ days from Holy Wednesday to the following Saturday (finishing at midday) the orchestra will rehearse a concert production taking off on tour from Easter Tuesday to the following Saturday taking in 5 concert days. Home on Sunday in time for recommencement of school the next week. This tour will generally take a trip to Scotland including the Edinburgh Harp Festival.

The Junior Irish Harp Orchestra tours at Hallowe'en (week approaching Oct 31st)

The Belfast Harp Orchestra tours at Hallowe'en (week after Oct 31st)

The overlapping weekend will involve the Junior Irish Harp Orchestra being hosted by the Belfast Harp Orchestra for their last concert as the BHO start their rehearsal days for their concert tour later that week.

The All Ireland Junior Harp Orchestra tours the 12th week in July.

For the week approaching the 12th day in July, both orchestras will combine in a mass concert production giving 4 to 5 concerts Ireland-wide and hopefully participating in some of the 12th day commemorations (e.g. in Aras an Uachtarain, Dublin).

Rehearsal dates for the Belfast Harp Orchestra
September to August 2002 – 2003.

Next Belfast Harp Orchestra Open Day is September 22nd, 2002 at Camphill, Glencraig (near the Ulster Folk & Transport Museum). Harp players from 10 am, all other instrumentalists from 2.30 pm. The day's activity finishes at 5 pm.

For the latest news and schedule, look us up on the internet at:

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2002 Current Harp Members

Ciara Crail (Belfast, age 12)
Lynn Finnegan (Coleraine, age 14)
Barbara Haugh (Crumlin, Co.Antrim)
Lucy Kerr (Garvagh, Coleraine, age 15)
Fergal McCartan (Newcastle, Co.Down, age 13)
Sarah Beth McClelland (Antrim, age 15)
Gemma McQuillan (Garvagh, Coleraine, age 14)
Esther McKimm (Belfast, age 15)
Nadia Markey (Castleblayney, Co.Monaghan, age 14)
Francis Meehan (Monaghan, age 13)
Cathy Potter (Ballinderry, Co.Tyrone, age 15)
Claire & Jennifer Shane (Greenisland, Co.Antrim_)
Susannah & Kathryn Weir (Garvagh, Coleraine, ages 16 & 14)
Jenna Wood (Holywood, Co.Down)

Past Harp members over the past 10 years

Roisin Bonner (Ballyarnett, Derry)	Mary Bradley (Garvagh, Coleraine)
Padraigin & Siobhan Caesar (Carlow)	Louise Corrigan (Garvagh, Coleraine)
Edel, Ciaran & Christine Brady (Belfast)	Claire Creelman (Stiles, Co. Antrim)
Emily, Benita & Margo Cullen (Carraigonshannon, Co.Leitrim)	
Dearbhla Finnegan (Nobber, Co.Westmeath)	Bronac Gallagher (Newry, Co.Down)
Grainne, Niamh & Roisin Hambly (Claremorris, Co. Mayo)	
Holly Geraghty (Claremorris, Co.Mayo)	Mernie Gilmore (Belfast)
Barbara Haugh (Crumlin, Co. Antrim)	Declan Hegarty (Derry)
Mairead Hogg (Tuam, Co. Galway)	Sorca Kelly (Monaghan)
Aileen Kennedy (New Ross, Co.Wexford)	Suzanne McAlindon(Crumlin, Antrim)
Emer McCaffrey (Belfast)	Helene McCann (Portadown, Armagh)
Orlaigh McCaul (Derry)	Aideen & Keava McClelland (Antrim)
Emma McClelland (Antrim)	Maeve & Una McGuinness (Derry)
Joe, Maureen, & Lucia McGinnis (Greysteel, Co.L'Derry)	
Emer McLaverty (Moville, Co.Donegal)	Julie McNeill (Antrim)
Brian McParland (Portadown, Co.Armagh)	Deirdre Macklin (Monaghan)
Eleanor & Brenda Meehan (Monaghan)	Una Monaghan (Belfast)
Vanessa Murphy (Derry)	Mary & Treasa O'Donnell (Dublin)
Catherine & Margaret Rhatigan (Sligo)	Karen Robb (Belfast)
Jennifer Robinson (Bangor, Co.Down)	Claire Shane (Greenisland, Co.Antrim)
Michael, Fionnuala & Aonghus Rooney (Scotstown, Co. Monaghan)	
Selena Smith (Antrim)	Diana Whelan (Christchurch, Dorset)

Past Soloists

Singers:

Terence Blackburn
Peter Corry
Mairead Healy
Michael Magee

Scottish Bagpipes:

Ian Bryce
Steven Kirkpatrick
Damian Noade

Flutes, Uilleann Pipes:

Ciaran Brady
Patrick Davey
Barry Kerr
Francie McPeake

A Note on the BHO Founder and Director

Janet Harbison

D.Litt., M.A., B.A.Mod.in Mus.(TCD), L.T.C.L., T.T.C.T

Harper, composer, teacher

For thirty years and more, Janet has enjoyed an international career of performance on the Irish Harp. She has evolved a style of playing and teaching that is unique and brings the ancient tradition of Irish harping into the modern day. She has received widespread recognition for her work with numerous national and international awards from arts and governmental institutions and in 1999, was awarded an honorary doctorate from the University of Ulster.

Although born and raised in Dublin in the mid '50s, her heritage and family is from the heart of Ulster. She came to settle in Belfast in 1984 and found a particular relevance for her skills, abilities and energy. Her portfolio of activities includes being a widely experienced stage performer, recording artist and composer; an educator in many contexts from a private lessons to conference masterclasses, an academic authority on the style and repertoire, political and social history of Irish harpers and their patrons through the ages; and from 1986 to 1994, she worked as the Curator of Music in the Ulster Folk & Transport Museum with responsibility of catering for all of Ulster's cultural heritage.

Her broad and intimate understanding of Ulster's history and cultural heritage, and her will to contribute to the peace and reconciliation environment in the community, has animated her work with young people in Northern Ireland and the current plans to expand the activities of the harp schools, agencies and orchestras into the Republic of Ireland will significantly enhance the national scale of the work and preoccupy the next decades of her life.

A unique style of music making

Over the past 30-40 years, the natural way of becoming a traditional musician has been significantly affected by the advent of television and the high tech and high energy consuming distractions available to young people today. There has also been an increasing disconnection between the older and younger generations as families disperse throughout the country and people socialise more with age-equals rather than across the generations. The natural way that people 'picked up' the music used to be as a child 'picks up' language, merely by communing constantly with the music makers and becoming participants in the activity. The notion of a 'structured learning process', and paying a teacher for half hour weekly lessons, is very new – and while it might assist in teaching something of the tradition, unless the player then communes with other music-makers in the normal improvisational way (as in a session of improvising players), the music remains a 'fixed' and a 'learned process' rather than a 'lived tradition'.

Janet Harbison's method of teaching harp students synthesises the tradition of intuitive musicmaking in the language of the Irish tradition with the compromises that are made to allow young people to also enjoy all their other distractions. The method presents them with the experience of learning from simple structures of the starter pieces to the facility of being able to interpret the tradition for themselves, to ornament, variate and arrange the highly fascinating and complex compositions at the core of the historical harp repertoire. The experience of playing in the harp orchestras involves the students in a highly disciplined approach to music performance, rather like 'theatre', which also offers a unique opportunity for young people to mix in a cultural environment, from all religious backgrounds, learning of each other's history and heritage, gaining valuable self-confidence and personality development by participating in large scale stage productions, and in gaining valuable life experience when sharing in the great adventures when the harp orchestras go on tour.

THE BELFAST HARP ORCHESTRA

Headlines of our History!

The Background

- 1798 *The Belfast Harpers' Assembly takes place at the Belfast Exchange Rooms. Organised by the founders of the Linen Hall Library, the festival was a magnificent effort to record an ancient and declining tradition, to save it at least in manuscript for posterity. In 1792, 10 Harpers answer the call to come to Belfast to have their music written down and a large body of manuscripts resulted with three volumes of harp music published over the next forty years. The tradition never actually died, but through all the political upheavals of the turn of the 19th century and the next 150 years, it evolved and found new relevance to each decade. In the 1960s, the tradition was strong in Dublin as the Irish tourism industry looked to young Irish harpists to refresh the cultural image of Ireland...*
- 1984 *Janet Harbison arrives in Belfast to undertake doctoral research on the 18th century harp music manuscripts at the Institute of Irish Studies in Queen's University. Taking time out from a busy international performance career, Janet was looking for inspiration in the old music, most of which was long forgotten. In Northern Ireland at this time, there were practically no harp players – less than 5 and these were mainly orchestral concert harp aspirants...*
- 1986 *After 2 years at the University, Janet had intended to return to Europe, but was offered the position of Curator of Music at the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum. It was also the time of exciting developments in music education in Northern Ireland. The new government policy of "Education toward Mutual Understanding" was designed to teach each community about the history and culture of the other, thereby provoking understanding and mutual acceptance to a deeply divided community. Janet was involved in curriculum development. She illustrated all her lectures with the harp as it brought no discomfort to either community since it was not an element in the cultural identity of either side.... In the Linen Hall Library, Janet organised a first Belfast Harp Summerschool....*
- 1988 *The Governors of the Linen Hall Library ask Janet to arrange a concert of young Northern Irish harpers in the Ulster Hall to celebrate the Library's Bicentenary. Over a year in advance, Janet started teaching, and on May 22nd, 22 young harpers graced the stage with numerous celebrities participating as guest artistes, performing a programme of music from the manuscripts the 1792 Harpers' Assembly.*
- 1990 *So successful was the concert in May 1988, and as a result of the two BBC radio programmes made from the recordings of the concert, such enthusiasm was raised, that Janet was not permitted to go back to her museum work without the harpers on board. News of the event reached America, and the "Harp Concert" was invited to tour University campuses there. But, the war in Kuwait broke out and the plans were shelved for a year or two... Two of our harpers mentioned to their local newspaper journalist that they were in a "harp orchestra" and the name stuck.*

Launched!

1992

The Belfast Harpers' Bicentenary

Chieftains Alain Stivel

Brittany, London and the USA with the Chieftains

Autumn onwards

Carnegie Hall NY etc

1994
GRAMMY

Album No.2

Christmas Cantata

The Bicentenary year of the Belfast Harpers' Assembly and a year of celebrations was organised. Janet with Jimmy Hawthorne, chairman of the Community Relations Committee, and Maurice Hayes, the ex.chairman of the Civil Service, constituted the company "The Belfast Harper's Bicentenary Ltd". Janet also constituted **the Belfast Harp Orchestra** and the celebrations were set. The most prominent event was a **World Harp Festival** taking place in Belfast over ten days in May, directed by Janet, and consequently fixed to feature performances by the Belfast Harp Orchestra for the first half of the two concerts featuring firstly, The Chieftains and secondly, Breton legend, Alain Stivel. The Orchestra was triumphal.

Shortly after the festival, the Orchestra took off on a concert tour to Brittany where they featured at the **Festival Internationale de l'Harpe Celtique at Dinan**, and on their return home, the Chieftains commanded us to the **National Concert Hall in Dublin** for a joint concert and a recording. On August 1st, the Orchestra accompanied the Chieftains to London for another concert at the **Royal Festival Hall, London**. The resulting recordings were to be released under the title of "The Celtic Harp" (on the RCA Victor label)...

Almost immediately on our return from London, the Orchestra took off again for the USA to feature at America's largest Irish festival: **Milwaukee Irish Fest**. We released our first album there and came home after a dizzy spell of stardom!

More concerts followed at various festivals at home and the **Chieftains** invited us to join them in the **US** for their **St Patrick's Week tour** and the release of the "Celtic Harp". Despite the challenge of St.Patrick's hurricane on the West coast, the Orchestra joined the Chieftains for concerts in the **Boston Symphony Hall; the Kennedy Centre in Washington DC; The New Brunswick Hall and New York's Carnegie Hall**. Due to the storms, the Boston concert was cancelled, but at the Kennedy Centre, the Chieftains who travelled by airplane, didn't arrive until the second half of the concert. We who had travelled 14 hours by bus performed the first half, had a phenomenal reception with long standing ovation.

Our "Celtic Harp" album with the Chieftains won a **Grammy Award for the top Folk Music album of 1993**.

The Orchestra continued to give spectacular concerts with new programmes of music each season, and a second Orchestra album was recorded at Down Cathedral's 1500th anniversary commemoration St.Patrick's birth. (He is buried in the Cathedral cemetery). Concert tours through **Scotland** and **England** (with a top feature at **the Edinburgh Harp Festival**) and performances at all of Ireland's top festivals followed.

In December 1994, Janet's Christmas Cantata receives its premiere at **Fisherwick Church in Belfast, Christchurch Cathedral, Dublin, Ballintubber Abbey in Co. Mayo, St. Bartholomews Cathedral in Galway and in Down Cathedral, Downpatrick**. In the course of the Summer, the Orchestra is invited to **Germany** as guests of the German government to perform at **Bonn Somerfest**.

Peace in NI On September 1st, peace is declared and the Orchestra is invited to tour **Great Britain** again. This time, we have taken on considerably more exciting forces of Lambeg Drums and Bodhrans, Scottish Bagpipes and Uilleann Pipes, Fiddles, Flutes, Concertinas and Dancers. Janet composes the “**Ulster Symphony**” which embraces the most extreme elements of our political music tradition and we forge our own solution to “the troubles”. In June, Janet was presented with the “**Reverence for Difference**” award in recognition of her work in bringing people from both sides of the cultural divide in Northern Ireland together through harping and the celebration of Cultural Heritage. We move our office into Brookfield Mill on the Crumlin Road sandwiched between the Ardoyne and the Shankill....

The BHO expands

Awards

CD Carillon

In November 1995, we launch our third album “Carillon”, this time in CD as well as cassette form, at Belfast City Hall. The event was televised by both TV channels and that evening, we set sail again for **Great Britain** taking in Leeds, Liverpool, and London’s west end for a sensational concert at **St. James Church, Piccadilly**. This tour caused a media frenzy and led to a number of British Booking Agents fighting to represent us! We signed up with Roy Hastings and planned a nationwide tour for March and April 1996. Tickets sell like hot-cakes until:

London’s West End

1996
February

The bombs go off in Canary Wharf and Lewisham and ticket sales stop almost immediately. Then, we are dropped for three planned BBC TV appearances: the concert tour went ahead, but things Northern Irish were obviously treated with suspicion and derision on the British mainland. By this time, Janet had left her position at the Ulster Folk Museum to devote her time to the Harp Orchestra, composing, performing solo and teaching – but the future looked bleak with our political situation worsening. We considered everything, including a change of name, but in the meantime, we concentrated on other aspects of our work, such as our new professional group: “The Irish National Harp Ensemble” which went on tour for 4½ months with the successful stage production “**Spirit of the Dance**”.

Belfast City Council opens the **Waterfront Hall**, its own international concert hall and conference centre, and in the Opening Festival we presented the concert on the 5th night of opening. With the world champions, the Fieldmarshall Montgomery Pipe Band and folk-singer Tommy Sands with his friend Vedran Smylovitch, the cellist of Sarajevo, the Orchestra filled the concert hall, and we also launch our charity: **The Harp Foundation (Ireland) Limited**.

Blue Peter

We continue to be featured on top TV programmes including the famous “Blue Peter”. This filming in March is actually featured again in “The Best of Blue Peter” at the end of the year.

St. Columba

But, the big feature of 1997 is Janet’s original work commemorating the 1400th anniversary of the death of St. Columba (or Colmcille). The premiere of “The Columban Suite” was presented on St. Columba’s birthday and the work was performed in 22 concert venues throughout Ireland and Scotland with community choirs from both Catholic and Protestant traditions. The final concert in Belfast Waterfront Hall was spectacularly performed with a massed choir of all the choirs participating in the year’s concert. A CD of the work was also launched.

The new year opened with a special film feature of the Belfast Harp Orchestra for the

interval film of the **BBC Young Musician of the Year Competition** which this year was held in the Belfast Waterfront Hall.

Polygram Another film and CD recording took place for Polygram Records. The album “Celtic Harpestry” was recorded in Belfast in June, and the film made at the magical Lismore Castle, Co. Waterford in August. The video was also intended for Public Broadcast (PBS) throughout the USA and our email averages soured!

Aras an Uachtarain Also in mid Summer, 12th of July, the BHO was invited by President Mary McAleese to perform in a 12th Day Celebration at Aras an Uachtarain, Dublin. Happening during a time of major political stress, because of the threatened closure of the border at that time, we ended up having a 3-day stay in Dublin and, despite the horror of the situation, the break was wonderful!

Brittany Another busy year with local concerts and in July, the Belfast Harp Orchestra toured again to Brittany to participate a second time at the **Festival Internationale de l’Harpe Celtique** at Dinan. That night, we sold out of our entire stock of CDs and Tshirts!

Another album with the CHIEFTAINS Recording again with the Chieftains in Glenarriff for a Chieftains retrospective and another album. We contribute one track: “Planxty George Brabazon” – and you should know that despite what’s on the credits, Janet was entirely responsible for the Orchestra arrangements.

Munich A group of 12 senior players from the Harp Orchestra toured to Munich to perform “An **Irish Christmas Concert**” at the **Philharmonic Hall**. It was sold out three weeks in advance and so successful was the venture for us, that Janet decided to create a new orchestra from graduate members of the Belfast Harp Orchestra. It will be called the **Irish Harp Orchestra** and will be semiprofessional.

LOTS OF TV FEATURES IN YEAR 2000!

Millennium with Brian Kennedy Our last great engagement of the old millennium was featuring with pop star Brian Kennedy at Belfast City Hall for the BBC millennium programme from Northern Ireland going UK wide on millennium eve night.

Millennial St.Patrick **The Belfast Harp Orchestra had a very busy millennial St. Patrick’s Feast!** In the morning-time, they were invited by Bishop Millar to perform at the St.Patrick’s Day service at Down Cathedral, Downpatrick where over 300 of the world’s most eminent Anglican clergy were present. In the afternoon, the BHO performed at the Gilford Fairy Folklore Festival at Gilford Castle, March 17 (also the following afternoon) and on St.Patrick’s evening, the BHO featured in a special BBC TV programme, including a starring performance with renowned singer Peter Corry, filmed from Carrickfergus Castle celebrating St.Patrick and Ireland’s cultural heritage.

Blue Peter BBC Wales & NHk Japan Our second feature on Blue Peter was filmed from the Belfast Waterfront Hall in the BBC Millennium “Live Music Now” show broadcast in May; and in June, the Belfast Harp Orchestra filmed for “Frank Hennessy’s Ireland”, a BBC Wales production. And our appeal is now filtering to the far east with a special feature on the BHO for a Japanese film company NHk which was filmed in September.

*Our first
"Best of
the BHO"*

October 10: Release of "The Best of the Belfast Harp Orchestra" compilation album in Germany on the Laika Records label. December 13-18: Major concert hall performances in Germany December 22-24: Concerts in the Basilica di San Martino, Magenta, Italy after which most of our members were marooned in Heathrow airport over Christmas thanks to a snowstorm. Ooops!

Spring '01

Unfortunately the Foot and Mouth disease outbreak causes the cancellation of our St.Patrick's day concerts in Downpatrick, and our tour to the Scottish Highlands in Easter week – so all our energy is directed to a busy Autumn programme around all the major Arts venues in Northern Ireland... and new costumes and image for the BHO.

Year 2002

For the year 2002, we are planning a major music and dance spectacular – based on the legend of Cu Chulainn, Janet is composing an epic musical starring Peter Corry with the harp orchestra. The dance form will be a mixture between Irish step and modern – so, watch this space....

But then there is also now the

THE IRISH HARP ORCHESTRA

Launched in Germany in December 2000, the Belfast Harp Orchestra came of age – with a fully professional (adult!) stage production of up to 34 artistes presenting a programme of the Music, Song and Dance of Ulster, the Irish Harp Orchestra was launched to major acclaim at the Munich Philharmonic Hall. The concert agent immediately took on the representation of the IHO in northern Europe, and since then to date (September 2001) the IHO has undertaken concert tours of Germany and the Netherlands (including for the opening of Amsterdam's new "Heineken Music Hall"), and in December 2001, the IHO will undertake a 16 date tour of Germany, Austria, Switzerland and Netherlands with guest singer Peter Corry (recently starring in Les Miserables in London's West End).

In September 2001, Janet started up a Limerick School of Irish Harping at the Limerick School of Music and from July 2002, will establish a permanent Irish Harp Centre just outside Limerick which will officially open in June of 2003. By 2004, we expect to launch a **NATIONAL HARP ORCHESTRA** and in the following years, to expand every further including an American Irish Harp Orchestra which will be established in Milwaukee in August 2004.

We also launched a smaller group of 5 artistes (4 harps, 1 guest instrumentalist) entitled **HARPER**

In the course of the last 2 years, this group has toured a number of times throughout Italy performing at village and town festivals and in many churches including the Basilica of San Martino in Magenta.

Another group of about 14 harps, occasionally performing with plainsong choirs, was established in 1997 inspired by the Celtic Spiritual tradition:

THE HARPERS OF COLUMBA continues to perform mainly in ecclesiastical settings.

DISCOGRAPHY

Belfast Harp Orchestra:

THE CELTIC HARP RCA Victor, 09026-61490-2, (CD & cassette 1993)

GRAMMY AWARD FOR BEST FOLK MUSIC ALBUM 1993

Top grammy winning album featuring the BHO with the Chieftains in a great album with the BHO featuring prominently on four tracks Released March 1993.

CELTIC HARPESTRY Polygram, Imaginary Road Records 314 558 351-2 (CD, released 1998) **Best Selling Album** featuring 7 tracks from the BHO including “Bright New Morning”, a “Walk on Belfast” and “Theme from Titanic” with guest tracks each from Maire Ni Chathasaigh, Sileas and Rudiger Oppermann.

THE BEST OF THE BELFAST HARP ORCHESTRA Laika Records 4 011786 001316

A year 2000 compilation of instrumental tracks taken from four of our BHO albums: Carillon, Feasting with Carolan, O'Neill's Harper and Colmcille. This is a great introductory album proposed and produced by our concert agents in Northern Germany.

CARILLON Belfast Harp Orchestra (BHO) 005 (CD & cassette, released 1995)

The Belfast Harp Orchestra's **Best Selling Album** of contemporarily arranged Irish music, song and dance with a number of original compositions including ‘Carillon’ (specially composed by JH for Derek Bell in 1992), ‘Earth, Water, Wind and Fire’ and many unusual arrangements of rare and well-known tunes including an exceptionally popular arrangement of ‘Danny Boy’.

COLMCILLE BHO 007 (CD only, released 1997)

An original album of harp music composed on the story of St.Colmcille who died in 597AD (1400 years ago). Performed with St.Killian's Choir of Kells singing Celtic Christian Plainchant and also featuring the recitation of early Irish poetry (6th-9th century).

WATER FROM THE WELL RCA Victor 09026-63637-2 released 2001

‘Planxty George Brabazon’ is performed by the BHO with the Chieftains with their recently released retrospective album.

THE ART OF HARP (Volume 3) Shamrock Records 9 016389 105527

The second double-album production produced by Rudiger Opperman features two tracks from the Belfast Harp Orchestra: ‘Columba's Journey’ and ‘Into Exile’ remastered from the BHO's Colmcille CD

LIVE IN DOWNPATRICK BHO 003 (Cass. only, released 1994)

The Belfast Harp Orchestra's second solo album recorded live at a concert in Downpatrick Cathedral the day after the orchestra performed in Carnegie Hall in New York with the Chieftains. Some of the programme focuses on music associated with St. Patrick and features two local choirs and organist Michael McCracken.

THE BELFAST HARP ORCHESTRA IN CONCERT BHO 001 (Cass.only, released 1992) The BHO's debut album recorded from three live concerts at end of inaugural Irish Tour in April 1992. The programme is mainly music arranged from the Belfast Harp Festival of 1792.

**THE
NATIONAL HARP ORCHESTRA**

&

**THE
BELFAST HARP ORCHESTRA**

Are on the web at

www.irishharpcentre.com

Director: Dr Janet Harbison
Manager: Mr Malcolm Gullis

Irish Harp Centre
The Old School House
Castleconnell
Co.Limerick
Republic of Ireland

Tel. Ireland: +353 (0)61 372777
Fax: +353 (0)61 372712
Tel. UK: +44 (0)7803 086555

Email: info@irishharpcentre.com

www.irishharpcentre.com