

HARP NOTES

Newsletter of the Australian Therapeutic Harpists Association

Calendar of Events

National Therapeutic Harp Gathering

National Therapeutic Harp Gathering which will now be held in Belgrave Victoria. 13th & 14th June 2025. (See flyer)

Our two regular interactive groups have resumed. These are a wonderful opportunity for engaging with fellow members, and offer quality learnings with CEU eligibility.

Tune a Month

- Meets online first Tuesday evening of each month.

ATHA Discussion Group

- Meets online third Tuesday evening of each month.



Welcome to the 2025 Autumn edition of the ATHA newsletter. Although each edition varies in size, the quality of content is unwaveringly consistent!

The big event in the ATHA calendar is our June harp gathering being held in Belgrave. (See flyer on page 2)

We also have a new section where members can advertise. Thanks to all for your contributions. It's great to read about members' harping experiences. Please keep sending them.

As always, Brandden has provided another informative and helpful Workbench article. We are so fortunate to have such a useful resource shared with us.

I hope you find this edition informative and engaging. If you'd like to contribute to future editions, please contact me at harptranquility@gmail.com



Australian Therapeutic
Harpists Association



HARP GATHERING

The Australian Therapeutic Harpists Association welcomes you to a Special Two Day Harp Gathering in Belgrave, Victoria. Treat yourself to stimulating and interesting workshops from some of Australia's leading Therapeutic Harp Practitioners, meet other harpists and share the joy of our chosen instrument. Open to all ages and levels of harp proficiency. A private screening of the movie *FROM MUSIC INTO SILENCE* will take place at the Cameo Theatre, Belgrave on Friday 13th June at 6.30pm. This will be followed by a Q & A session conducted by Peter Roberts and the Director and Producer of the movie, Farshid Akhlaghi.



TWO DAY HARP GATHERING

Friday 13th June
Saturday 14th June

VENUE

MASONIC HALL
33 Bayview Road
BELGRAVE Victoria

COST

\$50 (ATHA Members)
\$55 (Non-ATHA Members)
for 2 Day Workshops
\$30 per ticket for the movie

For further information
about the gathering and to
access the registration
form go to:

<https://www.atha.org.au/>

Enq: Christine Middleton
0419 526 550

News from our Members

From NSW

Carol Booth

ATHA Discussion Group – Up and Running

The ATHA Discussion Group started up again, as always, on the 3rd Tuesday of the month, on February 18th 2025. Nine women attended and many others let us know that they'd like to have been present.

Our first topic of the evening was **'Bring out your toys!'** We discussed the gizmos and gadgets that we use to make life easier as a therapeutic harpist or that are simply fun.

Carol showed the group the Spark Go amp (which she had been using with her small harp) and discussed its qualities. She said it is compact, portable, has good sound for the size, many different tones, and is operated via a smartphone. Carol noted 'It is a bit complex and techy to get on top of anything other than just straight amplification.'

Other participants showed harp lights, trolleys, page-turners and various methods for displaying music as well as other interesting devices (have you ever heard of a 'harp garter' or 'shruti box'?)

We then moved on to discuss topics for the rest of the year. Please, if there is a topic you would like discussed, or you would like to facilitate a session, contact Carol (text 0412 175 974 or email agnodice@bigpond.com)

This led to discussing the challenging or interesting events we'd faced over the last six months. We were delighted to hear a wonderful story about an ATHA member playing in the foyer of a busy cancer unit. A little girl in a pink tutu came up and touched the harp and then danced. Months later, a patient who was a musician told the harpist of the impact this'd had on him.



Image courtesy of deepai.org

From Victoria

Carla Whiteley

Harp circles

The harp is a beautiful instrument and a joy to all those who play it, and those who listen to its dulcet tone. Sadly, for many harpers, playing and learning the harp can be an isolating experience as one plays and practices on one's own. Occasionally we might be fortunate to meet up with other musicians who need a harp in their ensemble, but for many it can be a long and lonely road.

Many years ago, (and no, this is not a fairy tale, but the truth as told to me) Jacquie Spring¹ returned from the USA having studied Module 1 of the IHTP course in its early beginnings. Upon her return she drew together a small group of harpers in the area of the Dandenong Ranges, to meet once a month to learn from each other and to explore the meaning of playing therapeutically.

This little group included Dr Cath Connelly². After some time, Jacquie stepped back from leading the group and Cath took over. Cath was at this stage playing the harp once a week at the Edward Street Nursing home. At this time there were approximately up to 10 harpers, with various abilities, meeting on monthly basis at Cath's home. First in Belgrave, then Belgrave Heights, then in Upwey, followed by a final time in The Patch.

I joined the group in about 2007. Cath would teach us a tune and we would then play a little piece we had worked on to share with the group. On occasions we would also learn an ensemble piece. The evening would conclude with supper and a chat. The group remained steady at about 10 enthusiastic harpers, meeting once a month on a Friday night. Occasionally, if Cath was away, we would meet at some-one else's place.

Cath moved out of the area, and Anke Arkensteyn and myself were left to co-ordinate the group.

By this stage the group had grown to 15. It was no longer viable to meet in a home with that many harpers and their harps. The added problem was that many of the group found driving at night not a comfortable experience. So it was decided to meet on a Saturday afternoon instead. Fortunately the little church that I attend in Tecoma allowed us to use their facility on a Saturday afternoon.



So, I guess the next question is what do we do and how do we run our gathering in view of the fact that we are a group of harpers of varying ability?

Let me confess that I spent most of my life as a music teacher, and based on this I felt that it was good to not only learn a new piece, and play our showoff piece, but also for some learning to occur.

We commence our session by playing some exercises based on the I, IV and V chords in the key of C Major. We have then been applying the chords and their inversions to some pieces of music that only have a chordal accompaniment, not a full-scale left-hand arrangement. This is followed up by playing several rounds and maybe a simple ensemble piece.

After about 25 minutes, Anke teaches a new tune, or we may revise a tune we learnt the previous month.



Finally, those who wish can present a piece they wish to share.

Everyone brings a plate of supper to share at the end of the gathering where we can have a little chat, and we collect a contribution to using the church.

The group comes from far and wide, some driving up to 90 minutes to share in the fellowship and the joy of music making.

I would encourage any-one wishing to start a harp circle to do so. It does require commitment to be there on a regular basis. The advantage of sharing the leadership is multitude as each leader brings their own particular gift and if one leader is unable to be in attendance the other on is there.



¹ Jacquie Spring and her husband Warwick are the owners of Harps Australia based in NSW. She and her husband have been handcrafting and developing Celtic harps since 1994 but today are the suppliers of Lyon and Healy and Salvie Harps.

² Dr Cath Connely is the Abbey Director of the Anglican Abbey in Raymond Island, and is well known as a retreat and pilgrimage conductor, spiritual director, musician and a member of Anglican Earthcare Gippsland.

From Tasmania

Helen Morrison

Therapy Harp Training Program (THTP) graduate news

There have been two graduates from THTP this year already!

I'm excited to announce that Rae Lloyd-Jones from Queensland has recently graduated from THTP. You may have come across Rae on an ATHA Zoom meeting. Rae is full of passion and enthusiasm for harp therapy and her practicum reports and Independent Study project reflected this. Rae dedicates many hours every week to playing for people in a nursing home in her area. Along with her harp, Rae enjoys taking Reverie Harps in to share with residents. There are lots of smiles and laughter with Rae around. Well done, Rae.

It's always a pleasure to welcome international students onto the program, and Diana Boardman of England is our most recent graduate. Di has enjoyed working through the program and it has helped her to meet her goal of playing for folks in her community including in hospice and nursing homes. Her music is making a difference and she is in demand in her area, with some paid work opportunities coming up. Congratulations, Di!

On another exciting note, Ilona Weir, a 2021 Therapy Harp Training Program graduate from Adelaide, was featured in the February 2025 edition of the Coles supermarket magazine. The article talked about Coles' support for the Hospitals United for Sick Kids program. Part of the money raised has gone into funding the Music for Wellness program run by the Women's and Children's Hospital Foundation in South Australia where Ilona plays her harp on a weekly basis. She helps create a calming space for paediatric intensive care patients and their families. Well done, Ilona!

Music that works

Music by Debbie Vinick

<https://harpistct.com/sheet-music/>

I have downloaded several pieces from US harpist Debbie Vinick's website over the years. Her arrangements are always well thought out and accessible. Here I will talk about just a couple of recent purchases that work really well in harp therapy settings.

Debbie Vinick's **Twenty-One Easy Irish Songs For All Harps** book is an excellent resource for those wanting to add to their repertoire in the harp therapy space.

The book is made up of well-known Irish songs that are sure to bring joy to the listener. There is something soothing about Celtic music for many of the people for whom we play. I have personally enjoyed playing from this book in various hospital settings.



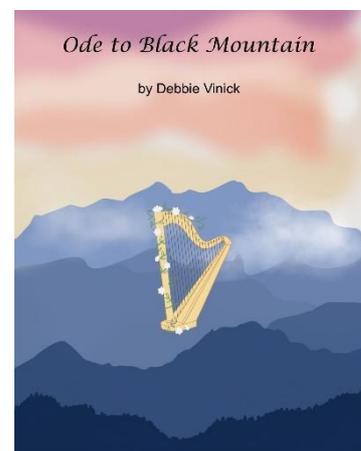
Feedback from patients, staff and families has been excellent. When I play in ward corridors, a patient who is able, might come out of their room and join in by humming along to tunes like When Irish Eyes Are Smiling, The Dear Little Shamrock or Cockles and Mussels. Emotive tunes such as Star of the County Down, The Foggy Dew and The Parting Glass provide a slightly more meditative mood. Well-known standards such as Down By the Salley Gardens and My Wild Irish Rose all help to raise the spirits.

The pieces are in easy keys such as C or G major, and they include comprehensive fingering and brackets throughout. Chord symbols enable the player to invent their own harmonies and improvisations. A handy tip sheet at the beginning of the book explains chord symbols and chord voicings.

My second purchase recently was Debbie's beautiful original piece **Ode to Black Mountain** which was originally written as a piece to share at a Harp Gathering in North Carolina, USA in September 2024. But as Debbie describes on her website, things took a very different turn for those attending.

Debbie writes:

'I wrote this piece (Ode to Black Mountain) for the Harp Gathering which was to take place September 27th, 2024 in Black Mountain, NC. Hurricane Helene swept through the state causing massive flooding and destruction. What started as a communal gathering quickly became an evacuation. When I got home, I changed the song to reflect the devastating situation in North Carolina. The people and communities are in my heart. I am extremely grateful to the first responders who made heroic rescues. All proceeds from the sale of this song will be donated to relief organizations in Black Mountain.'



You can read Debbie's and other attendees' stories of bravery and courage in the face of Hurricane Helene in the Folk Harp Journal, Winter 2024, edition no. 205.

Ode to Black Mountain is an emotive piece in three sections. The piece builds with interesting left hand patterns which weave along with the melody. It is a later beginner or early intermediate piece in the key of C with chord symbols and some fingerings marked. This will surely be a beautiful piece to play for groups, individuals and as background music.

I also recently purchased Debbie's **Songs For The New Harpist** and this is proving to be a valuable resource for a young student who has had several lessons but needs more structure. This booklet sets out a progressive program for a new harpist to learn note reading, harp conventions, theory of music and more.

From Western Australia

Helen Punch

Vibroacoustic therapy (VAT)

Vibroacoustic therapy (VAT) is a non-invasive form of therapy that uses frequencies, sound and vibration to promote relaxation, reduce pain and improve physical and emotional wellbeing. By producing deep relaxation the therapy allows the body to heal itself. It is based on the science in physics that sound waves and vibration can have a therapeutic effect on the body, mind and spirit. It has also been described as having a 'musical' massage.

I recently graduated as a certified Vibroacoustic Therapeutic Music Practitioner. I started the course last year during a quiet time and after completing the theory I had 5 hours supervised sessions with Mary Stevens from Harp for Healing, plus another 20 hours of unsupervised sessions at Solaris Cancer Care in Bunbury.

I have thoroughly enjoyed the course and learning about the history of vibroacoustic music and vibrational medicine that included the science of sound and vibration. Also covered was sound, music, healing and psychological perspectives and the effects on the body. As a modality vibroacoustic music has so much to offer and the feedback from clients as been very positive.

Please feel free to contact me if you would like further information.



The room where I conducted my sessions at Solaris Cancer Care.

Harp Workbench

As a service to the subscribers of this newsletter, Brandden Lassells of Harps and Harps will answer questions you may have pertaining to the making, maintenance or repair of harps.

Question: How do I keep my harp safe with high temperatures and heavy rain?

Preserving your harp involves two major environmental concerns: temperature and relative humidity. Both are important.

Temperature. Never leave your harp in a parked car on a warm day, full stop. Even in the shade and the windows cracked open, the temperature inside a parked car can easily reach 50 degrees Centigrade. Many of the glues used to hold your harp together can begin to soften at this temperature. At this condition, joints can start to pull apart. The glue may harden when your harp is taken to a cooler environment, but the strength will likely be compromised. A joint exposed to this warm air might give way immediately or sometime in the future. To be safe, a good rule of thumb is to never leave your harp in an environment where you would not be comfortable. If you would be comfortable, then it should be OK for your harp.

Some people are concerned about low temperatures and cracking the lacquer/polish. This is very rare. The only thing is that cold temperatures often go hand in hand with low humidity, which can put your harp at risk of cracking.

Humidity. The wood in a wooden instrument (or any wooden object) will react to the moisture in its environment. The wood gains or loses moisture until it is in equilibrium with the surrounding air; if it is dry, the wood will shrink, and if it is moist, it will expand. The term Relative Humidity (RH) is a percentage of the amount of moisture in the air compared to the maximum amount of moisture the air can hold at that temperature. Besides the naturally occurring RH, we need to be aware of air-conditioned air, which tends to have a low RH. So, if your harp is exposed to an air-conditioned space during the warm months, there is a chance that the RH could be below the recommendations for the harp. The ideal RH is generally between 40% and 60%. The only way to know if your harp's environment is in the ideal range is to measure it with a device called a Hygrometer, which can measure the RH near your harp. Although not usually a problem in temperate Australia, you should not keep your harp near heating ducts or fireplaces as they can have dry, low RH air.

If your harp's environment is too dry, you can use a humidifier to humidify the entire space using a room or house humidifier. The other option is to keep your harp in its case and use a case humidifier to keep the air moist enough.

Too high of an RH is not usually a problem, but the swelling of the thinner wood in the soundboard could expand and buckle.

Remember to keep your harp out of high heat and parked cars, and use a hygrometer to verify that the RH is between 40% and 60%.

Questions and comments for future "Harp Workbench" column of this newsletter can be addressed to the editor, Glenda Underhill harptranquility@gmail.com or to Brandden. Brandden Lassells, the proprietor of Harps and Harps, home of the light weight all carbon fibre harps. Brandden can be contacted on (07) 4125 8393, 0419 692 286 or through his website www.harps.com.au

New addition - Advertisements!

We're always looking for ways to benefit ATHA members, and as such, from this edition onwards, **members** who have harp related items for sale can now advertise them without charge in our Harpnotes newsletter.

Helen Punch from WA is the first member to take advantage of this service with her lovely harp.

Offering a gently used Stoney End Double-strung, Gothic style Lorraine floor harp in rich walnut with full Camac levers. It has 29 strings x 2 (58 strings) 4 octaves – G to G and a 6" base. She has a beautiful rich "voice" with easy tension and is in "like-new" condition. There are 2 x tuning keys, a padded case, double strung books (at least 4 books with music by Carolyn Deal) and extra strings.

Asking price AU\$5,200 plus shipping within Australia.

Contact: Helen Punch (0427217664)



Australian Therapeutic Harpists Association 2025. If you'd like to contribute to future editions, please send to glenda at harptranquility@gmail.com