

# HARP NOTES

Newsletter of the Australian Therapeutic Harpists Association

## Calendar of Events

### **ATHA Tune a Month**

Meets online first Tuesday evening of each month, resuming 5<sup>th</sup> March 2024.

### **ATHA Discussion Group**

Meets online third Tuesday evening of each month, will resume February 20<sup>th</sup>, 2024.

### **Harp at the Port Workshops**

Will continue in 2024. Dates for upcoming events and concerts to be posted.

### **Harp Magic**

Second Sunday of each month  
10am to 12pm begins 14th January 2024

### **ATHA AGM**

**Held** 7<sup>th</sup> November. All office bearers returned with the exception of Lyn Johnson (retired) Helen Punch joined committee



Welcome to the 23/24 Summer edition of the ATHA newsletter.

Once again, this newsletter is brimming with all sorts of exciting things. It includes the President's Report, harping events, state reports, a great article regarding a visit from Josh Lane (the harp Tuesday fellow), an edition of Brandden's informative "From the Harp Workbench"; and many other wonderful and interesting harp related articles. Thanks to all contributors.

A special thanks from the ATHA committee to Lyn Johnson. Lyn has decided it is time for some well-deserved "me" time. We wish her well. Fortunately, Helen Punch has stepped up. Welcome Helen.

Don't forget to check out our ATHA website. [ATHA Website](#)

Cheers, Glenda [harptranquility@gmail.com](mailto:harptranquility@gmail.com)

## President's Report 2022-2023

Dear members,

Thank you for your ongoing support of ATHA this year.

State representatives have been updating the committee about the activities of harpists in their states. Thank you to Carla Whiteley, Lyn Johnson, Helen Morrison, Alison Ware and Jenni Sawell for keeping us in the loop. Thank you as well to Louise Bell who provides updates for the IHTP.

Committee member Kerry Viner stepped down from the Treasurer role and Christine Middleton stepped in. Thank you to Kerry for all your work as Treasurer.

Kerry was also the newsletter editor and we thank her very much for all the time and effort she put into bringing it all together. Glenda Underhill is now compiling the newsletter and doing a very fine job of it. Thank you so much to Glenda for keeping the newsletter on track, chasing up the contributors and producing a professional document which is so enjoyable to read.

ATHA also administers a Facebook page, Australian Therapeutic Harp Community. Thank you to all the contributors, and particularly Nicky Lock, who regularly shares interesting articles regarding therapeutic music. Thank you very much, Nicky.

May was a busy month in Victoria, with Vimukti Warr hosting the International Harp Therapy Program Australia's ESM with Christina Tourin in Guildford. Vimukti took some very lucky harpists to play at Edgar's Mission, a not for profit farmed animal sanctuary. Some of the stories of the animals' reaction to the music were just incredible. Vimukti also hosted a Celebration Day at her home for students past and present, where we received a beautiful Welcome to Country, walked the peaceful bush block and participated in sessions with Christina Tourin and Louise Bell. Vimukti was so generous in sharing her home, making everyone feel welcome and pulling together such an incredible schedule of learning opportunities. Well done, Vimukti. A big thank you to Louise Bell, who came down from NSW to assist with running the ESM and provided such warmth and incredible talent and experience.

After the ESM, Christina Tourin travelled to Portarlington, where she held a harp workshop for 30 harpists. It was followed by a concert in St Andrew's Church for about 95 people. Christina and a keen group of harpists performed a variety of pieces for the enthusiastic audience. The concert was well run and well received, a testament to organiser Christine Middleton's skill in pulling together a great shindig and her love of sharing harp with the community.

ATHA has continued to run online education sessions through Zoom. Improv Magic wrapped up at the end of 2022 and was replaced by Tune-a-Month sessions, facilitated by Christine Middleton.

## President's Report cont'd

Harpists including Jenni Sawell, Helen Morrison, Helen Punch, Carla Whiteley, Glenda Underhill and Gwenda Davies have shared pieces of music throughout this year. Thank you very much to all who contributed.

Carol Booth has been facilitating the wonderful Discussion Group sessions over Zoom this year. Presenters included Glenda Underhill, Gwenda Davies, Nicky Lock, Carol Booth, Helen Morrison, Christine Middleton and Jenni Sawell. Thank you to the presenters and all of the members who contributed their thoughts and ideas to these valuable sessions.

We're looking forward to continuing to connect and help therapeutic harpists in the coming year. A big thanks to the committee for their ongoing commitment and thank you to the members for being a part of it all.

Kind regards,  
Catherine Lyons-Nash

## ATHA State Rep Reports

### ACT

#### **Alison Ware - Canberra News - HarpCare Therapeutic Music services update.**

The Therapeutic Harp program continues across Canberra Health Services. It has been a vibrant and full year as I continue to develop new programs incorporating the harp into staff and patient wellbeing programs.

This year I have broadened the program by collaborating with a massage therapist and yoga teacher which has worked well. As an independent practitioner it has been great to collaborate with others and take the harp into new areas.

The Renal team's wellbeing project I mentioned in the last update finishes in 3 weeks. This project provided alternative ways for staff to nurture their wellbeing in the workplace

using mindfulness, art and music.

Ongoing funding has been provided for follow up sessions in 2024.



In September I offered a short presentation on the Therapeutic Harp program in Palliative Care at the Oceanic Palliative Care conference in Sydney. It was a great opportunity to share stories and talk about the value of music in palliative care. I attended workshops in the complementary therapies stream. It was interesting to see, hear and experience the value of storytelling, art processes and singing in Palliative Care. There was a great deal of interest about the benefits of the harp in these spaces. Selected content is available here: [Oceanic Palliative Care Conference 2023](#)



There have been lots of babies born at the National Zoo and Aquarium in the last couple of months. I have enjoyed seeing the responses of the new baby Zebra Ndefu, and giraffe Mkarli to music. They are quite mesmerised and fascinated by the harp. I find major rhythmic music works well for them and I will make sure I have pictures and an article next newsletter. One animal that's been loving the harp is Lace Monitor "Steve" who loves the vibration of the harp.

I hope you all have a joy filled Christmas and peaceful New Year. My best Wishes for 2024

## NSW

### Nicky Lock – Conference Presentation on Harp Therapy to feminist theologians

Earlier this year I made a submission to the following conference to present the results of my grounded theory research I conducted with a group of ATHA members.

"TENDING TO STORIES" The 2023 conference, co-hosted by WATAC Inc. (Women and the Australian Church) and the Australian Collaborators in Feminist Theologies (ACFT), ran from 13-15 October 2023. We explored the ongoing place of stories and narrative within feminist theology, the variety of ways in which stories can be heard and held, and the place of story tellers in communities of hope." The conference organisers asked for a breadth of presentations, including poetry, performance art and visual arts and they obviously considered that my tending to the stories of harp practitioners fitted with their theme.

My abstract was titled "Music that soothes the soul: stories from harp therapists of attending to emotion and spirit for those in medical or residential aged care."

I introduced Harp therapy as an ancient discipline dating back to Ancient Greece, involving the use of the harp to relieve stress and pain and provide a connection with the spiritual self.

I explained that my presentation would present stories gathered in a collaborative enquiry project exploring a small group of harp therapists paying attention to the spiritual and emotional needs of hospital patients, hospice and aged care residents and how the therapeutic harpist seeks to meet the spiritual and emotional needs of their clients by paying attention to present needs of the patient through her close observations of the physical and emotional presence of the patient. These interventions work by providing music that both has deep spiritual meaning for the patient and impacts the person as the music itself induces emotions through rhythmic entrainment and vibrational resonance. The stories gathered revealed emergent themes highlighting subtle and hard to measure efforts made by the therapists to be open to the patient (or resident) and their spiritual 'soundtrack', and how through complex personal discernment, they select appropriate music that ministers to this unique person emotionally and spiritually at a unique point in their lives. The stories also reveal the profound caretaking impact of the work on patients, families, and staff. I offered a multimedia presentation that included a review of broader research into harp therapy, how the music connects spirituality and emotions using recordings of the women's stories and a live demonstration of the use of therapeutic harp.

After a difficult weekend where people were deeply saddened by the outcome of the Voice referendum, along with hearing many stories about the oppression of women within the broad church, my presentation at the end of two days was a welcome relief generating several comments on how healing just a short reverie harp session was for them.

Whilst my presentation was a little off the main topic of the conference, I have been invited to contribute an abstract to a book which will focus on "the variety of ways in which stories can be heard and held, and the place of story-tellers in communities of hope". I am currently considering how the material I have gathered from harp practitioners may fit with that theme....

### **Jenni Sawell - A Day in the life of the MSU**

I walk into the MSU (Memory Support Unit) and begin to unpack and set up for their regular fortnightly harp therapy session. This particular unit has about 15 residents, most of whom are in the advanced stages of dementia.

One or two of them smile as I enter. They recognise me. This is good. Most of them do not acknowledge my presence, and are fairly unresponsive.

Today is particularly chaotic. Two residents are constantly screaming. For one of these poor ladies, every waking moment is filled with distress. Ghosts of past memories haunt her present, and she cannot escape the trauma in her mind. It is embedded in her soul. She screams until she is exhausted, then starts again once she has her breath back. This is a relentless battle.

Her screams set off another resident, who yells and calls out loudly, shouting angrily at everybody and everything in her sight.

I begin to play to the group. No use. No one can hear me. I cannot even hear myself. I move over and sit next to the angry Mrs B. I try and catch her eye as I begin playing gently in Dorian. I try some melodies in her home language. I try to match my music to her voice. Still no response. My music appears to have no effect on her, as she continues to rail at the world around her. I give up and return to the group.

I settle in to try and play for the few who might be able to hear, hoping to cut through the noise and provide an atmosphere of peace and calm to the room. The staff are in much need of support here. Now a third resident begins to raise her voice, demanding to be taken to her mum. Angry that her demands have not been met, she loudly rouses on the staff who try and calm her.

Suddenly Mr D decides to get up and climb over the back of his chair. Quickly the staff rush to prevent a certain accident. Mr M then takes off his shoe and begins to examine it, offering it to everyone around him as gift...

After 25 minutes, Mrs B is finally taken out by the staff. Only one resident is screaming now...

Finally, after over half an hour of persevering, I notice some foot tapping, and some heads nodding. Is this a response to my music at last...?

It takes me until the end of my 45 minute session before there is relative peace in the MSU. I am grateful I can finish and walk away, but conscious that the staff have a full day ahead. I am hopeful that I have made some difference, and provided a small window of tranquillity into a chaotic world.

### **Moira Pagan - IONA 2023 A Pilgrimage and The Joy of a Community of Harpists**

I attended the Iona Harp Retreat towards the end of a visit to the UK and Europe this year. It amounted to the delayed 2020 session and I was a little unsure of how it was all going to go. Having moved to Australia in 2014 following 10 years in New Zealand and having lived in the UK until my 50<sup>th</sup> year, I have been used to letting go of homes, houses and friends when relocating to a new country.

One of the side effects of this process has been a certain amount of isolation each time we found ourselves in a new place and knowing perhaps only a couple of people. My husband's job as an Ophthalmologist who enjoys working in smaller centres and regional towns, meant that our new homes were based 'on the edge' of small communities and a long way from teachers or practicing harpists. My harp learning and playing has therefore taken place on my own via first Skype Lessons (with Anna Dunwoodie In Auckland) in the early 2000s and later on via Zoom from 2014 to date.

Living in small town Eastern Australia I found attending harp Zoom sessions rewarding though usually quite challenging- often being held at 4 or 5 in the morning my time! Still it has been a way of engaging with other harpists and teachers 'in person' and a treat for me in that sense.

Making the journey to Iona which has historically been a place of pilgrimage over the ages, was indeed an Odyssey and took us on 'The long and winding road ' from the initial travel of a flight from our home town of Port Macquarie to the city of Sydney and an overnight stay there before the long International flight to Manchester via Dubai, followed by several hours drive from family in Manchester up through Scotland to an overnight in Oban then a two hour ferry across to the Island of Mull. We drove a few hours to the far side of Mull and then took the tiny Ferry across to Iona to see our first sight of the famous Abbey and the small cluster of buildings that constituted the centre of the



village itself! Not forgetting finally getting a lift from a van with a volunteer driver which was meeting travelers to their retreat centre and who kindly agreed to take us and our many bags and harp up to the hotel!

On reflection, the rigors of such a journey, does demonstrate my commitment to seeking improvements and learning with the harp and a sense of a wish to discover and explore new possibilities for linking my harp practice with my spiritual practice.

During the Journey The Mind wanders to how will it be to meet a group of new people? What will be expected of me? Will I find it useful? Interesting? All those thought which pop up between trying to enjoy the voyage, the sights, the sounds and the sense of moving towards something Unknown.

We first met up with many of the harpists and their partners, as well as Christina, in the foyer of a hotel in Oban the night before the final parts of the journey and we were happy to meet a range of people from different countries as well as fellow Australians who had also made their own journeys. Christina invited us to introduce ourselves briefly and that certainly helped to disperse some of those fearful aspects of meeting new people. As the week progressed there were plenty of opportunities to get to know people and find oneself drawn to certain people and they to you, in a natural process of linking up with those with whom one shares a closer bond. The Instrument, the harp, of course was the shared bond between all of us and so there was a sense of belonging to a group with a shared love for the instrument, its music and its healing properties.

For me the week presented the opportunity to become part of a group of harpists, to eat, walk, play and learn together. It was a chance to take me out of my normal situation of being the only harpist for miles around – with a link to only one other practitioner in the area and no physical teacher with whom to work.

This sense of sharing and support was invaluable and I thank the whole group as well as of course Christina for the gift of giving this boost to my practice and the feeling that I am not alone with this work and it nourished my need to be with others of like mind in a physical as well as spiritual sense. It has given me increased confidence to work with larger groups of elderly resident in the nursing home which I attend on a weekly basis.



This photo taken by my husband on the final ferry trip across to Mull shows the joy of new found friendships and happiness of our individual journeys with the harp as well as the community of harpists about to take the ferry back to their own lives. A visual image of the rediscovery of the joys of shared Community with other harpists. That's me in the hat with harp in hand!

## Spiritual Community

Iona is known for its Spiritual Community which is a permanent feature of the Life there. We got a sense of the wider community when we shared the magnificent new Village Hall in which our morning classes were held, with the Iona folk and found them to be as helpful and respectful as we tried to be as fellow users of the space. Walking around the village and over to some of the beaches on which those early pilgrims



landed, we also came across monks and religious folk from a range of disciplines. Seeing the old Greek Orthodox monks with their black robes walking on the beaches where St Columba walked was a powerful demonstration of both the fleeting passage of time and my life on earth as well as the continued bloodline of Faith and the strength it can give to humans of any Denomination.



The aspect of Pilgrimage with which I opened my report, was demonstrated in many forms throughout the week. During the afternoons one of our main teachers Fiontullach, offered to lead walks across the island to sites of spiritual significance and the walk to the White Strand pictured above, took the group to the pure white beaches and shining coloured rocks which edged the beach upon which those ancient religious walked and upon which the present-day followers of spiritual traditions still walk.

*Following in the footsteps of ancient monks and pilgrims across Iona*

Our visit there wasn't just one of sightseeing. We spent a few hours there. Some relaxed, meditated, Fiontullach lead a sacred dance with a group of followers advancing towards the sea with arms open and welcoming and a sense of Joy in the movement and chant which was barely audible above the sound of the waves. Being a bystander non-the less felt like I was part of the ceremony and the sense of being in a sacred space.

My response to the environment in which I found myself as each person seemed to be taking their individual places around the beach, was to go and sit on the rocks by the sea. There I painted the colours and the forms of the ancient rocks which have stood steadily throughout the ages weathering the elements and movements and habitation on their surfaces. The space was full of sounds from sand and pebbles moving with the tide, the breeze, distant voices and soft chanting – all the senses were filled with the richness of the moment





*Pilgrimage to St Columba's Bay with imagined monks by the shore*

My painting was an attempt to tune into something and let the creation of forms on paper express itself. The act of painting or making music on the harp have similarities and creative links with the Other, with the Elements, with Nature, with Mother Earth, with The Creator God – whatever one chooses to call it. I saw during the week that the link between the three main teachers Fiontullach, Alix Colin and Julie Darling was their relationship with the Earth and everything seen and unseen within it. Nature's energy being a major inspiration for both their worship and their musical expression of it.



*My watercolour sketch of the view from the St Columba Hotel complete with the drops of rain effect!*

Christina took pictures of my paintings and shared them with the group via Facebook as at the final workshop I had opened my sketchbook during morning tea as an offering for others to have a look at my response to the Island of Iona. I had appreciated the sharing of photos from others and it always amazes me how each person, looking at the same scene can 'see' a different aspect of meaning within it. This is of course so with playing a simple tune- how each player will express the sounds and feeling of the same tune differently.

This sharing of music and of spiritual experiences was of course a profound part of the teaching we received especially in the morning sessions. I will attempt to summarize my main take aways from each teacher in turn.

### **Fiontullach- a Song to the Land**

Fionn as I already mentioned has a deep connection to the Island of Iona and the ancient bardic ways of the Gael. She finds inspiration through reading the music of the land. Nature she says, to the ancient

Celt is nothing less than 'Otherworld Melody'. As A Spiritual guide and Head of the Ceile De order based in Scotland, she had a warm glow of confidence in 'the Transformative Power of Love'.

During one session, Fionn took her harp and used the example of looking out the window, after a period of quiet and silence, and 'seeing' the bank of the hill behind the room in which we sat and imagined the notes she would play to describe the form of the hill as a gentle rising and falling along with its contours. She might then gaze over its surface and express, through notes, the various plants, shrubs or trees on its surface. Then I imagined something else could emerge to express its deep and quiet steadfastness with its rocks. I could see how my painting in response to Nature could be translated into making an improvisation on the harp based on a response to the natural world using sound.

The next teaching which made an impact was the use of her voice to chant the song of the Land in ancient Gaelic. I felt a deep link with this, as my heritage, being born in the Scottish borders in Berwick upon Tweed and with my surname Pagan – seemed to resonate and enhance, not jar with my life- long journey with the Soto Zen Buddhist Tradition in which everything has Buddha Nature.

I was so entranced with the effect of these chants especially during the final performance in Iona Abbey during which Fionn sang the most beautiful chant accompanied by Christina improvising I felt moved to silent, tears of beauty and deep joy during the singing of these chants to the Unknown but Knowable Spirit.

I bought CDS and booklets from Fionn called 'Sacred Chants of the Ceile De' and was astounded to read almost on the first page about many Celtic legends in which the protagonists find themselves being forced into coracles without oars or sails and they drift on open seas until the hand of Grace takes them to the other Shore. It described almost perfectly a painting I made after I had moved across the world to New Zealand, of a parson standing in a canoe without oars looking through a cleft in a cliff towards the open sea and the land on 'the Other Side' putting trust in something 'Other' to guide me. It demonstrated how these archetypal images can resonate with us today from deep in the past and even across cultures unknown to us.



*Fionntullach sings an ancient Gallic chant as the other teachers Julie Darling, Christina Tourin and Alix Colin look on.*

listened to the Land itself, to the flowers and trees and animals to teach and to heal. Here on the Island of Iona I was listening to Fionntullach and could make these deep connections with myself and perhaps my ancient ancestors who lived during the time of Saint Columba and whose influence I could tune into through her chants and stories of times past becoming alive in the present.

Having taken some singing lessons and attending a choir regularly I have been beginning to use my voice as a part of my journey with the harp. Especially working in the new area of Palliative Care, I can see there may be times when I would play a lullaby type piece and hum along with it or accompany the improvisations with some resonant notes rather than use of words.

This is still a new area for me but the healing impact of the chants I heard undoubtedly pointed the way to using my voice as well as the harp to respond to the environment – especially where a peaceful, supporting space may be needed and it becomes clear this is what is being asked on me at that time.

Instead of looking out the window and describing or responding to the shape or form or feeling of the landscape outside, I would try to do the same thing with the landscape inside. This landscape may be a room or hospital corridor in which patients and visitors are anxiously moving around or nurses are feeling stressed. To be still and choose the right piece to play or whether to hum or not – to respond to the feelings in the space and give them a nudge towards a more sense of being open and still and perhaps take someone to the place I was when I heard the beautiful chant in the Abbey is something I wish to be able to do and have had feedback that it does happen.

### **Julie Darling – Poetry and the Harp respond to Nature**

Julie is a down to Earth Yorkshire woman with an other-worldly presence and she is also a Spiritual Guide for the Ceile De tradition. She uses her harp and voice as an ancient Bard would do, using poetry and improvisation of the harp to respond to Nature and Life. She leads gatherings in which people come to find spiritual peace. Her workshops with us usually involved quiet time of meditation and provided the opportunity to enable insight to arise within the silence which of course resonated with my personal spiritual path too.

The main thing I remember about Julie was the way in which she invited everyone to find through words, what had most resonated with them during their stay on Iona. She wanted just a few words from each person in which to weave a poem made up from the whole group. This seemed a daunting task to me but it was a very interesting question to ask myself what had made the greatest impact on me from the Island? What came to mind almost immediately was the rocks – those I painted repeatedly as rocks or landforms, the rocks pilgrims carried with them and laid in cairns along the far beach at the end of the St Columba's Way Pilgrimage. My chosen words were:

*'Rock of steadfast stillness come wind or storm'*

The inspiration of the rocks and the peace emanating from them was a wish that I might have that 'rocklike' quality within myself that might show peace to others and which I would like to express in daily life as well as in my therapeutic harp playing.

I was delighted to hear my words as the first line of the group poem which was filled with many beautiful and meaningful words which just was another demonstration how a group could become more than the sum of its parts. Julie was indeed a very skillful wordsmith. She showed also how words themselves can be healing and reminded me that sometimes NOT playing the harp but sharing a quiet time with anyone and listening to them in silence and with respect and non-judgement, can provide 'what is needed' at that moment. Julie also reminded me how a few words, well considered and from the Heart, can be helpful to someone if needed.





*Rocks on White Strand Beach - my watercolour interpretation of the sense of place.*

### **Alix Colin - Giving back to the Land, Grace Notes and honouring the harp and each other**

Alix is an utterly warm and charming person with a wonderful sharp shooting edge to her sense of humour. She made a big first impression when she talked about hearing all about the people who came to Iona searching for something, wanting to find answers to their spiritual needs and questions. She asked us 'What about the Island itself and the all that lives on it? What does the Island want or need? It doesn't have to be a one-way thing- this taking ... what can we offer? How can we use our harps and play music as an offering to the Island and the birds and all that lives here?'

This approach to seeing the use of the harp as a service and as an offering resonates with me for several reasons but one of the main ones is that it takes pressure off 'self' as a performer- but rather self as more of a conduit for the harp and the music to flow as best it can without my expectations getting in the way. This approach is very helpful when I play for largish groups of residents in a nursing home where my playing is still regarded as a 'performance' but if I keep true to the aim of offering a service then I don't have to suffer 'performance anxiety!'

At the beginning of each session with Alix she asked us to lay our harps in a ring and to look at them and honour them in whatever way it felt right for us. She also played a game to help us remember everyone's name which in fact was another 'honouring' ceremony and certainly felt like it helped the group to gel as a community and a great way for everyone to feel important enough that their names would be known and remembered by everyone.

Alix taught us some of her tunes by ear and we repeated and played sections of the tune together over and over. No names of notes were mentioned and having to follow the sounds was quite a stretch for me –not being used to learning tunes by ear very often. I also find the activity of playing in absolute unison with others a challenge as it's not something I am used to as a solo player.



*A harp recognition and honouring mini ceremony*

This was all good experience and a reminder to set the metronome for practice sessions as I realize I can tend to stretch the timing too much sometimes and not keep a regular beat.

Alix's belief that the resonance of the harp and its tones produce positive and healing energies for use in the world and her demonstration of a scientific experiment which showed how the vibrations emitted from plants can be measured scientifically. She also played a video demonstrating how harp and cello music played to flowers produced a measurable sonic response from them as proof of her belief.

Alix showed how using triads to accompany the modes wasn't always successful and that different patterns such as 1,2,5 (C,D G in the scale of C) OR 1,4,5 (C,F,G) worked better as accompaniments and often sounded more interesting.

She also made an impact by suggesting we use decorations freely in our improvisations and it is not necessarily that case that 'less is more' in harp playing. She reminded me that Celtic musicians add in extra notes as embellishments and as the harp has a more limited resonance than some instruments such as the violin, then extra notes can increase the time the harp notes are in the air without masking the tune- especially as they are usually played softer anyway.

It is Interesting that the extra notes are often called 'grace' notes. I'm finding I can more easily add these intuitively the more familiar I become with a tune and especially if accompanying my husband on the penny whistle where he is also adding in grace notes so I will mirror this in the harp accompaniment.

I did enjoy the French flavor to Alix's own compositions and thought they were very suitable for use in therapeutic situations and palliative care. One of her book of compositions is called 'Peace' and the music aims to evoke feelings of Peace in the heart and in thoughts and deeds. The compositions are gentle and in the keys of E flat, B flat and F Major which have a peaceful feeling to them. Her special word 'Harpeopathie' evokes the sense that a little harp music goes a long way for healing and this would be very encouraging when one plays at the bedside of folks who choose never to leave their beds in a nursing home and for whom 20 minute of my playing harp every so often seems far too little an offering to make!

### **Goodbye to Iona but not to your Wisdom**

Below is the group photo taken in the Abbey at the end of the programme- it is a fine symbol of the benefit of coming together and sharing learning and harp music as well as friendship in the special place that Iona inhabits in the World.

It is known as a place where the veil between this world and the next is thin and where people can find their link with their spiritual being more easily.

It certainly felt that I would be able to take the increased link to the spiritual with me and allow the voice of the harp to sing more sweetly in this world wherever I may find myself asked to play.

The Tunes I learnt and the hard to define extra confidence acquired during my time on Iona, makes my offering in the nursing home I play at regularly to Dementia ward residents a calmer, steadier one.



I can also take it to individuals at their bedsides as well as to communities when I'm asked to play for someone's memorial ceremony ('Tender Funerals') and finally to my weekly visit at a Palliative Care ward.



*The whole group final photo in Iona Abbey. I'm at the back almost directly above Christina*

## South Australia

### Lyn Johnson – Farewell letter

After playing the harp for patients at the Flinders Medical Centre (FMC) for 10 years, I am resigning from the job. It has been a wonderful and rewarding time, and I will miss the interaction with patients, their visitors and staff. I observed the beneficial effects of harp music for patients, evident from their reactions and feedback. My work was a pleasure rather than a job.

I first started at FMC to fulfil the requirements of a student placement for Harp for Healing for study in the Clinical Musician Certification Program. I had not heard of the Arts in Health program at the hospital until I was informed by a previous colleague; neither were they aware of the harp as a therapeutic instrument, however they were pleased to accept me in that role.

I clearly remember my first day. I felt quite anxious about playing in front of others, let alone in a medical centre. I was asked if I would be willing to be filmed for an honours student's project on the benefits of the arts within a medical setting. My natural inclination was to decline, however, I reminded herself that I was there to do the job, so I agreed. While playing for my first patient I was surrounded by cameras, lights and microphones just to add to the existing nervousness. The patient told me afterwards that he felt relaxed while listening to the music, despite the busyness of the situation.

After completing my placement and gaining accreditation with Harp for Healing (and later with IHTP), I stayed as a volunteer for a while, which later became paid work through invoicing, then as an employee with the SA Health Department. I was a team member in the Arts in Health Department within the hospital. During the last few years, Arts in Health purchased a 26 string Dusty Strings harp which meant I did not need to take my own harp. I played in all wards, the Laurel Hospice, and the Cancer Wellness Centre according to a patient referral system. I also guided meditation accompanied by gentle harp music for staff, held in the hospital chapel. This gave staff members a chance to reset during their busy and often stressful days.

While long term staff at the hospital are familiar with 'the lady with harp', as I became known, new staff or visitors expressed surprise and delight at seeing a harp being wheeled around the hospital. I often played 'elevator music' on the harp in response to requests from others in the lift, and their positive reaction was immediate. On the other hand, some people made the association between the harp, angels, heaven, and death; and told me they were not ready for my services yet!

The harp played therapeutically has an important role in medical settings. I encourage all therapeutic harpists and students to continue the good work.

## Tasmania

### Helen Morrison - Therapy Harp at the Harp Society of Tasmania

In September I presented a session on therapeutic music at the Harp Society statewide Spring Gathering and AGM in Hobart. I began by introducing my new Reverie Harp, generously donated by Peter Roberts. There was lots of interest and it turned out that one or two society members also own a Reverie Harp. The group was keen to see and hear ideas for how and where it could be played, different tunings, and possibilities to enrich their community.

The second part of the session was an in-depth look at the Therapy Harp Training Program of which I have been Director for two years now. I highlighted the structure of the program as well as the key assessment tasks and practical requirements. Our diverse group asked lots of questions and gave excellent feedback, with several members having a 'lightbulb' moment, realising that they too could study harp therapy and build their skills to better their community through music.

We finished with a simple improvisation on just a few notes, first by listening to the resonance of our own harps, then offering our music out to each other in a quiet, mindful manner.

St John's Hospital, Hobart – I have been continuing to take my harp in and play each week to staff, patients and families. It is always rewarding to be able to offer beautiful harp music in this setting.

November offerings – I will be playing for the DonateLife Service of Remembrance for organ donors and recipients. Harp music will add a restful atmosphere throughout the service.

Sound Sanctuary – I will be facilitating a short ensemble workshop for beginners and those with experience who wish to bring their harps to play and learn in a group setting. We will do some improvising, play a simple round and finish with a soundscape with poetry.

More details of harp and music happenings are in this newsletter on A Summer of Harp and Music Events.

A SUMMER of HARP and MUSIC EVENTS in Tasmania  
Jan 2024 – March 2024

**Harp Workshop on a Golden Kelp theme - Sunday January 7, 2024**

with Cliona Molins, NSW harpist. All levels welcome. Learn original music in a supportive setting.  
BYO harp, music stand, pencil, lunch.

Claremont RSL, 9 Bilton St, Claremont, Hobart. 10.00am – 4.00pm

Bookings on Humanitix <https://events.humanitix.com/golden-kelp-harp-workshop>

**Cygnnet Folk Festival, TAS - Friday 12-Sunday 14 January, 2024**

<https://cygnnetfolkfestival.org/>

**Sheffield Folk Harp Weekend - Saturday 20 - Sunday 21 January, 2024**

with Andy Rigby (Vic). A weekend of fun harp events for all levels.

Contact Kate Fraser 0412 322 729

**Tamar Valley Folk Festival, George Town, January 19-21, 2024**

**Adriano Sangineto – harpist, composer, arranger**

Performances: Friday 26th Jan at Fern Tree Tavern 7.30pm - Tickets on Humanitix

Saturday 27th Jan at MONA Lawns 1:45pm, non-ticketed

Sunday 28th Jan, the Don Theatre, Wynyard 3pm

Contact Kate Fraser 0412 322 729

<https://www.adrianosangineto.com/>

**Deloraine Celtic Music Weekend - 26-28 January, 2024**

**Rhondda Howland - Qld harpist and composer**

Sunday February 25, 2024

<https://www.rhonddahowland.com.au/music/>

Meet the composer and explore her music – afternoon session in Hobart – venue to be confirmed

Please RSVP to Helen Morrison - [helenamusic@yahoo.com.au](mailto:helenamusic@yahoo.com.au) or phone 0419 002 344

**TMTA Conference Fireworks in the Musical Brain, with Dr Anita Collins of Bigger Better**

Brains. Saturday 2 March, 2024 Hotel Grand Chancellor, Davey St, Hobart

<https://www.tmta.com.au/event-5438657>

**Harp Island, March 8-11, 2024 with Josh Layne**

<https://www.harpsocietytasmania.org/events-1/harp-island-2024> Harp Island Concert on March 11.

More concerts with Josh Layne after the weekend.

Contact Judy Crees-Morris [jac\\_morris@hotmail.com](mailto:jac_morris@hotmail.com)

For further details contact Helen Morrison on [helenamusic@yahoo.com.au](mailto:helenamusic@yahoo.com.au) or 0419 002 344



## Victoria

### Bernadette O'Rourke

It was my pleasure to celebrate International Day of Peace with some of the residents at an aged care facility in Melbourne's eastern suburbs on 21st September 2023.

We took part in an activity together, setting an intention of peace, and touching the wood or gently playing the Reverie harp strings sending the vibrations out to the world.

*Loving hands at work*



### Christine Middleton - Splash "n" Arts Camp

Last month Tim and I journeyed 3,000kms to far west Queensland to be involved in an Artist in Residence Program over three days for the Bedourie Arts & Splash Camp. This program brings together primary school aged children from the region's small remote schools to Bedourie which boasts a swimming pool, pub, primary school, two pet camels and a daily temperature of 43 degrees. The aim of the Camp is to teach the children how to swim and an Arts program is also provided at the same time.

Last year I took eight coloured Harpsicles to the Camp and the children were so excited and responsive to the Harp program that I was invited to return for a second year. This year I took with me twelve coloured ukuleles. I've never played a ukulele before and not been particularly interested in the instrument either, but the children took to them like "ducks to water". They're colourful, easy to learn and the perfect size for their little fingers. The children played, danced, sang and they performed their new learnings at a wonderful concert on the last night.

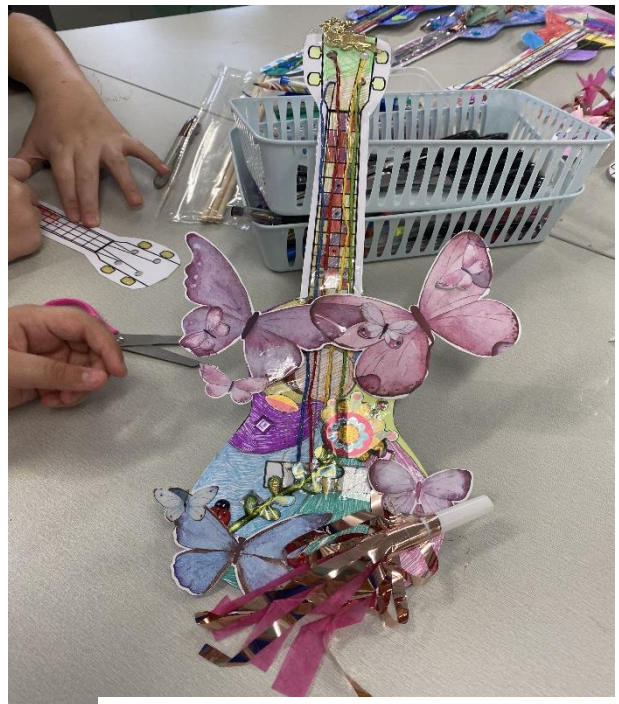


*Kids at the Arts n Splash Camp*



The children also had great fun with the Arts activities and were amazingly creative with the range of materials that I provided them with. I always finished the sessions with a Harp Meditation of course..... it was the perfect way to calm these excitable young grasshoppers down.

The whole experience for me was one of pure fun and joy but five days later and home again, I'm still trying to get "Alice the Camel" and "The Dingle Dangle Scarecrow" out of my head. *My advice is to always take opportunities when they arise because they make you think in creative ways you would never have thought about and open doors you never realised were there.*



Arts

**Christine with Priscilla Queen of the Desert**



## Rachel Gellert - My harp adventure with Josh Layne...

I have a knack for materialising people I look up to in my life...starting with running superstar Yiannis Kouros (look him up, a story for another time), then a couple of well known vocalists (again, 'as seen on tv') became my teachers. In recent years, this propensity has moved onto harpists I admire.

Youtube has created wonderful opportunities to observe and connect with musicians from around the world. My harp teachers have included Anne Crosby-Gaudet, and Harriet Earis, a Welsh harpist. I discovered both on Youtube.

Thus it was with Josh Layne ('Harpist in the Wild' and 'Harp Tuesday'). After watching Josh's Youtube videos for a couple of years (initially recommended through THTP study), he appeared as if by magic at our house.

When Josh was planning his trip to Australia, he put a call out for interested folk to host a 'Harpist in the Wild' episode. Assuming he'd have dozens of offers, I nonetheless offered to facilitate an episode, promoting our local area, the Grampians national park (Gariwerd) and Mount Arapiles (Dyuritte) as ideal locations to film. I included a photo I'd used for 'Random Acts of Harping' day in 2019) – showing a harp was well suited to this rugged landscape.

I was quite shocked when Josh replied, expressing interest in coming to our rural town of Horsham in the Wimmera.

Plans were made, timelines set, and there we were, my equally excited husband (Michael) and I, on our way to collect Josh from the shuttle bus in Ballarat. 'Francesca', my trusty Musicmakers Voyageur harp (which lives up to its name) was in the back, as Josh had asked to borrow it for filming. Being March, the weather gave us less than ideal conditions to take Francesca into the great outdoors.

We collected Josh, then journeyed to the various locations we'd chosen. It rained, AND RAINED, and the wind blew wild gusts that threatened to blow us off the top of the various cliff tops we had chosen to show off our glorious countryside.



*Michael, Josh and Rachel*

Our 'Harpist in the Wild' adventure proved to be wilder than we had expected. At one location (Reeds Lookout), we retreated to the car half a dozen times, venturing out only when each downpour appeared to abate. Each time we returned to seek shelter, Michael literally ran, carrying Francesca, to prevent rain damage.

We finally had just enough of a break in the weather to film three takes of Josh playing Bernard Andre's 'Vanille'. We watched the rain roll in over the distant mountains, aware that we had a limited time before sheltering was necessary once more.

At this point Josh asked if he could film me (!), so I played Anne Crosby-Gaudet's 'Mermaid's Tears'. My fingers were frozen, the wind was picking up, and the rain starting increasing again as I played in front of my harp hero for the first time...not my best effort, but a thrill none-the-less!

We had a couple of weather-brave tourists stop and observe the filming at Venus Baths in Halls Gap where Josh played Andre's 'Pistache'. Michael and I enjoyed experimenting with different angles for each take, with Josh's regular camera (with wind sound reducer) set up close by.



*Josh at Venus Baths at Hall's Gap*

Fortunately, we'd packed lots of snacks, because the hours flew past and we arrived home just in time for the start of the ATHA ZOOM social gathering.

I had pre-warned Christine Middleton that Josh might be popping in to say hi if we arrived home in time. Josh was happy to go along with the fun, and as we joined the meeting, we were amused to overhear a couple of comments about Josh playing at the Tasmanian 'Harp Island' event.

ATHA members were then well primed to be suitably stunned when he suddenly appeared live on the screen! I certainly enjoyed the mix of reactions, some (literally in a couple of cases) jaw drops and a few big grins, the latter continuing when he responded to a member's leading question 'What day is it Josh?' Right on cue, 'Harp Tuesday!' was the cheerful response from Josh. We excused ourselves soon after as we were well in need of rest and refuelling. Michael cooked while Josh and I talked about harps...and unicycles, after Josh noticed mine leaning against the wall. Josh enthusiastically attempted a ride...while I held my breath and prayed he didn't crash to the ground, damaging his virtuosic harp hands! Fortunately he completed his short ride unscathed. After dinner and some more harp playing/discussing, it was time for bed to rest before our next adventure.

The weather was much more amenable to filming the following morning, and we drove to Mt Arapiles with Francesca plus my lap harp, as I was keen to attempt a simple duet with Josh. Josh is a keen photographer, and enjoyed wandering around the bush photographing different bird species.

While this was happening I carried my lap harp to the top of a large boulder and began playing. Josh asked if we could take Francesca up as well, so we carefully manoeuvred the large harp up, and Michael and Josh climbed up after it.

Josh set up the harp for filming his composition 'Forgotten Summer', a piece that worked beautifully within the landscape (incorporating atmospheric bird calls). Josh then invited me to join him for a duet, so we improvised over a couple of chords, then played a bit of Brahms's lullaby (one of my favourites) as Michael filmed.



*Josh and Rachel*

Playing together was the highlight of the trip for me, and as we finished and I stood up, I stated 'I can die happy now', as I unknowingly stumbled towards the edge of the boulder. Michael and Josh both reached out to grab me, preventing my offhand statement from becoming a reality!

Our adventure drew to a close eventually; we retrieved harps and filming equipment, carefully transporting them and ourselves to ground level, and back to the car. We journeyed homewards for lunch and then back to Ballarat to deliver Josh to the coach station. Michael and I drove back home, barely believing we could return to real life after our jam packed two days with Josh. Fortunately the excitement continued as we waited for Josh to release the three 'Harpist in the Wild' episodes we filmed in the Grampians, and we were able to relive our time being a part of this virtuosic harpist's time in Australia.

Links to Josh's 'Harpist in the Wild' Grampians episodes (3)

<https://youtu.be/718hPT9sy-8>

[https://youtu.be/fF9sUULN\\_Mk](https://youtu.be/fF9sUULN_Mk)

<https://youtu.be/U3zUuT6DwBw>



## Vimukti Warr

The two Exploring the Magic of the Harp workshops in Guildford, Central Vic. were well received. Booking limit was 8 and that is how many people attended each session. A total of 11 people altogether.

Everyone agreed, the harp is indeed a magical instrument as we shared in its therapeutic effects.



By popular demand Harp Magic +++ sessions will continue in 2024 as monthly 2-hour sessions on the second Sunday of each month. 10am to 12pm. Attend casually or regularly, all are welcome. Starting Sunday 14th January. YAY!

Introduction to Therapeutic harp in Guildford on the 3rd Dec. with Anke and Vimukti was well attended.



Therapeutic harp for animals continues weekly at Edgar's Mission. Therapeutic harp internship hours have also begun and are greatly supported by the E.M team, animals and volunteers.

*Bernadette with the kids*

## Western Australia

### Helen Punch

#### *Solaris Cancer Care*

I continue to provide Harp Meditation at Solaris Cancer Care in Bunbury as a volunteer and have been doing this since they opened the centre over 12 years ago. The service I provide has changed from when I first started. At the beginning it was harp music in a general area for those coming to the centre where people would sit and listen before going in for a complementary therapy session. It has been a place where I've tried different 'techniques' based on what I have learnt and how to 'feel' a room and play music appropriate for a group or individual. I love being part of Solaris and meeting the many wonderful people at the Centre.



#### *Busselton Hospice Care*



Last weekend I played harp at the annual Remembrance Service in Busselton. The service was led by a wonderful funeral celebrant who was able to make people feel comfortable, and with love and compassion talked about how grief can affect individuals differently. I played harp during the lighting of the candles and the showing of photos of loved ones which proved to be a very emotional experience.

The service was conducted with great sensitivity and beautifully presented. Each time I am asked to play at the service I come away feeling enriched and fulfilled and grateful to have been part of a very special occasion.



*Bunbury and Busselton Regional Hospitals*

This year I started playing with a flautist and through her connections with the hospital we were asked to provide music as part of their 'wellness' program for staff. We played in open areas where staff could hear us and take time out to sit and listen. This not only was of benefit to staff but also patients. The feedback has been very positive and we are hoping to continue with more sessions in 2024.

*Finally*

I continue to play at nursing homes around the south west and love doing this. However, after 6 years of playing in palliative care I decided to take a break and this has provided an opportunity to open up to other areas of therapeutic harp which has been very rewarding!



## 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: Can I install carbon fibre strings on my nylon strung harp? They seem to be all the rage.***

Firstly, the strings which many people call carbon fibre strings or carbon strings, are NOT carbon fibre. They are fluorocarbon or a polyvinylidene fluoride which is an extruded plastic polymer similar to nylon but with different mechanical properties. Like nylon, it contains carbon molecules, but otherwise it has no resemblance to carbon fibre which is black

My experience is that if a harp was designed for fluorocarbon strings then it tends to sound good with these strings but if it was designed for nylon or gut strings then the sound is compromised to substitute fluorocarbon strings. Be aware that the fluorocarbon strings are denser so they tend to be thinner for a given pitch and may be harder on your fingers. If you change to a string composition different than what the harp was designed for you are going to get different result in the sound and feel.

To get back to the question which should be, can I install fluorocarbon strings on my harp even though it was designed for nylon strings? You can, provided that you do your homework as to the density and lower the fluorocarbon string gauges to match the load the harp was made for. You would also need to change the levers or the regulation of a pedal harp to match the new string gauges.

Other than the issue of the sound difference, a harp designed for nylon strings is likely to have longer string lengths. To install fluorocarbon strings on these longer vibrating lengths may mean more frequent breakage of the fluorocarbon strings.

If by chance you have a harp where the strings are on the loose side and not producing a clear tone, then fluorocarbon strings might improve the sound and feel. If your harp has poor tension and tone it is not fault of the string but that the harp string design does not match the string type.

Fluorocarbon strings tend to stretch more than nylon when first installed. This means that they require more tuning in the beginning but reportedly once stretched and holding pitch, they tend to stay in tune longer than nylon strings.

There are lots of reports and claims about which strings break more frequently, stay in tune better and sound better however it is not the because of the string itself but rather how compatible the harp design is to the type of string.

A properly designed synthetic string folk harp should be specifically designed for either nylon or fluorocarbon and the harp maker should be able to advise you about the pros and cons of selecting either type of string.

If you like the way that your harp sounds and feels but you have heard that fluorocarbon strings are better than nylon strings, I would seriously question why you would want to change your nylon strings to fluorocarbon strings. Or the other way around.

Questions and comments for future "Harp Workbench" column of this newsletter can be addressed to the editor, Glenda Underhill [harptranquility@gmail.com](mailto:harptranquility@gmail.com) or to 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](http://www.harps.com.au)

## Tune-a-Month

### By Christine Middleton - (Facilitator)

Tune-a-Month has been a terrific initiative this year and well attended by ATHA members. Many thanks to all the contributors to the Program – Jenni Sawell, Helen Morrison, Helen Punch, Carla Whitely, Glenda Underhill, Gwenda Davies, Nicky Lock and Moira Pagan. We've all benefited from the expertise and passion of these therapeutic harpists and it's been great to build up such a broad range of therapeutic harp music to use in our work.

Tune-a- Month will continue throughout 2024 on the first Tuesday of each month commencing Tuesday 5th March.

If you missed any of the sessions and would like a copy of the music sheets, please contact Christine Middleton at [Christine.mi@bigpond.com](mailto:Christine.mi@bigpond.com)

## ATHA Discussion Group

### By Carol Booth - (Facilitator)

The ATHA Discussion Group was originally launched by Vimukti Ware who was the facilitator of the group from its beginning until the start of 2023 when she passed the baton to Carol Booth. ATHA is grateful for Vimukti's initiative in getting the group started and her commitment to making it successful.

The ATHA discussion group takes place on the third Tuesday of the month. The group continued to be well attended into 2023, when discussion topics included:

February: Harpy New Year Resolutions and Creating Conducive Conditions for practice.

March: In this two-part discussion Glenda Underhill spoke about her book A Harper's Journey. We were treated to a fascinating insight into Glenda's writing process and also the character development of Orla, the fictional 17th century middle aged woman who is plunged from her settled family life into tragedy, and then finds herself on and the path of becoming a harper.

Jenni Sawell then gave an astute and helpful presentation on calming unsettled and distressed clients. Jenni recounted bedside scenarios ranging from 'mildly unsettled' to 'very distressed' and discussed specific solutions.

April: Helen Morison gave a very valuable presentation titled 'Harp Therapy Basics' in which covered many aspects of therapeutic harp including 'improvisation and intent' through to 'preparation, self-care and reflection'.

May: Gwenda Davies who is both a music therapist and also a student of the IHTP program. Gwenda's talk addressed the challenges of bringing harp to a traditional music therapy training program, as well as the similarities and difference between the two disciplines.

June Christine Middleton, presented "A Day in the Life of a Therapeutic Harp Practitioner" an audio visual presentation created for Harp Fest NZ in February 2023. Christine shared her journey in the world of therapeutic harp, including training to be a therapeutic harp practitioner. She highlighted all the different areas that therapeutic harp practitioners work in, and gave case studies and stories from the bedside.

July	Carol Booth presented a paper (and PowerPoint) titled 'A sacred edge: the intersection between therapeutic harp practice and chaplaincy' which was followed by stimulating questions and discussion.	
August	Nicky Lock presented her research: Attending to Emotion and Spirit in Palliative Care through Live Therapeutic Harp Music. Nicky's rigorous research was enthusiastically received.	
September	Carol Booth facilitated a discussion titled 'Spirituality and therapeutic harp'. contributors spoke for three minutes each and a respectful and illuminating conversation followed.	Six
October	The discussion topics were  Travelling with a harp. Have you done it? How did you go about it?  Fun with a harp, and  What have you done that is crazy or scary with a harp?  These three topics resulted in a very educational and at times hilarious evening. (Which ATHA member has played harp on top of the Sydney Harbour Bridge? Can you guess?)	
November	The final discussion for the year is on  Copyright: Do therapeutic harpists have anything to be concerned about? What if someone records or videos me? Does that change my obligations?  Christmas: Does Christmas affect what you play or where you play your harp? Special gigs? Special challenges; Tips for building Christmas repertoire;  And.... What does Christmas mean to you?  What do you do on Christmas day?	

*The first ATHA discussion group in the New Year will be the third Tuesday in February and we look forward to a continuing a stimulating and enjoyable dialogue.*

Australian Therapeutic Harpists Association 2023. Thank you to all contributors. If you'd like to contribute to future editions, please send to glenda at harptranquility@gmail.com