

This article by Anna Dunwoodie was first published in the January 2019 issue of the Sylvia Woods Harp Center e-Newsletter

You can find Anna's PDFs at www.harpcenter.com/Dunwoodie

When I was ten years old, I saw a teenager singing and playing her Celtic harp at a local music competition, and immediately said to my mother "That's what I want to do!" Unfortunately, harps were rare in NZ, and harp teachers were just as hard to find. The nearest teacher was in Auckland and as we lived two hours away, it was a challenge!



My parents were totally supportive of my mad musical passions. At age 15, my first harp was a combined Christmas and birthday present, and any other gifts were often harp music books. The Sylvia Woods catalogue was read from cover to cover and back again, pages were marked, and I left the catalogue out strategically to indicate what my preferences would be! The Folk Harp Journal and UK Harp Association magazines were my bibles and I still have all my well-worn issues from the late 80s. There was NO harp music available anywhere in NZ, and a very small harp community both here and in Australia.



I started teaching when I was 13 or 14. I was teaching from a plan book for group keyboard lessons after school in the school music department, and from this started developing my own teaching programmes. A trio of divine little six-year-old recorder players, along with some pre-teen pianists, taught the teenage me an awful lot about teaching and learning, as well as the concentration span of young learners! Teaching and gigging brought fantastic pocket money through secondary school, and there wasn't much time for anything except music. I was totally immersed and loving every minute of it. It wasn't until many years later that I realised I had missed much of the experience of being involved in the music from a student's perspective, because I was living in a small town, and my musical experience elevated me to that of teacher and performer well before my time.

I went on to study pedal harp at the School of Music at Auckland University, and then on to Teacher's College studying Music and English. I went busking every Saturday to earn enough for my living expenses and picked up many gigs this way. During Teacher's College, I was also playing and singing full time with an Irish band, and spending five or six nights a week playing the harp in Irish pubs all around the North Island. With my classical and very formal music education to back me up, I quickly learnt to improvise to keep myself

entertained through many repetitions of the same sets of music many nights of the week.

After living in the UK for a few years and attending every festival I could get to, I returned to NZ, and I knew classroom teaching was only going to be a means to build up my own harp teaching business, complete with harp events. I set on my way to do this. Having two children, and ultimately raising them by myself slowed me down a little, but they learnt very quickly that a harp was never far away from mummy, and as two very happy, sunny little boys, they too loved all things musical.





Having been a lone harper as a teenager, and through university, it was great to have a group of keen students of all ages, and I started to organise the sorts of events that I would have liked to have attended as a student: workshops, concerts, ensemble rehearsals, and retreats. These things are now a prominent feature in the Auckland harp scene. I also took over the editor's role for the NZ Harp Society Journal. I began filling the thrice-yearly journal with articles from NZ and international teachers, harpists and harp makers, album and book reviews, and news from the community.

I now have a career portfolio as teacher, composer, performer and event organiser. I teach more than 50 weekly students at four different schools around Auckland, at home and in the Waikato. I have to actively schedule in time to 'stop, sit and compose' or arrange new music and my own practise.

Planning for the next event is always on my mind - The harp retreat is next up (held at a school camp out of Auckland) for 35 harpists and their families -- fantastic fun to be totally immersed in all things harp!!! I've also started arranging music for Harpenz mid 2019 (I've been running this since 2001), a four-day ensemble workshop where we get up to 45 harpists attending from all over NZ and Australia to play ensemble music together. It takes a while to arrange 30 pieces of music for all levels from absolute beginner to advanced pedal harp, so I have to start a year in advance.



I realise now that so much of what I do is due to the fact that my young musical years were very sparsely scattered with musical events, and that I want to create the sorts of events and music that I would have liked to attend. Hopefully, I'm encouraging a few emerging harp teachers, composers and performers along the way who can eventually share the load with me.

The internet has been a lifeline for building up the harp community. Accessibility to music, to other composers and teachers, and to resources

on You Tube and other websites has opened up the harp world to all of us, particularly those of us in more isolated parts of the world.

- Anna