

# An CRUITIRE

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The cover photo is of harper Cormac De Barra in concert at Cairde na Cruite's annual harp festival  
*An Chúirt Chruitreachta* in An Grianán, Co. Louth, July 2014  
(Photo credit: Kieran Cummins)

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*An Cruitire* is the newsletter of Cairde Na Cruite and is issued annually on the first week in December.

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# Cairde Na Cruite Events

## An Chúirt Chruitireachta 2014: Director's Report



**An Grianán, Termonfechin, Co. Louth**

Our 29th annual harp festival in An Grianán ran from 29th June to 4th July 2014. It was marked by its Viking and wire-strung harp themes. Once again we had a full house with participants from every corner of the globe. After a busy opening day with Irish and International Harp Makers exhibiting, 'Hands on Harp' and an informal afternoon harp session, we all settled into a week of intense harp playing in a relaxed atmosphere. The festival tutors, Máire Ní Chathasaigh, Kathleen Loughnane, Gráinne Hambly, Cormac de Barra, Kim Fleming, Dearbhail Finnegan, Anne-Marie O'Farrell, Aisling Ennis, Helen Davies and sean-nós singer Seosaimhín Ní Bheaglaoích pulled out all the stops to deliver a festival of the highest quality. The visiting artists brought their own genius to the mix and inspiration was the order of the day!

The evening concerts provided the opportunity to experience an amazing and stimulating mix of music and styles of playing. Helen Davies opened the festival with "The Melodies and Myths of the Vikings and Gaels" with Anne-Marie O'Farrell and storyteller Nuala Hayes and Danish wind player Poul Hoexbro. The audience were charmed by the festival tutors' concert, featuring our internationally acclaimed mentors. "Harping from Scotland to Ireland" was a memorable and stimulating concert presented by our colleague Gráinne Hambly and her husband William Jackson. The Meath Harp Ensemble with Dearbhail Finnegan performed a new work "The Chronicles of Meath" conducted by composer Vincent Kennedy. "Carolan's Harp" presented the wire-strung harp with first-time visitor to the festival Andrew Lawrence-King and Siobhán Armstrong. Gerry Cullen and the Drogheda Singers added a vocal and local touch to the evening. "Acoustically Yours" completed the festival concert line-up with Cormac de Barra and singer Hazel O'Connor.



**Cormac De Barra &  
Hazel O'Connor**

The afternoon focus on youth concerts with Aoife Ní Argáin and Fíona Gryson assured us that the younger harpers are keeping the tradition live and vibrant.

Many thanks to all participants at the festival, to the staff, to the visiting artists, to the harp makers, to An Grianán staff and to the Cairde na Cruite committee and in particular to Orla Belton and Kieran Cummins for all their hard work which helped make this such a memorable festival.

Once again we had a full house with participants from every corner of the globe.

*Áine Ní Dhubhghaill, Festival Director*

# An Chúirt Chruitireachta 2014

Photo credit Kieran Cummins



Poul Hoexbro, Helen Davies,  
Nuala Hayes, Anne-Marie O'Farrell



Poul Hoexbro,  
Nuala Hayes, Anne-Marie O'Farrell



Anne-Marie O'Farrell



Helen Davies



Gerry Cullen & The Drogheda Singers



Siobhán Armstrong



Festival Tutors



Seosaimhín Ní Bheaglaoich & Kathleen Loughnane



Seosaimhín Ní Bheaglaoich & Cormac De Barra



Aisling Ennis & Mary McCague



Kim Fleming



Andrew Lawrence King



William Jackson & Gráinne Hambly



Cormac De Barra & Hazel O'Connor

# Spring Concert 2014

On 6th April 2014, Cairde na Cruite held its annual Spring Concert at the Pearse Museum in St. Enda's, Rathfarnham. This year the concert was co-presented by Áine Ní Dhubhghaill and Helen Price.

The beautiful hall of Pádraig Mac Piarais' school rang once more to the sounds of a new generation of young harpers. A group of talented and promising young players delighted all in attendance by delivering a high standard of performance in a relaxed and informal setting.

We are very grateful to Director Brian Crowley and the staff at St. Enda's for welcoming and facilitating us and our talented young players, parents and friends.



The Pearse Museum, St. Enda's

## Regular Events with Cairde Na Cruite

**Christmas Concert:** Held annually on the first Sunday in December. The 2014 event will be held on Sunday 7th December, 3pm in Foras na Gaeilge, Merrion Square, Dublin 2. All are welcome! This very special concert is in memory of Mercedes Garvey, an inspirational teacher and performer, and founder member of Cairde na Cruite.

**Spring Concert:** Held annually each Spring at the Pearse Museum in St. Enda's, Rathfarnham. The 2015 dates will be published on cairdenacruite.com in the New Year.

**An Chúirt Chruitireachta:** International harp festival that takes place annually in An Grianán, Termonfechin, County Louth, from the last Sunday in June to the first Friday in July. The 2015 event will take place from Sunday 28th June to Friday 3rd July 2015.



Mercedes Garvey

# News and Events

## Gráinne Hambly & William Jackson



Warmest congratulations to Gráinne Hambly and William Jackson on the birth of their son Liam Mícheál Jackson on Thursday October 2nd 2014!

Photo left: William and Gráinne in concert at Cairde na Cruite's annual international harp festival *An Chúirt Chruitireachta*, County Louth, 1st July 2014.

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## Ann Jones Walsh

Cairde na Cruite would like to thank Ann Jones Walsh for her long-valued and active involvement in the society over the years. In Ann's words: "Having served on the committee of Cairde na Cruite for the last 40 years I am proud to have been associated with the events that we promoted. I myself edited the newsletter for over ten years, was membership secretary at a time when we had approximately 120 registered members who were hand written to twice a year! We organised a number of master classes and promoted harp concerts.

I think that we achieved a position for the harp in this country that is well respected and is acknowledged as a dignified and deserving national symbol. The standard of playing is now at international level and I am confident that our younger members will maintain this achievement."

## Harp Hire

Cairde na Cruite's harp-hire scheme enables aspiring harpers to borrow a harp for a trial period of 6 months up to a maximum of one year. The society currently has six harps out on hire. If you are interested in hiring one of these harps, please contact our harp hire co-ordinator.

**Harp Hire Co-ordinator:** Caitríona Rowsome **Email:** [info@cairdenacruite.com](mailto:info@cairdenacruite.com) **Phone:** 01 6586224

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## Feis Ceoil 2015



The Feis Ceoil runs from 16th to 27th March 2015.

Details of the many harp competitions, syllabus, prize funds and closing dates can be found online at [www.feisceoil.ie](http://www.feisceoil.ie).

# Royal Irish Academy of Music

Did you know that Local Centre Exams include ensemble harp grades? Check out the syllabus at [www.riam.ie](http://www.riam.ie)

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## Meath County Council present the work of Mary Lavin

During the months of September and December actor Nuala Hayes, artist Gillian Gott and Anne-Marie O'Farrell collaborate to present workshops for children featuring the stories of Meath writer Mary Lavin. Drawing on 'The Second Best Children in the World' and 'A Likely Story', this was a chance for primary school children to devise their own stories, and illustrate them with sound and art, inspired by the work of Mary Lavin. Public performances by Nuala and Anne-Marie of Mary Lavin's work for adults have also been presented in libraries across County Meath as part of this project. The next event which is open to the public in this series is on Thursday 11th December at 3pm in Julianstown Library, Co. Meath.

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### *The White Christmas Tour*

Irish Classical Crossover sensation, Affinití, will perform their White Christmas Show with **Howard Crosby**, nephew of the legendary **Bing Crosby**, at the Round Room, Mansion House, Dublin, for one night only on Tuesday 16th December 2014.

Affinití, the lovechild of classical music and rock with a touch of Celtic blood have teamed up with Bing Crosby's nephew, Howard, who was lucky enough to inherit the golden voice as well as the name, to create the quintessential Christmas experience – *The White Christmas Tour*. Beginning on 2nd December in Chicago, USA and finishing in the Round Room at the Mansion House Dublin on Tuesday 16th December. The show will feature music made famous by Sarah Brightman and Pavarotti; Glen Hansard and Adele and of course the Father of White Christmas himself, Bing Crosby!

The Round Room at the Mansion House will be transformed into a Winter Wonderland for the evening concert with intimate tables and full bar service. Tickets are available from [www.entertainment.ie](http://www.entertainment.ie)

# Muckross Harp Festival

## Harps ‘on the move’ at the Muckross Harp Trail Ar Shlí na Cruite

In planning the Muckross Harp Festival, Ar Shlí na Cruite, nobody anticipated that most of Kerry would be travelling to Dublin to cheer on the home county which competed in and subsequently won the All Ireland football championships at the end of September last. While some of its harpers had conflicting interests and tore themselves reluctantly away from the harping festivities, the Muckross Harp Festival, Ar Shlí na Cruite, stood its ground and more than 30 harpers gathered in the beautiful environs of Muckross House and Traditional Farms for a third year to celebrate the harp in Kerry. Established in 2011 with the support of the Trustees of Muckross House and the then Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, Kerryman Jimmy Deenihan TD, who has a great interest in the revival of the Kerry harp tradition, Ar Shlí na Cruite is a festival with a difference.



**Michelle Mulcahy with students at the Muckross Harp Festival**

Harp classes, workshops and concerts combined with a harp trail, where harpers in true troubadour style took their harps on their backs and departed to all corners of Muckross, where they held a series of harp sessions for visitors to the house and farm. The reconstructed thatched cottages on the farm were a particular attraction, and while the Kerry team were cheered on to victory in Croke Park, visitors to the cottages enjoyed the spectacle and sound of harps of all sizes sitting beside the open turf fires with the homely smell of soda bread baking on the griddle in the style of bygone days. As well as listening to tunes from the harpers, visitors tried their hands on the harps and some of the harpers acting as *bean a' tí* added to the fun with a song and a dance of their own.

Festival participants were ably guided by festival tutors Janet Harbison, Deirdre Granville, Kathleen Loughnane, Michelle Mulcahy and Marina Cassidy in a series of classes and workshops covering all aspect of harp playing from dance music to the harping tradition to singing with the harp. All came together at the end of the first day to entertain an enthusiastic audience in the recently constructed purpose-built Muckross school house venue.

Two highlights dominated the festival. We were treated to an intimate night of music and song in Muckross Schoolhouse by Grammy award winner, Clannad's Moya Brennan and harper Cormac De Barra where Moya's beguiling voice and Cormac's mastery of the Irish harp, as well as his captivating rendition of a Suantraí learned from his grandmother Róisín Ní Shé, combined beautifully to give us a memorable evening.



**Aibhlín McCrann with students at the Muckross Harp Festival**

This was followed on Sunday morning by an equally memorable and reflective lecture recital, *When Wales meets Kerry: The life and times of Joan Francis Denny*, one of the Tralee Denny family, presented by Copenhagen based harpist Helen Davies, who gave us a fascinating account of Miss Denny (1849-1926), who had studied with Welsh pedal harpist John Thomas, harpist to Queen Victoria, who had visited Muckross House. In a meticulously researched lecture, Helen tracked Francis from her childhood in Tralee through her teen years to London, where she studied with John Thomas and subsequently became his second wife. Helen added some

authentic flavour to her recital by performing on an original Gothic Erard pedal harp, not unlike what Francis might have played.

There are always the unseen supporters working hard behind the scenes of any successful festival. Everybody participating agreed that it could not have happened were it not for the help of Toddy Doyle, manager of Muckross House and Traditional Farms and his staff, whose loyalties were divided on this particular weekend and whose hearts were really in Croke Park. They stayed at home from the match and supported us with true grace and generosity; allowing the harp and harpers to dominate a football-filled weekend.

Go mbeirimid beo ar an am seo arís!

*Aibhlín McCrann*



MUCKROSS HOUSE

# Willie Clancy Week, Milltown Malbay



We had a delightful harp week in Milltown Malbay, in this our 7th year as part of the Willie Clancy summer school. The inclusion of the Irish Harp at the Willie Clancy summer school has affirmed the position of the Irish Harp in the heart of our traditional music culture.

Our classes take place in the morning leaving our students free to avail of the great diversity of music, lectures and recitals that are a central part of the Willie Clancy week. Our teachers this year were Gráinne Hambley, Cormac De Barra, Laoise Kelly, Máire Ní Chathasaigh and myself. I greatly appreciated having such a talented and committed team who gave generously of their skills and experience.

Our annual Harp concert on the Monday evening attracted a full and appreciative house. All the teachers performed, reflecting the diversity of arrangement and interpretation in harping today. In addition, we had the surprise and welcome visit of Janet Harbison who was prevailed upon to play a few tunes. Maeve Gilchrist from Edinburgh visiting the Willie Clancy school for the first time also delighted students and visitors with a short performance and she gave workshops to the more advanced students, the following day. Paul Dooley, very much part of our harp programme each year gave a focused workshop on the wire strung harp. The week offers a wonderful opportunity for harpers to interact with each other and with the wider group of traditional musicians.

Throughout the week there is ample opportunity for conversation, tunes, and a sense of carnival and celebration. Harry Hughes the director of the school and his staff have a remarkably calm and positive way of dealing with the major complexity of running such a large summer school and each year all are welcomed and facilitated with grace, charm and that quiet low key inimitable Clare way. I look forward to taking the winding back roads to Milltown again next year.

*Kathleen Loughnane*

## New CDs & Publications – the perfect Christmas gift!



### *Duopoly*

Album by Cormac De Barra & Anne-Marie O'Farrell

This latest release from harp duo Cormac De Barra and Anne-Marie O'Farrell showcases the best of the Irish harp. It features newly composed traditional tunes by Anne-Marie O'Farrell, lively duetting on both gut and wire strung harps, in addition to the songs in Irish, *An Fhallaingín Mbuimbneach* and the ever popular work-song, *Ambrán na Cuiginne*. The central role of Turlough O'Carolan in the canon of Irish harp repertoire is honoured here too, with an arrangement for musical quizzers of Carolan's *Sir Festus Burke* concealing no fewer than five other Carolan tunes, alongside the pairing of *Charles O'Connor* and the graceful *Lord Inchiquin* for wire strung harp duet. Solos include the beautiful famine air, Johnny Seoige played by Cormac, while Anne-Marie plays her new pedal harp arrangement of Isaac Albeniz' classic, *Asturias*.

Available from [www.claddaghrecords.com](http://www.claddaghrecords.com) and [www.annemarieofarrell.com](http://www.annemarieofarrell.com)

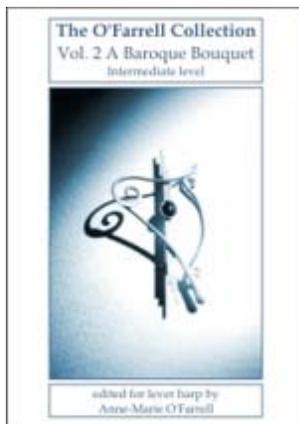


### *The Gift of Music*

Album by Affinití

Affinití's first full Christmas album 'The Gift of Music' is now available for pre order. It features original arrangements of Christmas classics such as 'Walking in the Air', O Holy Night, Have yourself a Merry Little Christmas, The Wexford Carol and a very special duet of 'White Christmas' with none other than Bing Crosby's nephew Howard Crosby.

Available from [www.affinitimusic.com](http://www.affinitimusic.com)



### *The O'Farrell Collection Volume 2:*

#### *A Baroque Bouquet*

Irish Harp (lever) sheet music by Anne-Marie O'Farrell

This volume is aimed at intermediate players, and every piece includes some lever changes to acclimatise the intermediate player for more advanced repertoire at a later stage. It includes the well-loved Prelude no. I in C by J.S Bach, along with a number of other pieces from the Anna Magdalena Notebook, including some by C.P.E. Bach.

Available at [www.annemarieofarrell.com](http://www.annemarieofarrell.com) and [www.creightonscollection.com](http://www.creightonscollection.com)



*Bí a Iosa im' Chroíse*

*Don Oíche Úd i mBeithil*

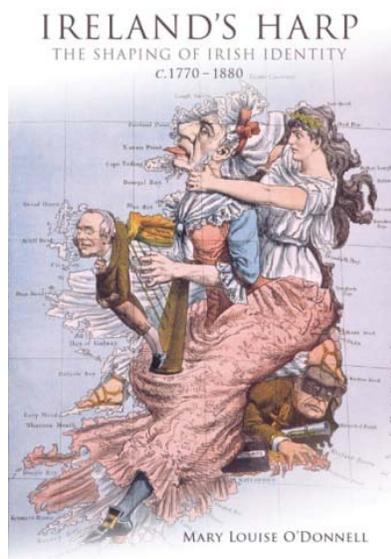
*An Raibh Tú ag an gCarraig?*

*The Knappogue Medley*

Irish Harp (lever) sheet music by Anne-Marie O'Farrell

Assortment of airs published recently. Includes a new edition of *The Knappogue Medley* with of a choice of more accessible keys than previously available.

Available at [www.annemarieofarrell.com](http://www.annemarieofarrell.com) and [www.creightoncollection.com](http://www.creightoncollection.com)



*Ireland's Harp: the shaping of Irish Identity c.1770-1880*

Book by Mary Louise O'Donnell

The image of the harp – symbolic of the political and cultural landscape of Ireland for centuries – evokes strong sentiments in the collective Irish imagination. This iconic instrument became the emblem on Irish coinage in the sixteenth century. Since then it has been symbolic of Irish culture, music, and politics – finally evolving into a significant marker of national identity in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. One of the most important periods in this evolution was between 1770 and 1880. In these years, the instrument became central to many utopian visions of an autonomous Irish nation and eventually the harp's metaphoric significance eclipsed its musical one. Mary Louise O'Donnell uses these fascinating years of major social, political, and cultural change as the focus of her study on the Irish harp. From the revolutionary symbolism of the harp to the cultural curiosities that were the blind Irish harpers, the many permutations of Ireland's harp are thoroughly examined. Mary Louise also discusses how the protection and patronage of the Irish harpers passed from the aristocratic Gaelic order to the Ascendancy and finally, to the affluent middle classes in Dublin and Belfast. *Ireland's Harp* brings to light the monumental importance of this instrument by highlighting the central place the harp occupied in the formation and expression of Ireland's cultural and national identity.

Available from bookshops and online at [www.ucdpress.ie](http://www.ucdpress.ie)

Alternatively contact Noelle Moran at [ucdpress@ucd.ie](mailto:ucdpress@ucd.ie)

# Arfavita Harp Festival in Russia

Recently I played and taught at the annual Arfavita harp festival in Moscow. It was especially heartening to witness the growing connections between the harpists in Ireland and Russia, since a number of people involved in organising the Arfavita festival have participated in An Chúirt Cruitireachta in Termonfeckin. I also had the opportunity to visit a specialist music school for children, and to meet some of Moscow's harp teachers. Keenly aware of their wealth of tradition in classical and orchestral harp music, they're also interested in expanding performance repertoire on the lever harp, particularly in solo and chamber settings.

I was very struck by the warmth of the welcome I received in marked contrast to the unbearably cold temperatures outdoors! During the festival, a charming moment was when I unexpectedly heard two children perform an arrangement I wrote a long time ago, and which I've never heard played, of *Céad Moladh le Muire Beannaithe*.

A translator was on hand for my workshop and concert introductions, for which I was very grateful, since, when I introduced that I was dedicating my recital to the memory of Mercedes Garvey for her first anniversary, a quietness settled over the audience as I explained that she was one of the founders of An Chúirt Cruitireachta, a festival which some members of the audience had experienced for themselves. The performance was also of personal significance to me because I undertook to play Bach's Chromatic Fantasy in D minor on a Camac mechanism for the first time. With almost sixty lever changes in the last five bars this piece is a marvellous test for any lever mechanism as well as being such remarkable music.

Following the festival itself, we were treated to a tour of the Bolshoi Theatre. Many years ago when I queued for hours as an eighteen-year-old at the RDS to see the Bolshoi Ballet dance in Dublin, I never dreamed I would one day visit their home theatre in Moscow. Particularly striking was the rehearsal area at the top of the building, featuring an exact replica of stage and pit, so that all the performers, musicians and dancers alike, can acclimatise themselves to the conditions without competing with set designers and carpenters on the real stage. In the replica pit, as in the real one, there were each two beautiful gold harps, uncovered, just waiting for an arpeggio.

Imagine the surprise of our tour guide, when each of us, one by one, quietly approached one of the harps and played a motif. 'Sorry, but is every one of you a harpist?' she asked as her eyes got wider and wider.... 'Da!' we replied. Yes!

*Anne-Marie O'Farrell*



**Russian Committee of Arfavita Festival from left to right: Julia Sorokina, Nataliya Shestakova, Anna Shentyabina, Annie Chambers, (festival performer Anne-Marie O'Farrell), Katarina Moskovskova, Olga Patsuk and Nikita Leonenko**

# World Harp Congress 2014

It is my pleasure and privilege to congratulate the Harpists from Ireland, who took part in the Twelfth World Harp Congress in Sydney, Australia. Your participation in this important international event brings honour to our country. Beannachtaí libh go léir!

Sheila Larchet Cuthbert  
*Uachtarán Charide na Cruite*



## Lecture on John Egan at the WHC

Mary Louise O'Donnell presented some of her research on John Egan, the harp maker, at the World Harp Congress in Sydney in July, 2014. The lecture titled, 'Invention and Innovation - John Egan's Transformation of the Non-pedal Harp' focused on his career as a pedal/Irish harp maker and his rise from relative obscurity to become portable Irish harp maker to George IV and the British royal family.

## *The Chronicles of Meath* at the WHC



Vincent Kennedy with the Meath Harp Ensemble

Cairde na Cruite were delighted to preview a performance of Vincent Kennedy's work *The Chronicles of Meath* at its International Harp Festival in An Grianán, Termonfechin, County Louth on July 1st this year. A mere three weeks later it debuted at The World Harp Congress in Canberra, Australia.

The work was commissioned by Meath County Council, funded by the Department of Environment, Community & Local Government under the Per Cent for Art Scheme. *The Chronicles of Meath* was written for the Meath Harp Ensemble, comprising eight Irish harps and one concert harp led by Dearbhail Finnegan.

The work entitled '*The Chronicles of Meath*' is in seven movements. Each of the movements is inspired by a place or facet of County Meath's rich heritage and history and includes titles such as: *Newgrange*, *The Hill of Tara – The Hill of Slane*, *The Book of Kells*, *O'Carolan's Arrival*, *Lament at the Boyne*, an arrangement of *O'Carolan's Concerto*, and, *Have you ever been to Nobber in the County of Meath?*

# Clare Memory Orchestra



Anne-Marie O'Farrell and Rachel Duffy in St. Flannan's



Harp Section, Clare Memory Orchestra, Killaloe

The activity of the Clare Memory Orchestra continues apace, and a recent performance in St Flannan's Cathedral in Killaloe featured a six-piece harp section. Section leader Anne-Marie O'Farrell was joined by Gloria Birardi, Siobhan Buckley, Rachel Duffy, Gráinne Meyer and Tara Viscardi. This is an orchestra which performs the music of Dave Flynn, incorporating stylistic elements from our oral music traditional but also requiring classical techniques of its players. The word 'memory' in the orchestra's name is not only because this group memorises all its material, but also because it cherishes the remembering of our musical heritage. [www.clarememoryorchestra.com](http://www.clarememoryorchestra.com)

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## New works for harp

Anne-Marie O'Farrell's appointment as AEPE Composer in Residence at Mary Immaculate College, Limerick has brought about a number of new works which include use of the harp, both Irish and pedal. This composition residency is with the Department of Arts Education and Physical Education in association with the Lime Tree Theatre and funded by the Arts Council/An Chomhairle Ealaíon. Limerick harpist Eimear Coughlan, together with accordionist John Carroll and Rebecca McCarthy Kent on fiddle performed the premiere of *Máirseáil Luimní* and *The Cap and Gown* at the MIC graduation ceremony on 24th October. On Tuesday 16th December at MIC Chapel the MIC Community Choir conducted by Paul Collins will premiere *Eden's Joy* for mixed choir and harp, and a chamber work for flute, oboe and harp, *Aisling na Nollag* will receive its first performance in the same concert by oboist Etaoin McCooey and flautist Deirdre O'Flynn, joined by Anne-Marie on harp. These two works will also be performed on Thursday 18th December in Limerick's Redemptorist Church at 7.30pm. Further premieres in 2015 include a performance of Anne-Marie's song cycle *Pomes Penyeach* for soprano, harp and string quartet, when she will be joined by the RTÉ Con Tempo String quartet and soprano Colette Delahunty for a lunchtime concert on 24th February at 1.10pm in Limerick's Lime Tree Theatre. This is the first time that this set of Joyce poems has been wrought into a song cycle by a single composer.



Eimear Coughlan

# Research Update

The increase in popularity of the Irish Harp has been mirrored by a corresponding increase in the quantity and quality of academic publications and research on many aspects of the history and development of the instrument. Many of our members and friends are actively engaged in research and are happy to share the results of their work with the wider harping community. *An Cruitire* provides an ideal forum for sharing such material and we would welcome contributions in the form of abstracts, summaries or on-line PDF documents.

In this edition, Teresa O'Donnell draws attention to her article:

'Gráinne Yeats: A modern-day bard remembered', *American Harp Journal* 24, no. 3, (Summer 2014): 15-21.

## **Article summary:**

On April 18, 2013, the harping world bid farewell to Gráinne Yeats, the renowned Irish harper, singer, pedagogue, arranger, Irish language enthusiast and historian. From the 1950s onwards, Yeats played an important role in the revival and promotion of the Irish harp, in particular, the wire-strung Irish harp. Her tireless devotion and admirable advocacy contributed to a transformation of the harping tradition in Ireland and her influence is evident in harping initiatives such as, Cairde na Cruite (Friends of the Harp) and its annual international harp festival, An Chúirt Chruitireachta.

In this article, I evaluate Yeats' contribution to the Irish harp tradition by examining four main areas, namely, the performance of voice to harp accompaniment, the commissioning and premièring of numerous compositions by contemporary composers, the revival of the wire-strung harp and, finally, her research into the history and performance practise of the wire-strung harp with particular focus on the harpers at the Belfast Harp Festival of 1792 and recording of their music.



# Owen Lloyd, Irish Harpist

Indeed following on from Cairde na Cruite's 2013 newsletter, which included research details of Mary Louise O'Donnell's article, 'Owen Lloyd and the De-Anglicization of the Irish Harp', Éire-Ireland Vol. 48, Nos 3&4 (Fall/Winter 2013): 155-175, the Editorial Committee was delighted to be contacted by a descendant of harpist Owen Lloyd. Owen was a central figure who breathed new life into Irish harp performance and patronage in the 1890s through the cultural infrastructure of the Gaelic League. The correspondence went as follows:



Owen Lloyd  
(photo courtesy John Kinsella)

Date: Sun, Dec 29, 2013

Dear Sir,

Please find attached a newspaper article on Owen Lloyd Harpist. He was one of the few people who were involved in the revival of the Harp in Irish music. I have some more info on him - Concert info. and recitals etc. if you are interested. He was a founder member of the "Feis Ceol" in Ireland. His harps are currently in the National Museum of Ireland. He also taught music at St Enda's with Patrick and Willie Pearse. He is one of my ancestors.

Kind Regards

John Kinsella  
Donegal

The newspaper article to which Mr. Kinsella refers is included here and begins as follows:

## Irish Master of the Harp

Here is the story of an Irishman who, but for his modesty, would have made world fame. He was a genius of the harp, but it was not until his 27th year that he ventured a public performance.

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From an artist of Herr Sjoden's great reputation as a harpist such a recommendation of an absolutely unknown player was startling.

But the great Swedish master spoke with authority, and history was to prove that when he spoke these words of his pupil, Owen Lloyd, he was merely anticipating the verdict of musical Dublin.

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### **First Appearance**

It was typical of Lloyd's conscientiousness as an artist that this was his first public appearance. From childhood he had devoted his life to the study of the harp. At the age of twelve he was practising from eight to ten hours per day. He had been successively the pupil of Aptemina, the renowned Welsh master, and of Herr Sjoden, but

it was not until his twenty-seventh year that he ventured a public appearance.

His rendering of Oberthur's "Fantasia" on Bohemian airs on this occasion was received with enthusiastic applause, and the foundation of his fame was laid. From this time forward he devoted his life to a profound study of Irish music, particularly the rhapsodies of O'Carolan and other noted harpists. He collected and studied old Irish airs, arranged them for the harp where necessary, and interpreted it on the harp in a manner unrivalled since the days of O'Carolan. He became a prominent name in the music-

ment for the revival of Irish music and Irish culture generally, and his concerts throughout the country drew ever-increasing crowds.

### **Wrote Music**

He was not only a magnificent solo harpist, but also played and wrote harp accompaniments, which were in great demand among the vocalists of the day. He also won fame as a teacher, and many of the most famous harpists of the day were his pupils.

On the foundation of the Gaelic League in 1893 he organized classes in two branches in which he taught the harp himself. Three years later Owen Lloyd was appointed harpist to Lord Aberdeen, then Viceroy. In the following year when the Oireachtas, the Festival of the Gaelic League, was founded, Lloyd composed a special Harp Fantasia for the first concert. For the second he introduced a band of harps. In 1902 he was prominent in the formation of the Oireachtas choir, and he also played his part in the establishment of the Feis Ceoil, at which so many of his pupils won prizes.

### **Curious Coincidence**

There is a curious and pathetic coincidence about his last public appearance. It was on the occasion of the Celtic Congress in Dublin in 1925. Lloyd was now in his 73rd year, but his great fame as a harpist made all the delegates anxious to hear him.

On July 7 he played superbly for three in University College and on the following night was to play at a concert of Celtic music in the Grand Room of the Mansion House. When at the Mansion House he unlocked the case and began to undo the cover of his harp he discovered that the base of the harmonic curve had been fractured in transit. The harp could never be used again. Lloyd was inconsolable. He came to the platform hardly able to utter his grief, for in addition to the ruin of his beloved instrument, it was the first time in his long career on which he had failed to fulfil his contract.

This was his last public appearance. He



**OWEN LLOYD**

retired afterwards to his quiet home at Mentone, Killiney, where he died on March 21, 1929.

### **A Pen Picture**

The following pen picture of him by one of his friends will evoke fond memories in many music lovers in Dublin.

"How vividly I recall the slightly bending, slim figure of Owen Lloyd as he came upon the platform to play. He was some what sunk in stature, and wore a thin beard, and gentle piercing eyes, and always dressed in a dark long frockcoat. After making his bow he took a key from his waistcoat pocket and tuned his instrument most carefully.

"Then he sat down and drawing the harp to his shoulder drew his hands across the strings in a rhythmic cadence so sweetly exquisite as to remind one of gentle wind passing over a field of ripening corn. Beautiful airs then resounded, falling upon each other in perfect order and at last his own—and the people's—best loved one, Brian Boru's March played with a realism that once heard might never again be forgotten."

That was Owen Lloyd, the master harpist, who in his life did so much to re-awake the harp to popularity, and will be some of the best of the traditional music of Ireland.

# Caoine Phiaruis Feirtéara

Recently, I spent some time researching Irish castles in a quest to find connections between Irish castles / castle owners and Irish airs or songs. The following gives an overview of my findings on a possible connection between a castle in Corca Dhuibhne once home to a legendary Irish leader, poet and harper, and an air collected by James Cannon Goodman (1828–1896).



Remains of Ferriter's castle, middle right

Ferriter's Castle was the homestead of Piaras Feiritéar (Pierce Ferriter) (c. 1600-1653), lord of Baile an Fheirtéaraigh (Ballyferriter) in Corca Dhuibhne, county Kerry. His castle, now in ruins by a gale in 1845, lies in Baile Uachtarach Thiar. It stands proud and defiant in a solitary headland to the west of Smerwick harbour, under the watchful eye of Binn Dá Rí.

Feiritéar was leader of and hero to the Catholic Irish, renowned for his intellect, his bardic poetry and his masterful harp playing. He is a prominent figure in West-Kerry folklore, having armed and led local citizens to hold out against the English Crown. He was married with two sons and a daughter,

and served as an officer of war from 1641 – 1652.

Grattan Flood in *A History of Irish Music*, 1905, pp.197-98, writes: 'One of the most renowned harpers in 1650 was Pierce Ferriter, of Ferriter's Castle, county Kerry, whose fame is not confined to tradition. We read that he was presented with a beautiful harp by Edmond Mac an Daill (son of Donnell Mac an Daill), of Moylurg, county Roscommon, on which occasion he wrote an Irish poem of twenty-six stanzas'. Flood also includes a footnote that reads: 'The poem on the harp is particularly interesting, as giving the Irish names for the *corr* (harmonic curve or crosstree), the *lámcraon* (front pillar), and the *com*, or soundboard, of the harp given to Ferriter by Mac an Daill. It was designed by MacSithduill, made by Cathal, bound and emblazoned by Bennglan, and decorated with gold by Parthalon *mor* MacCathail.'

My quest led me to an air titled 'Caoine Phiaruis Feirtéara (*Piers Ferriter's Lament for his wife and children*)', one of an extensive collection of tunes played by the Munster pipers and collected by James Cannon Goodman. Goodman, a musician and native of Ventry, county Kerry, was very much admired and respected by the locality. He studied at Trinity College Dublin from the age of 19 and was ordained curate of the Church of Ireland four years later. He held various parish posts in West Cork and played the flute and a Taylor set of uilleann pipes. Goodman began collecting Irish music and song from the oral tradition of Munster and amassed a collection of over 2000 tunes (including 80 song-texts) now housed in manuscript form in the library of Trinity College Dublin. 500 of these tunes were published by the Irish Traditional Music Archive (ITMA) in 1998 in *Tunes of the Munster Pipers, Volume 1*, ed. H. Shields. *Volume 2* of the same title, ed. H. & L. Shields was published by the ITMA in 2013. The tune in question is a slow air, played freely, and begins as follows:



Not alone was Feiritéar a leader and master harper, but his Irish poetry is celebrated for its beauty, its intricacy and themes of emotion, politics and war. In 1653, Piaras Feiritéar was brought to Ross Castle in Killarney under an assurance of safety from Cromwell's forces. However he was captured and imprisoned in violation of that promise. On October 15th, 1653, he was hanged by Cromwell's army in Killarney for his allegiance against the English forces.

The four lines of Irish that follow were often recounted to me by my mother, a native of Corca Dhuibhne. They survive to this day in local memory as a prayer from the voice of Piaras Feiritéar as he sought shelter from the *nambad* (the foe) in Ferriter's Cove.

A Dhia atá thuas nach trua leat mise mar atáim  
Im' chaonaí uaigneach is nach mór go bhfeicim an lá  
An braon atá thuas in uachtar lice go hard  
Ag titeam im' chluais is fuaim na toinne lem' sháil.

The Irish words describe his plight as he can barely see the light of day, with the water from the rock above dripping in his ear and the sound of the waves at his heel.



*Caitríona Rowsome*

## KEEPING IN TOUCH

We hope you enjoy the many and varied contributions in this first edition of Cairde na Cruite's new newsletter *An Cruitire*. We would be delighted to receive photos, articles, notices and reviews from all our members and friends for inclusion in future issues. We're also on Facebook /CairdeNaCruite and would encourage everyone to visit our website [www.cairdenacruite.com](http://www.cairdenacruite.com) where you'll find news of forthcoming events, photos, new releases, publications and updates on our activities.

Finally, we wish all our members and their families and friends a very happy Christmas and New Year.  
*Nollaig Shona agus Athbhliain faoi mhaise dhaoibh go léir!*

With best wishes,

The Editorial Committee, *An Cruitire*

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