

Why do a harp exam?

Well why not? All of the different colleges and institutions which offer performance exams have well-structured exam syllabuses which include the playing of pieces, studies and exercises, scales and arpeggios, sight reading, musical knowledge, aural and improvisation, though not all are offered by all the schools, and not all of these aspects are expected to be performed in any one exam!

Performance exams are offered by the following institutions. Anyone can be examined by these music boards, but you may need to check out how and where you get examined as only Trinity and ABRSM examine in NZ.

Australian Music Examinations Board (examiners don't come to NZ to examine anymore, but there is the potential for finding a way to be examined via Skype)

Associated Board of Royal Schools of Music (UK based, but they have a firm foothold in the music system in NZ) New Syllabus in 2015 (minor changes) lever and pedal harp.

Irish Harp Centre - this is a very traditional series of examinations preceded by intensive training by developer Janet Harbison.

Royal Irish Academy of Music - Preliminary to Grade 8 lever and pedal harp, with the early grade syllabuses primarily made up of traditional Irish tunes.

Royal Conservatoire of Scottish Music - Traditional and contemporary Scottish syllabus (Based in Glasgow, Scotland and again examiners don't come to NZ to examine but they will consider examination via Skype) Completely new syllabus issued in 2015, grades 1-5, lever harp only.

Royal Conservatory of Music (Canada) syllabus available online, Grades 2,4,6,8,9 and 10 Lever and pedal harp

Trinity College, London (also UK based with a firm foothold in the NZ music system). New syllabus in 2016 (many new additions to the syllabus) from initial grade (pre grade one) to grade 8+ available on lever and pedal harp.

What are the benefits of preparing for, and sitting an performance exam?

+Preparation - you know exactly what is involved at each level - there will be no sudden surprises..... The examiner will not ask you to dance a jig or describe the structure of a sonata..... Unless it is specifically included in the syllabus at that grade.

+Goal setting - what better way to achieve a goal than have a performance, followed by receiving a feedback report and nice certificate?? In this case, we know from the outset

the month of the exam and then 5 or 6 weeks closer we find out the exact exam date.....
Good signposts for good preparation in advance.

+It never killed anyone else Loads of other music students, of all ages and stages, have successfully prepared for and sat music performance exams and then done the same thing the following year, and the following year..... So it can't be that horrific!!!

+The chance to explore a variety of music. Generally the exam schools ask the student to present a balanced programme of music, indicating for the student to present pieces from different genre, not all classical, or traditional or contemporary.

Some exam pointers (and many of these will relate to exams in all areas of education)

* know your stuff (no, REALLY know your stuff) so that if you get a bit nervous, and wobble, you know where to look on the music, or you know it from memory so you can easily pick it up again. This applies to any performance.

* don't leave anything to chance - prepare to be nervous Expose yourself to performance situations in advance, and see how you react to the pressure.

* don't hate sightreading - we envy those who sightread easily - not just for exam purposes, but they can easily play a piece of music a couple of grades below their playing level (that's the idea that the sightreading in an exam is two grades below that which you are playing at) . So embrace sightreading as a skill that will give you pleasure far beyond exams. And if you are good at it, the sightreading test can be an easy 10 marks towards your overall mark.

Be prepared, don't be surprised....

- if you have a string out of tune, the examiner can ask you to tune it before you continue the exam. Know how to do this before you enter the exam room.

- at the higher levels, the examiner can ask you to stop before the end of your piece (don't panic, the examiners have strict time controls on them, and it doesn't mean you have mucked up!)

- while they set parameters for aspects like musical knowledge and sightreading, they don't always stick to them....this year all my grade 4 harp students have been given sightreading which is in six eight time....that's not in the given parameters.... This was no biggie for them, as they have played in a range of time signatures in their preparation for sightreading.

The examiner has my sympathy how many times have they heard the same pieces played from stunningly musically to abysmally pathetically bad and under rehearsed? Luckily for the harpists of the world, we number in a very, very small percentage of all the instruments heard. And what great self-control the examiner have to not correct, admonish, or show frustration during an exam!!!!

From students and parents

We're learning the music to show the examiner what we are capable of doing. But, beyond that, we're still really learning the music for our own enjoyment.

Mikaele (student)

Lewis Eady

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I find having an achievable yet challenging goal to strive towards helps me keep focused and motivated. Wendy (student)

For Allegra I find that sitting a formal exam pushes her to structure her practice and to secure her pieces and studies a little every day. It also brings practice higher in priority in her daily things to complete list. Dori (parent)

I think it gives the students a goal and something to strive for (ie. passing the exam). If there is no absolute goal and implied urgency to do the practice then there will always be other priorities that will get bumped up the hierarchy in preference (not to say there would not be any practice, but an exam will change the focus). It encourages them to strive for the perfection as someone external will be critiquing their effort.

Bernie (parent)

Harp Retreat Anyone??

In 2009, we ran a very successful harp retreat in Waipu Cove, hosted by a harp family. Now after much encouragement, we are going to run a similar event in May 2016, at Whatipu Lodge, West Auckland.

This retreat will be suitable for harpists of initial grade and above, and all ages. There is accommodation, teaching space, outdoor activities and plenty of nature available.

For more details, or if you would like to be included in this retreat, please get in touch with Anna – harpmad@gmail.com or Shane – harps@heronstudios.co.nz or there will be details online at www.annadunwoodie.co.nz in the next few weeks.

Harp for Sale

Horngacher Empire Style
(but without the gold leaf decoration)
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