

Anna's harping holiday!

The initial reason for my recent overseas trip, was to teach with Danielle Perrett at Benslow Clarsach Course, but it was also a fantastic opportunity to spend a week catching up with Danielle, and then head on to Rome for a family holiday. Danielle and I have been writing a book of 25 pieces of NZ themed harp music together for the last year, and one objective of the trip was to get our heads together over this..... but, there was so much else to do that a quick glance over breakfast on the last morning was all the book got! We've managed to work it from a distance thus far, so will figure the rest in the same way!

Our UK trip started with a quick detour to Pilgrim Harps in Surrey. This was cool - the factory was situated inside a little farmhouse - over several levels, and featuring a tiny showroom at the front. They had an open day a few days early, at which more than 250 people came through and many harpists played under marquees set up in the paddock - very rural, very boutique, and very cool!

The next day I was off to Benslow Music School. The set-up at Benslow Music School is unlike anything we have here in NZ - they host residential courses ... week long or over the weekends, with events and concerts happening all the time. We shared the space with the Celtic Fiddle course, and some pianists. It can host up to 50 residents, and has full catering. There are many small studio spaces, some larger classrooms and common room areas for socialising.

The Clarsach course itself, I was relieved to see, is very much in the same vein as many of the courses we have here in NZ. Not so different from the Auckland based Harp Retreat. The teaching was done in variety of styles, with most students preferring to have the music in front of them. We started off learning in the 'monkey see/monkey do' style of copying phrase by phrase, with fingering hints called out over the playing, and then revert to the sheet music to polish it up. They were a very enthusiastic and entertaining group, and it was easy to get to know them - I truly enjoyed the great company! Some had travelled from as far away as Wales - Benslow has a good name for being an intensive, fun, and fulfilling weekend of all things harp!



And the harps - well Similar amounts of Dusty Strings, Pilgrim harps and Teifi (Wales) harps, with a smattering of lesser known harps. We found ourselves with a bit of extra time on the last afternoon, and had a blind harp sampling - always an interesting exercise - people listen differently when they aren't influenced by their eyes!



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Being involved in this reiterated how important having a musical community is. Giving musicians the chance to catch up (on many different levels) and share information about all things music. Some had been harping for a great many years, one or two were attending after only a few (or no) lessons. This was somewhat challenging, as they all

had needs to meet, at very different levels. But in being together, and finding out that other people are having the same successes and difficulties can be a great relief - particularly, as in the case of Benslow, when the students are all adults.

As in NZ, they face the issue of being a wide spread community, but from my observations, they are all (teachers, performers, and students) happy to travel to the other side of the country (someone came to Benslow from Wales, no-one lived locally - everyone had to travel an hour at least) to attend harp events rather than missing out! In the UK, they are lucky to be offered many different harping experiences, and from the general chat, it sounded like the Benslow harpists made the most of the concerts and workshops that were on offer.

We were also treated to a lunchtime visit from Janet Harbison, now resident in London, while at Benslow. She was keen to come out and meet us, and form a connection with regard to a possible visit to NZ in 2018. Janet came loaded down with all her books and teaching resources, which I unfortunately I was travelling on a budget airline with very limited luggage allowance, so they will be coming back to NZ with a student in the New Year. If anyone is interested in looking at all Janet's materials (and tutor methods) please get in touch.

After Benslow, we had a few more days in Suffolk with Danielle and David. And while there was plenty of touring... There was also plenty of



music. A visit from Paul Lewis, and his lovely wife Sharon (previously of Tauranga) and an afternoon of swapping music, and hearing just about every harp in Danielle's studio, we have all promised to meet up and repeat the event soon! Sharon is a late beginner harpist, and Paul has a long standing relationship with harps and NZ, and has written many NZ themed pedal harp pieces (I have copies of these, which any interested parties can view) and we will feature more about Paul, and his music, in the next journal.

Later that week we were also treated to a post dinner concert from Danielle and soprano Charlotte de Rothschild (who plans to tour NZ next year). Charlotte is particularly fond of Japanese music, and has a wide variety of songs, with interesting stories, and it was lovely to hear how the harp accompanied in different styles. Danielle and Charlotte regularly tour in Japan where they are very well received!

We are eternally grateful to Danielle and David for hosting us, entertaining teenage boys, and the harp mad. For foraging for shaggy ink caps, blackberries, and in antique shops. For the days of wandering at Cambridge (leading us into Kings Chapel in time for evensong (bliss!)) and all around the county to see wonky houses, and extravagant churches!

A few other harp appearances if you know where to look, there are harps in many different places! A harp (and a heck of a lot of lyres and citharas in Italy) a day on our travels!

- There is the magical harp (it's a lovely old Erard) at the Harry Potter Studio tour in Watford, UK. It's a little odd, strung up with no coloured strings, and a base full of wires and bits and bobs, but.... it's a harp!
- The antique shops have little hidden harp treasures - I found a harp horse brass to complete my set of 8 brasses which had been lacking for one for over twenty years! And Danielle found me a lovely Coronation mug, with the Royal family crest, featuring a harp.
- There is a big statue of King David and his golden harp, in the Basilica of Saints Ambrose and Charles ... this happened to be the first place we walked into off the main road on our first day in Rome.
- The South American harpist busking outside the Castel Sant'Angelo We stopped to talk to her the following day, but her Italian and English were very limited gestures were our common ground elbows out, thumbs up and fingers down!

Cithara -at the Gladiator Training School, Rome →



Anna Dunwoodie