

Welsh Legend comes to life at Harpenz



After many years of running our biennial Harp Weekend/Harpenz event, Anna and I decided to change the format: instead of learning several, unrelated orchestral pieces beforehand and ensemble pieces on arrival, this year's participants had just one work to learn, and what a work it was! Anna came up with the concept of setting to music the Welsh legend of Taliesin the bard. After researching the story further and approaching Derek Gordon to edit and narrate the story we set to work composing.

This was the first part of what turned out to be a massive 3-part project. Between us we composed or arranged a total of 15 pieces at four different levels of difficulty. As each work was completed as a solo, it was then arranged for multiple parts reflecting participants' abilities and instrument size.

Once all the compositions were complete there was the compilation of the scores. By far the hardest aspect of this phase was proofing; suffice to say I've learned, when using Sibelius, to be very particular. I was constantly finding performance directions and explanatory notes in the wrong place! Sometimes I'd swear they had a life of their own and jumped all around the page when my back was turned. By the time we'd finished we had 20 individual scores ready to post, and were up to version 7 of the storyboard and version 15 of the conductor's score!

The final phase was the rehearsing and performance at AGC Sunderland College in Auckland during the April school holidays. We scheduled four days

and we definitely needed them all as it was a steep learning curve for all involved. Consider the logistics of coordinating 34 harpists, 1 narrator and 2 conductors – we all knew our parts as individuals but getting it all together was the challenge. Along the way Anna and I discovered mistakes in the score which required thinking “on the fly” and some rearranging of parts and players; at one stage it all got just too hard for me to work out how to make one of my compositions work so we just left it out altogether! The participants were just brilliant at responding to all the changes that had to be made as the whole work slowly came together. Fortunately we all survived and by the time our videographer arrived on Saturday morning it was sounding great. Filming went very smoothly – we qualify for a “one-take” award – and the performance on Saturday afternoon for friends and family was equally polished and well received.



On a personal note it was an incredibly moving experience for me to hear my compositions, which started as ideas in my head (and I have to admit here to really struggling with composition – it doesn't come easily to me),



come alive through the endeavours of the players, and I would like to thank them all again for their patience and commitment to the project. Music is definitely a triangular experience: composer, performer and audience; Taliesin gave me the opportunity to be all three and it was an amazing event in my life.

Unfortunately there has been a massive glitch with the DVD, as the videographer has had a computer crash and our film file has been lost. At this stage she is making efforts to retrieve it but we are not too hopeful of the outcome. All is not lost however, as we do have photographs and an audio file, and most importantly of all our memories.

Lisa Williamson