

***Irish Harping: Legacy and Living Traditions
Symposium***

Cruitireacht Éireann: Oidhreacht agus Traidisiúin Bheo

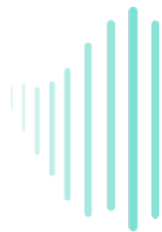
**In association with ICTMD Ireland, Cruit Éireann|Harp Ireland
and the University of Galway
Thursday 25 September 2025, University of Galway**



OLLSCOIL NA GAILLIMHE
UNIVERSITY OF GALWAY



**CITCR ÉIREANN
ICTMD IRELAND**



**Cruit Éireann
Harp Ireland**



Welcome

I would like to welcome you all to the ICTMD Ireland symposium Irish Harping: Legacy and Living Traditions Symposium / Cruitireacht Éireann: Oidhreacht agus Traidisiúin Bheo, an event organised in collaboration with Harp Ireland and the School of English, Media and Creative Arts at the University of Galway. This event is one of four significant gatherings in 2025 that celebrates the 20th anniversary of the formation of the Irish branch of the International Council for the Traditions of Music and Dance.

The Irish branch is one of more than 130 branches internationally dedicated to research and education in traditional arts and dance. The final of these four events, a symposium on Ethnomusicology in Ireland will take place at the Munster Technological University, Cork, on 25 November this year and will feature talks by Dr Aileen Dillane, Professor Thérèse Smith and a keynote by Dr Huib Schippers. Details can be found at www.ictmd.ie/events.

This symposium celebrates Irish harping traditions and practices, and the programme features a diverse selection of academics, performers and composers that represent the rich tapestry of contemporary scholarship and creative practice on the Irish harp.

The symposium keynote takes the form of the Annual Harp Ireland Lecture, which is co-sponsored by ICTMD Ireland. Dr Ann Buckley (Trinity College Dublin) will deliver a lecture titled 'Stringed instruments, contexts and repertory in medieval Ireland: local and international perspectives'.

In conjunction with the symposium and annual lecture, Harp Ireland have curated an evening concert that takes place in Claregalway Castle at 8pm.

A heartfelt thank you to the organising and programme committees (the members of each are listed on the next page) for their dedication and support in making this event happen. I would particularly like to thank Professor Tríona Ní Shíocháin (Head of School of English, Media & Creative Arts, University of Galway), Aibhlín McCrann (CEO of Harp Ireland) and Dr Susan Motherway (Chair of ICTMD Ireland) for their support of this symposium. Special thanks must also go to Marianne Ní Chinnéide, curator of the University of Galway Arts in Action Series, for organising the lunchtime concert with the harper Cormac De Barra.

I also wish to extend a sincere thank you to the symposium sponsors that have made this event possible: the School of English, Media & Creative Arts at the University of Galway, the University of Galway Arts in Action Series, Brendan Mac Suibhne of the IMIRCE Project, Harp Ireland/ Cruit Éireann, and the Irish branch of the International Council for the Traditions of Music and Dance.

Wishing you all a wonderful day!

Dr Ann-Marie Hanlon (Symposium Committee Chair)

Conference Committee

Dr Ann-Marie Hanlon (University of Galway, Symposium Chair)

Aibhlín McCrann (Harp Ireland)

Dr Síle Denvir (DCU)

Catriona Cannon (Harp Ireland, University of Galway)

Professor Máirín Ní Dhonnchadha (University of Galway)

Marianne Ní Chinnéide (University of Galway)

Programme Committee

Dr Ann-Marie Hanlon (University of Galway)

Professor Triona Ní Shíocháin (University of Galway)

Dr Síle Denvir (DCU)

Catriona Cannon (University of Galway)

Dr Helen Lawlor (TU Dublin)

Dr Úna Monaghan (Queen's University Belfast)

Irish Harping: Legacy and Living Traditions Symposium

Cruitireacht Éireann: Oidhreacht agus Traidisiúin Bheo

Symposium Schedule

8:45-9:15 – Registration (Hardiman Building, Foyer)

8:30: Úna Monaghan, Rabhadh Gan Ghníomh / Alarmed and Inactive (2023)

Room G010. Further showing in G010 at 12.30pm.

8:30: Úna Monaghan, The Tools of Surveillance and The Tools of Serenity (2024)

Room G011. Further showings in G011 at 11am & 12.30pm.

All day (Library Foyer): Harp Exhibition curated by Katie Feeney and Catriona Cannon, University of Galway Archives, featuring IMIRCE project.

9.15 - 9.30 - Welcome (Room G010)

Professor Triona Ní Shíocháin (Head of School of English, Media & Creative Arts),
Dr Susan Motherway (Chair ICTMD Ireland) & Aibhlín McCrann (CEO Harp Ireland)

9.30-11: Panel 1a (Room G010)

Harp Pedagogy & Community Building

Chair: Dr Susan Motherway (MTU)

Fiona Gryson (TU Dublin), The fifty-year legacy of *The Irish Harp Book: A Tutor and Companion* by Sheila Larchet Cuthbert

Karen Loomis (The Historical Harp Society of Ireland), Building a harping community internationally through online education

Maria Cleary (Conservatorio di Verona Dall'Abaco, Conservatorio di Vicenza Pedrollo, Haute Ecole de musique Geneve (HES-SO)), The Discovery of the Methode pour la Harpe by Michel Corrette and Newbourg's method as an Irish source (IRL-Da 5B1.5) [online presentation]

9.30-11: Panel 1b (Room G011)

Harping Traditions: Historical and Contemporary Interpretations

Chair: Professor Máirín Ní Dhonnchadha (University of Galway)

Michael Shields (University of Galway), What do 12th-century Irish texts tell us about harps?

Rachel Duffy (TU Dublin), Traditions and Transformations: Harping in Ireland 1960-2005

Lauren O'Neill (Ulster University), Harping with words: Remembering and re-imagining harp music in response to the recitation of Gaelic bardic poetry

11-11.30- Coffee break (Foyer)

11:15 Introduction to IMIRCE project & harp exhibition, Brendan Mac Suibhne (University of Galway) (G1010)

11.30-12.30: Panel 2a (Room G010)

Harping as Storytelling & Poetry

Chair: Professor Triona Ní Shíocháin (University of Galway)

Emily Cullen (University of Limerick), From footnotes to poetic feet: when Irish harp research ‘vibrates in the memory’ to transpose into poetry

Niamh O’Brien (Independent), Irish Harping as Storytelling

11.30-12.30: Panel 2b (Room G011)

Organology, Composition and Pedagogy

Chair: Professor Siobhán Armstrong (Royal College of Music, London; UCD; Historical Harp Society of Ireland)

Clare McCague (Independent), Silent Witness: A Pedal Harp’s Journey from Forgotten Workshop to the Old Asylum

Gráinne Meyer (Queen’s University Belfast), Demystifying the Harp: An Interactive Digital Tool for Composers and Harpists

12.30-13:00 - Lunch (Foyer)

13:00-13.50 – Cormac De Barra (harp), *Arts in Action* Lunchtime Concert, O’Donoghue Theatre

14:00-15:30 - Session 3

Panel 3 Harp Collections & Sources (Room G010)

Chair: Dr Úna Monaghan

Eilís Lavelle (Independent), James Cody: An insight into notations from the nineteenth century

Kathleen Loughnane (Independent), A selection for Harp from the MSS of Patrick O’Neill (1765-1832)

Siobhán Armstrong (Royal College of Music, London; UCD; Historical Harp Society of Ireland), Turlough Carolan (1670–1738): A critical evaluation of sources for the music of Ireland’s iconic harp composer

15:30-16:00 – Coffee Break

15:00-17:30 – Úna Monaghan, *And The Goals Will Come* (2022).

Screenings at 3pm, 3.30pm, 4pm, 4.30pm & 5pm (Rehearsal Room 2, O’Donoghue Centre)

16:00-17:00 – Annual Harp Ireland Lecture, Ann Buckley (TCD), O’Donoghue Theatre

Stringed instruments, contexts and repertory in medieval Ireland: local and international perspectives

17:00-19.30 Dinner Break

19:30 Drinks Reception, Claregalway Castle

20:00-21:15 Concert curated by Harp Ireland, Claregalway Castle

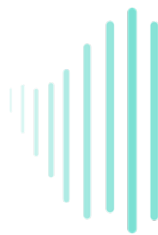
Harps in Castles. An evening of harps, uilleann pipes & storytelling with Kathleen Loughnane, Catriona Cannon, Cormac Cannon & reacaire Máirín Ní Dhonnchadha.

Tickets available via Eventbrite (€20 plus booking fee):

<https://www.eventbrite.ie/e/harps-in-castles-tickets-1667869766369?utm-campaign=social&utm-content=attendeeshare&utm-medium=discovery&utm-term=listing&utm-source=cp&aff=ebdsshcopyurl>

Harp Ireland Annual Lecture

Keynote Speaker: Dr Ann Buckley (Trinity College Dublin)



Cruit Éireann
Harp Ireland

Ann Buckley is a graduate of UCC (B.Mus., MA), the University of Amsterdam (*Doctoraal* in Ethnomusicology), and the University of Cambridge (PhD in Medieval Musicology). Currently a Research Associate of the Medieval History Research Centre, TCD, she has held appointments at UCC, Maynooth, QUB, and the Sorbonne where she was Visiting Professor in Medieval Musicology in 2001–03. Her research interests include music in medieval Ireland, organology, and medieval song in Latin and the vernacular, with particular reference to French sources. She has published widely in all of these areas, as well as being a Member of Editorial Board of *The Encyclopaedia of Music in Ireland* and Subject Editor for the period up to 1600; she is also a contributor to the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. Her current research projects include a survey of liturgical offices for Irish saints in Ireland, Britain and continental Europe, known as the *Amra* project.

Stringed instruments, contexts and repertory in medieval Ireland: local and international perspectives

This lecture will address the role of stringed instruments in medieval Ireland in a variety of performance contexts, both sacred and secular, focussing on the harp and the much neglected lyre. Following an overview of the visual, material and literary evidence, consideration will be given to the types of repertory involved, and the possibilities for engagement in historically informed performance. Much can be gleaned from comparative research in continental Europe, particularly France and Germany, where more sources have survived, including many with music notation.

Lecture open to the public, tickets via Eventbrite:

<https://www.eventbrite.ie/e/stringed-instruments-contexts-and-repertory-in-medieval-ireland-tickets-1705430892709?utm-campaign=social&utm->

[content=attendeeshare&utm-medium=discovery&utm-term=listing&utm-source=cp&aff=ebdsshcopyurl](https://www.eventbrite.ie/e/harping-through-the-generations-tickets-1705158166979?utm-campaign=social&utm-content=attendeeshare&utm-medium=discovery&utm-term=listing&utm-source=cp&aff=ebdsshcopyurl)

Lunchtime Lecture-Recital

Cormac deBarra, Harping Through the Generations, O'Donoghue Theatre, 1-2pm.

Illustrated lecture and concert with third generation harper and scholar, Cormac De Barra. A native of Dublin, Cormac De Barra was raised in an Irish-speaking family of musicians and singers. He is a third generation harper, having first studied Irish harp with his grandmother, Róisín Ní Shé, before going on to study concert harp in the United States. He has performed across the globe both as a solo artist and with many of Ireland's most respected and well-known artists including Clannad, Dervish, Altan, Moya Brennan, Brian Kennedy and Imelda May.

De Barra is currently a PhD candidate at UL researching the culture bearers of the Irish harp revival of the early-mid 20th century. His presentation will include live performance alongside elements of his research on the harp revival as well as his personal perspective and insight on harp performance practice as a touring Irish musician since he began working professionally in 1990.

Lecture open to the public, tickets via Eventbrite:

<https://www.eventbrite.ie/e/harping-through-the-generations-tickets-1705158166979?utm-campaign=social&utm-content=attendeeshare&utm-medium=discovery&utm-term=listing&utm-source=cp&aff=ebdsshcopyurl>

Film Installations by Dr Úna Monaghan (Queen's University Belfast)

Harp, Electronics and Improvisation: Three Collaborative Film Works

1) And The Goals Will Come (2022), 30 mins

Film showings at 3pm, 3.30pm, 4pm, 4.30pm and 5pm, Rehearsal Room 2, O'Donoghue Centre (open to the public, no booking necessary)

2) Rabhadh Gan Ghníomh / Alarmed and Inactive (2023), 65 mins

Film showings at 8.45am & 12.30pm in G010

3) The Tools of Surveillance and The Tools of Serenity (2024) (with Vivienne Griffin) 30 mins

Film showings at 8.45am, 11am & 12.30pm in G011

BIOGRAPHY

Úna Monaghan is a harper, composer, researcher and sound artist. She collaborates and improvises with poets, visual artists, computers, writers, musicians, and others, in performances and residencies internationally. Úna received the inaugural Liam O'Flynn Award in 2019 and held the Rosamund Harding Research Fellowship in Music at Newnham College, University of Cambridge from 2016-2019. She has released two albums of her compositions, most recently *Aonaracht*, for solo traditional musicians and electronics. She is a lecturer in Sound and Music at Queen's University Belfast, where her research examines the intersections between Irish traditional music, experimental music practices, improvisation and interactive technologies.

Programme Notes

1) And The Goals Will Come (2022), 30min

Performances at 3pm, 3.30pm, 4pm, 4.30pm and 5pm, Rehearsal Room 2, O'Donoghue Centre

Úna Monaghan (harp), Éanna Monaghan (bassoon, hurling), Matthew Jacobson (percussion), Jonjo Farrell (hurling)

A piece about hurling.

About the parallels between sport and music.

About exploring the connections between performance in sport and music, and between classical music, traditional music, and free improvisation.

About trying to be several things at once.

And about combining genres and practices.

The work celebrates the artistry of hurlers and musicians, and the creative and technical skill they lovingly develop. The importance of pacing, nerves, rhythm, mindset, technique, excellence, stages, outlook, and risk. The overlap in vocabulary in the disciplines; the training, the sacrifices, and the joy.

Commissioned by IMC and Moving On Music as part of the Ban Bam Award.

2) Rabhadh Gan Ghníomh / Alarmed and Inactive (2023), 65min

Performances at 8.45am & 12.30pm in G010

A multi-media exploration of the theme of climate emergency, through the responses of individual artists. Developed in association with IMRAM Irish-Language Literature Festival 2023

Ceoltóirí / Musicians: Matthew Jacobson (percussion), Úna Monaghan (harp, electronics), Cuan Ó Seireadáin (French horn)
Scríbhneoirí / Writers: Nandi Jola, Nithy Kasa, Ailbhe Ní Ghearbhuigh, Daithí Ó Muirí, Róisín Sheehy
Ealaíontóirí / Artists: Vivienne Griffin (visuals), Nóirín NicAlastair (sculpture)

3) The Tools of Surveillance and The Tools of Serenity (2024), 30min

(with Vivienne Griffin)

Performances at 8.45am, 11am & 12.30pm in G011

This scored and improvised work brings artist Vivienne Griffin together with musician Úna Monaghan for a harp-based, experimental live performance. Griffin has built a device that allows the harp to self play, expanding their practice in experimental score composition and musical dialogue. Monaghan performs with a harp and computer. Together, the duo merge harp, electronic distortion, motors, and the programming software Max MSP to create a sonic exploration of contrasts: melody in tension with noise, and meditative repetition.

Research and development funding from The Irish Arts Council. Originally commissioned by Somerset House Studios, London.

ICTMD IRELAND

20 YEARS OF MUSIC & DANCE SCHOLARSHIP

- Supports research, performance & community practice
- Publisher of Spéis bulletin & Ethnomusicology Ireland journal
- Hosts annual symposiums, networking & collaborative projects



2025: Our 20th Anniversary Symposium
📍 MTU Cork • 📅 21 November 2025
Featuring keynote speaker Huib Schippers

JOIN US & BE PART OF AN INTERNATIONAL
COMMUNITY DEDICATED TO THE STUDY AND
PRACTICE OF TRADITIONAL MUSIC AND DANCE

WWW.ICTMD.IE





As the umbrella organisation for developing and promoting harping in Ireland, we are delighted to be working alongside our colleagues to bring you the latest academic research and thoughts on harping, which has shown unprecedented and exciting growth over the past 60 years.

Cruit Éireann|Harp Ireland (CÉHI) was established in 2017 with the support of An Chomhairle Ealaíon, the Arts Council in response to an identified need for a professional national resource organisation to support the harping sector and develop harping in Ireland. Our artistic policy acknowledges that the harp is an integral part of our national identity, has fully integrated with Irish traditional music and occupies a unique niche in the traditional arts eco-system.

Unprecedented numbers of people in Ireland and farther afield are learning the harp. Designation of harping on the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanities list in 2019 was a source of great pride for us and obliges the Irish Government to safeguard its practice for future generations. Funded by the Arts Council and Heritage Council, CÉHI's core objective is to nurture excellence and creativity among harpers, remove barriers to access and reach new audiences.

We also aim to promote the legacy of the early Irish harp and its repertoire, while supporting professional development opportunities for harpers, with an emphasis on harp pedagogy. We commission and publish new repertoire. We work with Ireland-based harp makers to support indigenous harp-making, collaborate in the development of cross-genre harp-led initiatives and welcome harp-focused academic research relationships at third level.

Our approach is underpinned by mutual respect, access, inclusion, empathy and integrity. We are excited by opportunities to diversify, for example, via our all-island collaboration Harps Alive festival north and south. We also explore cross art-form initiatives, inspiring collaboration between harpers and other artists and facilitating access for diverse audiences.

We have an ambitious vision for harping in Ireland. Our development plan, 2025-2030 outlines our plans for the establishment of an international centre for harping in Dublin – one of the recommendations of Toner Quinn's seminal report on Harping in Ireland,

commissioned by the Arts Council in 2014. We envisage that this harping hub will be a dynamic destination for harpers, Irish people and visitors from all over the world to learn about the Irish harp.

Additionally, it will provide the essential administrative infrastructure required to support the exciting current surge of interest in harping in Ireland, safeguarding our legacy, enabling skills development and creating new performance opportunities for harpers. Above all, it will be a tangible acknowledgement of our national instrument's unique identity and its symbolic significance for Irish people and farther afield.

Is mór an chúis áthais dúinn bheith páirteach sa Chomhdháil seo i lámha a cheile le ICTMD agus Ollscoil na Gaillimhe. Míle buíochas dóibh as ucht a niarrachtaí thar cheann na cuitireachta, agus gach rath ar an obair.

Aibhlín McCrann
Cathaoirleach
Cruit Éireann|Harp Ireland
25 Meán Fomhair 2025

Abstracts & Biographies

Panel 1a Harp Pedagogy & Community Building (Room G010)

The fifty-year legacy of *The Irish Harp Book: A Tutor and Companion* by Sheila Larchet Cuthbert

Fiona Gryson (TU Dublin)

This project centres around the seminal pedagogical resource, *The Irish Harp Book: A Tutor and Companion* by Sheila Larchet Cuthbert, first published in 1975, which informed a particular direction in harp performance and teaching in Ireland that is still vibrant today. Celebrating fifty years, the historical, pedagogical, and analytical perspectives and methods of the project reveal the depth and richness of the book's scope in repertoire and instruction, its wider cultural resonance, and its impact and influence on harp practice in Ireland. The repertoire, technical exercises and studies are analysed and recorded in their entirety for the first time, including works by several of Ireland's leading composers. This comprehensive, digital collection for the Irish harp continues the ethos and legacy of *The Irish Harp Book*. This research deepens the understanding and knowledge of art music pedagogical methods, ideologies, and resources in the context of Irish harping. It also impacts and enriches the living tradition of Ireland's national emblem and instrument. This paper will outline the methodology of and approach to the project, and will discuss key findings.

Biography

A recipient of a Government of Ireland Postgraduate Scholarship awarded by Taighde Éireann – Research Ireland, Fiona Gryson is pursuing PhD research with Prof. Clíona Doris and Dr. Helen Lawlor at TU Dublin Conservatoire. Fiona completed postgraduate studies in harp at Civica Scuola di Musica Claudio Abbado, Milan with Dr. Irina Zingg. She graduated with MMus and BMus degrees and the Nuala Levins Perpetual Award for Pedagogy from the DIT Conservatory of Music and Drama as a student of Denise Kelly-McDonnell. Fiona performs regularly as a freelance harpist, runs a harp studio in County Dublin and co-directs TU Dublin harp ensemble.

Building a harping community internationally through online education

Karen Loomis (The Historical Harp Society of Ireland)

The early Irish harp has experienced a revival in recent decades and is currently enjoyed by musicians across Ireland and around the world. However, its players comprise a relatively small community that is geographically dispersed. Connecting with fellow harpists has often necessitated long-distance travel, isolating those unable to make the journey. Consequently, many have struggled to find a sense of community.

During COVID, the Historical Harp Society of Ireland (HHSI) migrated its annual festival online, with a purpose-built website that enabled interactive participation with artists, tutors, and students from around the world. Building on the success of the online

festival, in 2022 HHSI initiated a programme, Acadamh na gCláirseach–Academy of Early Irish Harp, offering interactive online courses and workshops throughout the year. Since its inception, it has created a welcoming learning environment for harpists of varying skill levels that integrates repertoire, cultural and historical context, and historically informed performance practice. Its international reach has significantly contributed to the global visibility of the early Irish harp, while fostering a vibrant community of learners and practitioners locally, nationally, and internationally. This paper discusses the programme’s methodologies, international reach, sustainability, and outcomes for early Irish harping, particularly with regard to community building amongst harpists and fostering connections and collaboration with musicians from other traditions within Ireland and abroad. By examining its impact, it will also highlight the transformative potential for online education to cultivate engagement with Ireland’s ancient harp in a modern, interconnected world.

Biography

Dr Karen Loomis is an organologist specialising in scientific analysis and study of early Irish harps. Since 2021, she has been Assistant Director of The Historical Harp Society of Ireland (HHSI), after serving on the HHSI governing body from 2016–2020. She helped create, and administrated, the HHSI’s online and hybrid festivals, as well as developing Acadamh na gCláirseach–Academy of Early Irish Harp, its online tuition programme. Karen is also a member of the editorial committee of The Galpin Society Journal. She earned an MMus in musical instrument research and a PhD in music at the University of Edinburgh.

The Discovery of the Methode pour la Harpe by Michel Corrette and Newbourg’s method as an Irish source (IRL-Da 5B1.5)

Maria Cleary (Conservatorio di Verona Dall’Abaco, Conservatorio di Vicenza Pedrollo, Haute Ecole de musique Geneve (HES-SO)) [online presentation]

The first harp methods originate in Paris in the 1760’s, the earliest publication being by the Alsatian harpist Philippe-Jacques Meyer (1737-1819) in 1763. The next methods are written in 1774, one by Meyer and the other being the recently-discovered method by Michel Corrette. These methods are principally written for harps with pedals; they include much practical advice on fingerings, ornamentation and, obviously, directions how to employ the newly-invented pedals.

These pedal exercises appear to be physical or mechanical instructions for altering pitches or modulating, but actually can be clearly placed within a long tradition of treatises on composition, improvisation, counterpoint, harmony and basso continuo. This presentation will firstly review the apparent mechanical exercises in Meyer (1763, 1774), Corrette (1774), Corbelin (1779), Cousineau (1784), and Ragué (1786) and then show their intrinsic musical value when composition was taught on the most modern of instruments of the 18th century: the harpe organisée. The final part of this presentation will show how I use these exercises when teaching composition and improvisation on pedals harps today.

Biography

Born in Ireland, Maria Christina Cleary studied Psychology at Trinity College Dublin and later harp at the Koninklijk Conservatoriums in The Hague and Brussels. She was awarded a PhD, carried out in and through artistic practice from The Academy of Creative and Performing Arts (ACPA), Leiden University, in 2016. The title of her thesis is 'The Harpe Organisée, 1720-1840: Rediscovering the lost pedal techniques on harps with a single-action pedal mechanism', which is the first-ever monograph on harp pedalling techniques. She researches and teaches improvisation, and music interpretation and performance with a historical perspective. She teaches at the Conservatorio E. F. Dall'Abaco Verona, Conservatorio A. Pedrollo Vicenza, and at the Haute Ecole de musique in Geneva, Switzerland. She has taught at the Juilliard School of Music, New York.

Panel 1b Harping Traditions: Historical and Contemporary Interpretations (Room G011)

What do 12th-century Irish texts tell us about harps?

Michael Shields (University of Galway)

Twelfth-century stories and scholarly glosses of older texts preserve a distinctive set of terms describing the construction and use of the instrument, but their meaning and use is unclear in many cases. Here, I focus on the word *céis* which is defined in an important set of glosses and poems (annotations of the much older *Amra Choilm Cille*) designed to explain the word *céis* in the phrase *Is cruít cen ceis, is cell cen abaid* ("it is a monastery without an abbot; a harp without a *céis*", i.e. unfit for purpose).

I will argue that the current definition of the word (eDIL- *Electronic Dictionary of the Irish Language*, s.v. 'céis' "[...] some part of a harp") needs some revision to account for the difference between its use in stories and in music-theoretical and organological contexts, and will consider the terms selected for use in the glosses to refer to strings and stringing (*delg, tét, tromtéd, (?)coblach*), tuning methods (*comaitecht chruite [...] hi comsinn, coblach, céis*), instrument construction (*lethrind, céis*) and contemporary music theory.

Biography

Michael Shields lectured in German at the University of Galway and is now retired. His research interests are in the interdisciplinary fields of medieval German, Romance and Irish literatures and music from the twelfth century on, focussing largely on the cross-cultural intersections between literature, rhetoric and music theory and practice.

Traditions and Transformations: Harping in Ireland 1960-2005

Rachel Duffy (TU Dublin)

This paper interrogates the interplay between tradition and transformation in the twentieth-century revival of the Irish harp. It presents the findings of doctoral research

examining harping in Ireland between 1960 and 2005, during which time the playing style, performance contexts and infrastructure associated with the instrument were reimagined and transformed. While the role of harp and song in the instrument's revival in the mid-twentieth century and the harp's integration into Irish traditional music in the late twentieth century have both received scholarly attention (Lawlor, 2012), an in-depth investigation of the intervening period is lacking.

This research addresses this gap through the exploration of three interrelated areas – how harping in Ireland transformed during this period, the role which individuals and organisations played, and how this transformation interacted with the wider context of music in Ireland. The study is informed by series of semi-structured interviews and extensive archival research and adopts a case study approach. The diverse and multifaceted careers and contributions of five key figures, Derek Bell (1935-2002), Nancy Calthorpe (1914-1998), Mercedes Garvey (1925-2013), Sheila Larchet Cuthbert (1923-) and Gráinne Yeats (1925-2013) provide rich scope for research, enabling a detailed examination of events and outputs through consideration of scores, recordings, broadcasts, publications and press commentary. The significance, impact and legacy of their work is highlighted through a broader examination of the harp landscape which aims to honour their contributions and create a more informed understanding of the instrument's recent past as it enters an unprecedented period of popularity.

Biography

Rachel Duffy is a PhD candidate at TU Dublin. Her research focuses on the twentieth-century transformation of harping in Ireland and is supervised by Professor Clíona Doris. She recently furthered her studies through a Fellowship at Burns Library in Boston College. Rachel is active as a performer and plays the harp with groups including Na Cauci, Triad Harp Trio and the National Folk Orchestra. Recent performance highlights include *Creative Connexions* in Sitges, Spain and the National Concert Hall's *Tradition Now* Festival. She teaches the harp through Comhaltas and Music Generation Wicklow and co-directs *An Chúirt Chruitireachta* international harp festival.

Harping with words: Remembering and re-imagining harp music in response to the recitation of Gaelic bardic poetry

Lauren Ní Néill (Ulster University)

An File, An Reacaire agus *An Cruitire*: three prominent figures of the bardic era in Ireland. Indeed, the recitation of Gaelic bardic poetry alongside accompanying harp music was a highly esteemed performance practice throughout Gaelic society. Whilst the survival of many Gaelic bardic poems provides us with insights into the complex nature of poetry of the time, a lack of recordings, transcriptions and source material relating to the accompanying harp music obscures our knowledge and understanding of the harpers' creative practice. Frequently mentioned throughout early Irish literature, the harper undoubtedly played a vital role within this mode of practice which demanded a high level

of skill in accompanying poetry governed primarily by syllables and strict metrical rules of composition. There are, however, frequent descriptions of the harpers' music within the poems themselves, and a large corpus of harp transcriptions which survive from the post-bardic era. Taking inspiration from these early transcriptions and descriptions of the harpers' practice, alongside the nuanced rhythmic characteristics of poetic recitation, this practice-led paper will offer new perspectives and insights on the basic functioning of harp music as an accompaniment to bardic poetry, whilst also suggesting potential means of re-imagining this unfamiliar mode of practice within a contemporary Irish harping context.

Biography

Lauren Ní Néill is a sought-after traditional harper, teacher and researcher from Glenuillin, Co. Derry. She has performed and taught at festivals throughout Ireland and Europe and is a current musical director of both the Derry and Inishowen Harp Ensemble. In 2021 Lauren featured as one of eight young traditional musicians on the TG4/BBC Alba production *Sruth* and has since featured on the ILBF/TG4/BBC Gaeilge *Beart Bunting* (2022) and the TG4 *Thomas Moore – Bard na hÉireann* (2024) production. Lauren's keen interest and passion for historical and contemporary Irish harp practices is reflected in her recently completed practice-led PhD research – *Bairdne*: A practice-led re-imagination of harp accompaniments to Gaelic bardic poetry.

Panel 2a Harp as Storytelling & Poetry (Room G010)

From footnotes to poetic feet: when Irish harp research 'vibrates in the memory' to transpose into poetry

Emily Cullen (University of Limerick)

Ten years after completing my doctoral thesis on the cultural and historical functions of the Irish harp, I found myself drawn back to my research through a new hermeneutic lens: poetry. The humanity and enigmatic emotions of Denis Hempson and Arthur O'Neill were haunting me in ways that called for a less cerebral approach and warranted an aesthetic exploration. I wanted to gain a deeper understanding of the constellation of emotion that impelled two elderly men to feel such grief as they shared their music with Edward Bunting at the 1792 Harp Festival in Belfast. Hempson, in particular, seemed resigned to the idea that contemporary ears would never retrieve a full appreciation for the old, modal music of his own era. I decided to probe more deeply into this complexity by writing a persona poem in Hempson's voice, which yielded some artistic discoveries. This, in turn, spawned a sequence of poems in the voices of the harpers who assembled for that watershed gathering. As a harper and humanities scholar in the traditional sense, who now lectures in Creative Writing, I am interested, in this paper, to explore the ways in which research can spawn art. Somewhere, between strict verifiability and verisimilitude, the academic/poet learns to claim imaginative and poetic license and these fertile interstices will be the subject of my paper. It will also consider the harping

tradition as a wellspring of inspiration for future art and how research-infused poetry may help scholars articulate their work to a broader audience.

Biography

Dr. Emily Cullen is the Meskell Poet in Residence at the University of Limerick, where she lectures on the MA in Creative Writing and MA in English. Emily has published three poetry collections to date: *Conditional Perfect* (Doire Press, 2019), *In Between Angels and Animals* (Arlen House, 2013) and *No Vague Utopia* (Ainnir Publishing, 2003). *Conditional Perfect* was included in The Irish Times round-up of “the best new poetry of 2019”. Emily was awarded an IRC fellowship for her doctoral research on the Irish harp and gained a PhD in English from the University of Galway in 2008. Emily was commissioned to work on a number of community-based poetry initiatives during the recent Decade of Centenaries. She frequently publishes essays on Irish music, cultural history and contemporary poetry.

Irish Harping as Storytelling (working title) [Performance-based presentation]

Niamh O’Brien (Independent)

In this lecture-performance I trace the lineage of harper as storyteller from the Bardic tradition, through the evolution of harping from the 1950s, and finally to my own practice of mixed-media harp performance. I examine the repertoire and performance contexts of historical and mid to late 20th century harp players and discuss the role the harp has played in Irish culture and society. I propose the notion of harp as resonator that captures, holds, accompanies, and responds to the voices that surround it. Over time the instrument has been a repository for cultural identity and aspiration and has consistently told stories of Ireland. These stories have evolved from preserving history and mythology in ancient Ireland to marketing Irish culture to the diaspora in the 20th century. In more recent years Irish harping has developed at a rapid pace and tells a story of modernisation and growing wealth, with expanded repertoire and techniques, and increased access across the country to the instrument and tuition. I will continue this story and perform a new work-in-progress which brings live harp playing and singing into conversation with pre-recorded sounds and voices. I propose that this style of mixed-media performance is a modern method of recording and reflecting Irish culture and society in the here and now, a form of contemporary performance that continues a long lineage of harping as storytelling.

Biography

Niamh O’Brien is a harp player, composer, sound artist and singer from Co. Limerick. She has performed in Ireland, Europe, and America as a solo artist, and with traditional groups such as The Chieftains, AnTara and Hoodman Blind. Since 2017 she has been active in audio and radio, working as a recordist, editor and producer on podcast and documentary projects. She was awarded a PhD by the University of Limerick in 2024 for her research in the field of sonic arts and deep mapping. This research was

supported by a post-graduate scholarship from the Irish Research Council. Her current compositional practice combines traditional, folk and electronic music, with voices, interview materials and field recordings. Her debut solo album will be released on the Farpoint Recordings label in Autumn 2025.

Panel 2b Organology, Composition and Pedagogy (Room G011)

Silent Witness: A Pedal Harp's Journey from Forgotten Workshop to the Old Asylum Clare McCague (Independent)

A rare nineteenth-century double-action pedal harp attributed to William Jackson Junior, a little-known Dublin harp maker active during the 1840s, offers new insight into a largely overlooked period in Irish musical instrument making. While the instrument's provenance remains unconfirmed, it was rediscovered in 2021 during TU Dublin Conservatoire's relocation to its new campus in Grangegorman. A brass plate links the harp to the legacy of John Egan, Ireland's most influential early nineteenth-century harp maker, and archival and physical evidence date it to Jackson's independent tenure at 32 Dawson Street between 1844 and 1847.

The study positions Jackson within the fractured Egan lineage, examining the familial and commercial divisions that followed Egan's death and shaped the final years of indigenous Irish pedal harp manufacture. Through analysis of the harp's surviving structure, Grecian-style decorative carving, and eighth-pedal swell mechanism, the paper situates the instrument within both Irish craft traditions and wider European stylistic practices.

As the only publicly documented Jackson harp to be examined in detail, the instrument serves as a material witness to a neglected chapter in Ireland's nineteenth-century musical and artisanal history. Its re-emergence prompts renewed consideration of overlooked instruments and underscores the significance of historical artifacts not only as remnants of past practice but as sources of new scholarly understanding.

Biography

Clare McCague is an Irish harpist and musicologist specialising in the 19th-century Irish pedal harp tradition. She holds a PhD from TU Dublin Conservatoire, supported by an Irish Research Council Government of Ireland Scholarship, and a First Class Honours BMus in Performance. Clare was the first person to undertake a comprehensive study of the history of the pedal harp tradition in Ireland. Through this research, she uncovered the catalogue of Ireland's foremost 19th-century pedal harpist, Boleyn Reeves (1820–1905), and is now the leading expert on his life, career, and compositions. She is currently recording Reeves' complete works, bringing them into the public domain for the first time. Clare works as a freelance concert harpist in solo, chamber, and orchestral settings.

Demystifying the Harp: An Interactive Digital Tool for Composers and Harpists Gráinne Meyer (Queen's University Belfast)

The harp has long been regarded as an enigmatic instrument, often poorly understood by composers and arrangers outside the harp community. Complex pedal and lever mechanisms often intimidate composers, leading to its underrepresentation in contemporary repertoire. This presentation introduces *Harp Lab*, a web-based application designed to explain harp mechanics in real time. This program addresses a critical need in the music community: making harp writing accessible to non-harpists while serving as a comprehensive reference tool for performers. The application features dual modes for both pedal and lever harps, real-time audio feedback, and visual representations of pedal/lever configurations. Users can explore glissando effects through touch or mouse interaction, experiment with various scales and chord progressions, and instantly hear the sonic results of different pedal combinations.

The presentation will demonstrate how this tool demystifies harp composition by eliminating technical barriers. The software demonstrates pedal and lever changes visually and aurally, which pedal/lever changes are playable, and what pitches are available depending on which way the harp pedals or levers are set. Features include preset libraries covering major/minor scales and modes and contemporary extended techniques; interactive notation display showing current pitch configurations; and mobile-responsive design with accessibility across devices. By providing composers with immediate auditory and visual feedback, the software encourages experimentation and demystifies the instrument's mechanics. For harpists, it serves as a practice aid and reference for pedal and lever changes and a teaching tool for students.

Biography

Gráinne Meyer is a PhD researcher at Queen's University Belfast, investigating the role of artificial intelligence and music technology in enhancing accessibility for musicians with disabilities. Her research, *Amplifying Accessibility in Artificial Intelligence in Music Systems*, examines biases in AI-driven music tools and explores how assistive technologies can remove barriers to participation in performance and education. As a professional harpist and software engineer, Gráinne Meyer has worked at the forefront of both industries as both an award-winning performer and composer as well engineering for global technology industry leader Microsoft. She combines her experience in both fields to advocate for more inclusive and representative music technologies.

Panel 3 Harp Collections & Sources (Room G010)

James Cody: An insight into notations from the nineteenth century.

Eilís Lavelle (Independent)

This performance-based presentation will focus on specific entries notated in the Edward Bunting manuscript collection, collected by the scribe James Cody. Employed by Edward Bunting, James Cody notated music and song lyrics during the early nineteenth century. Repertoire notated by Cody in his manuscripts will be examined

and performed, highlighting a selection of music performed during the early nineteenth century in Ireland. As Cody was a piper, his notation style will be reviewed to demonstrate and explore the differences and similarities between the performance practices of pipes and the music of the harp at the time. This approach will establish a connection between the historical harp repertoire and the pipes during the period of notation with contemporary performance practice. The presentation will consider and reflect on various settings of specific tunes associated with the harp notated by Cody.

Proposal: Performance-based presentation

Biography

Dr. Eilís Lavelle, from County Monaghan, Ireland, is a recognised exponent of the Irish harp and is in great demand as a performer and teacher. Eilís has recently completed a PhD at Queen's University Belfast (2024), focusing on scribal practices found in manuscripts collected by Edward Bunting. Most recently, Eilís has focused her performance and study on music found in the Edward Bunting collection. Having started her harping journey at the Armagh Piper's Club, Eilís has played the harp for many years and has been fortunate to have performed worldwide at various festivals, giving concerts, workshops and masterclasses.

A selection for Harp from the MSS of Patrick O'Neill (1765-1832)

Kathleen Loughnane (Independent)

I have published two books of harp arrangements, with accompanying CDs, on the music of Patrick O'Neill, of Owing, Co. Kilkenny. O'Neill lived through a period of relative stability following on the major political upheavals of the 17th century. Known as an Muilleoir Meidhreach, he ran a successful milling and farming business whilst pursuing his literary and musical interests. He was a competent musician and in a good position to note the repertoire of his musical associates. The music he collected spans a wide range of musical genres and represents a variety of traditions – Irish, Scottish, English and European - bearing witness to the diversity of dance forms and songs prevalent in his milieu. In April 2008 his manuscripts were purchased by the National Library, which lists 8 items in the collection [MS44806/1 - MS44806/8]. From the 450 tunes notated in the MSS I selected 24 tunes to arrange for harp. My presentation will be in the format of a PowerPoint presentation of the historical and social background to Patrick O'Neill's MSS, illustrated with the playing of newly arranged pieces for the Irish Harp.

Biography

Irish music Meteor Award (2010) nominee Kathleen Loughnane is highly regarded for her work in arranging traditional Irish dance tunes and airs for the harp and for researching the music of Irish harp composers of the 17th and 18th centuries. In 1990 she co-founded Dordan, whose mix of Irish and Baroque music has received widespread acclaim. Dordan received the National Entertainment award for traditional music in 1993. Kathleen has 6 CDs and accompanying books to her credit, *Affairs of the Harp*, *Harping On*, *Harp to Heart*, *The Harpers Connellan* .and more recently 2 books and CDS from the MSS of Patrick O'Neill (1763-1832). She has taught in Ireland and at

major festivals in the US, Japan and throughout Europe. She was invited to play at the World Harp Congress in Dublin in 1995. Her arrangements have appeared in various publications and feature on the Harp Syllabus of The Royal Irish Academy of Music.

Turlough Carolan (1670–1738): A critical evaluation of sources for the music of Ireland's iconic harp composer

Siobhán Armstrong (Royal College of Music, London; UCD; Historical Harp Society of Ireland)

Turlough Carolan's compositions are the most performed of all historical Irish harp repertory. Most, if not all, modern editions and performances of these are based on the melodies in Donal O'Sullivan's 1958 work, *Carolan: The Life, Times and Music of an Irish Harper*. However, O'Sullivan's source choices and editorial decisions are highly problematic in ways that are not yet currently widely recognized or acknowledged. A continuing misplaced faith in O'Sullivan's Carolan editions has led to many of the compositions – including the iconic *Carolan's Concerto*, *Brigid Cruise*, *Eleanor Plunket et al* – still being performed in versions that are verifiably inauthentic and unrepresentative of Carolan's particular idiom.

Using specific case studies to illustrate the issues, this paper will expose problems in O'Sullivan's editions, simultaneously offering superior sources for each piece, whilst outlining desirable Carolan sources more generally, many of which are now freely available online. These include live field transcriptions from 18th-century harpers whose lifetimes sometimes overlapped with that of Carolan. These enticing settings unlock Carolan's own performance practice, demonstrating uniquely carolanesque idiom now lost to modern harping. For anyone wanting to get as close as one now can to Carolan's oeuvre and performance practice, this presentation will equip them with the necessary tools to be able to find and critically evaluate Carolan sources, enabling them to discover and access the best source material for Carolan's music.

Biography

Siobhán Armstrong is Professor of Historical Harp at *The Royal College of Music*, London, and an Occasional Lecturer at *UCD*. She explores historical repertory on medieval to baroque harps, working with many of Europe's most prestigious traditional and HIP musicians and orchestras. Founding director of *The Historical Harp Society of Ireland*, her PhD research (Middlesex, 2020) dealt with early-Irish-harp performance practice. In 2016, Siobhán commissioned the first 3D-laser scan of a musical instrument at The National Museum. Siobhán's ensemble recording, *Music, Ireland and the Sixteenth Century* – a 2021 Irish Times' top-five international Classical Music pick – sheds light on a neglected century in Irish music.