



The Glissando

VOLUME 1, ISSUE 1

APRIL 2007

Pacific Harp Institute: *Sharing Our Passion For The Harp*

Hopes and Visions for the Pacific Harp Institute *Thoughts from the Artistic Director*

Important Dates

Eastside Harp Club meetings

- Apr 21
- May 19
- Jun 16

Canto Mio performs

- Feb 10
- Mar 17
- Apr 28

Master Class by Elizabeth Volpe

- Apr 24

Ruth Mar Recital at Benaroya Hall

- May 12

Summer Camp

Session 1

- Jul 23-28

Session 2

- Jul 30-Aug 4

For more information, please visit us on the World-wide Web at

www.pacificharpinstitute.org

Alison Austin ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

As a young student I felt remote and isolated from the general harp community because the camp that I was aware of was in Camden, Maine, and we lived in Seattle! My parents couldn't afford to send me that far or pay for summer camp. I always felt left out of the camp experience. My dream has been to have a west coast camp and why not here in the Pacific Northwest? It's beautiful here and our summer is usually much nicer than dealing with the humidity of the Midwest or east coast.

Four years ago a parent approached me about having a little music camp at

her home. We began with six young students and I had two teaching assistants. The vision for the camp was five or six days of intense work including technique, repertoire, supervised practice sessions, a group class, and ensemble. The first two years were great!

Wanting to expand the camp in numbers we moved to Bastyr University for our third year. This made it possible to further develop what we taught including harp arranging/theory, chamber music which we added this year, and exposure to other teachers and styles of music. This year's camp was our best yet! The students again reached and surpassed any goals we gave them. The concert was wonderful.



PHI Artistic Director Alison Austin leading an ensemble rehearsal during camp.

My vision is that the Institute will be an ongoing project that increases and builds on the strengths of local teachers and students as well as bringing in students from across the country and from Canada and Mexico.

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From the Executive Director

Nathan Chang EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

When the opportunity to work with the Pacific Harp Institute opened up, I was a little hesitant. Though I am a classical music enthusiast, my exposure to the harp was very limited. Harp is not a popular instrument, even in

the world of classical music. It is stereotyped and underappreciated in the general public and even in my own mind. It would be difficult to break these binds.

After attending Summer Camp and seeing the enthusiasm of the students, the dedication of the instruc-

tors, and ultimately, the quality of the harp music being played, it was not hard to see why the instrument is treasured so dearly. Artistic Director Alison Austin has poured her heart into the Institute and its students and the results are obvious.

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Canto Mio: The Face of PHI

Nathan Chang
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The Pacific Harp Institute will be launching our concert and touring ensemble, *Canto Mio*, in 2007. *Canto Mio* (Italian for ‘my song’) will be the visible face of the Institute. Its primary function is to promote the organization and its programs and to showcase the results of the high quality of instruction that it offers.

Canto Mio will be a group of 4-5 young harpists who are chosen by audition and by whom best embodies and expresses the vision of the organization. Judges for the auditions will include the Artistic Director and the Executive Director of the Institute.

Canto Mio will initially perform in various venues around the Puget Sound with the goal of expanding its presence into the surrounding areas and beyond. It will give 4-6 performances during the course of a year.

The ensemble will strive to make an annual recording. Proceeds from sales of the album will directly benefit the Institute and its programs.

Benefits to ensemble members include the recognition that comes along with being the representative of the organization, the appreciation of all

those who hear the performances, the experience and the discipline involved in keeping a concert schedule, and subsidized travel expenses. As an added incentive to those students who give their time and diligence to this effort, the Institute will strive to bring in scholarship funds for those who are interested in pursuing higher education.

This is truly an exciting time and endeavor for the Institute. We hope that you will join us in supporting our organization, and ultimately, its students.

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Introducing Harp Club

Nathan Chang
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

It is always exciting when an organization launches a new program. It signals new possibilities and potential. It gives the organization new ways to serve their target demographic. It often brings new talent and thinking into the organization, making it a more vibrant and exciting environment. This is what we will be experiencing throughout the year as we will be launching a couple of new programs.

This year, the Institute is offering a program called Harp Club. Harp Club targets children under age 16 who have had little exposure to playing an instrument, but are looking to start. The monthly meetings will allow club members to learn about the harp through various activities and lessons.

Students will be encouraged

to explore the harp in a group setting. The instructor will teach about the harp in fun and educational ways that will cover various aspects of the instrument including history, styles of play, composers and compositions, etc. Activities will be geared towards

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enhancing harp skills and appreciation. These include arts and crafts, ‘brain gym’, and creative music appreciation exercises.

Harp Club may also attend concerts and other events that will enhance appreciation of the instrument.

Costs of trips are additional and may vary.

Harp Club aims to not only teach about the harp, but also to build community of support and friendship around the instrument and around music. We would greatly appreciate your help in growing this program and in sharing our passion for the harp.

Harp Club is free! So, it is a wonderful opportunity for young ones to experience the beauty of the harp.

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The students enjoy playing the harp and play exceptionally well. They also enjoy the support and friendship that they form around the harp. I accepted the challenge and now am working with the Institute to build it into the organization that it seeks and deserves to be.

The coming year promises exciting things for the Institute. New programs are designed to not only serve existing harp players, but also to bring in new interest on an ongoing year-round basis. In this way, we hope to grow and sustain the Institute.

As you read through this premiere issue of our newsletter, you will get a feel for all that we have in store. We hope you will join us in making PHI into an organization that will succeed in its mission to provide young harpists with the resources, learning environment and support necessary to excel in performing the harp so that more people will be able to share in our passion for the harp.

Why I Play the Harp

Ruth Mar
GUEST COLUMNIST

It was the uniqueness of the harp that attracted me nearly ten years ago. I'd been playing the piano since I was five, and was itching for a new challenge. Specifically, I was interested in learning "something that everyone else doesn't play." Well, the harp certainly met that criterion. My parents found a local teacher, and I was instantly hooked.

What was initially intended as a hobby turned into a passion; and four years later, I entered the Bachelor of Music in Harp Performance program at the Royal Conservatory of Music (now there's a major you don't encounter too often!).

Though its soothing sound may suggest otherwise, playing the harp isn't always a dream. Rather, harpists face challenges that are as unique as their instrument. There is the awkward size, for one. At six feet tall and eighty pounds, the harp is perhaps the most unportable portable instrument. A flight of stairs, perfectly harmless to the average person, is a loathed obstacle to a harpist. Plus, I think I'm destined to be a mini-van driver for life! There are other physical demands as well. The concert grand harp has forty-seven strings and seven pedals, making harp playing literally a total body experience!

But there are numerous rewards to counter each difficulty. I am reminded of this nearly every time I

take my instrument somewhere, whether through a child staring agape at my "big blue mitten" in an elevator (my harp cover is an uber-bright blue) or by a fascinated audience member asking, "Can I pluck a string?" following a performance. And nothing compares to the sound of a rich harp chord or glissando. Indeed, an impressive appearance and an alluring sound combine to make the harp one of the most striking and romantic of instruments.

Yes, sometimes harp playing can be mind-boggling; my fellow school harpists and I often joked that one has to be slightly crazy to play our instrument!

But I can't imagine playing anything else.

Give Your Harp Some TLC: Tuning, Location, and Cleaning

Alison Austin
ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

Tuning, tuning. We all wish it would just go away. Did you know that those poor strings are pulling up and down with a pressure between 1000 and 2000 pounds when your harp is tuned up to proper pitch?

That's a lot of tugging and if the strings sag and want to rest in a lower position or become

pulled into too high of a pitch, it is difficult for your harp to maintain the proper balance and so your harp can slip out of tune more easily. Use a tuner with a microphone pick up or check a tuning fork (A440) as your starting pitch. You can also tune to the piano, but make sure it has been tuned regularly too. Then work in the

circle of 5ths as shown in the accompanying diagram (Figure 1).

Do you know that your instrument breathes? Because wood and the strings are made mostly of porous materials you need to make sure that you dust it at least once a week with a dry, soft dust rag. We have lots of particles in the air that

register in the winter. These two things can dry out the harp and damage the wood or fade the stain. It is also helpful to keep a small humidifier or at least a bowl of water in your harp room. Listen for the squeak test. If the strings squeak when you are trying to play then the room is too dry.

Even though we have lots of moisture

outside in the winter, we tend to have low humidity in the air. The squeak of the strings is due to the fact that they are too dry too.



Figure 1

become gummy with the daily cooking and living that goes on in our homes. This likes to glue to your harp on the wood or the mechanism.

Lastly, it's very important that you don't stress out your instrument by keeping it in a window with direct sunlight or near a blowing heat



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Our Mission

Pacific Harp Institute's mission is to advance harp music by encouraging and developing excellence through educational and performance opportunities, by building community among young harpists, and by preserving musical literature written for the harp.

Address Box

Visit our website
www.pacificharpinstitute.org

If you would like to receive our newsletter by email, please email us at nchang@pacificharpinstitute.org and write "Email PHI Newsletter" in the subject line.

Thank you!

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Scholarships are very important because we want students to be able to learn and the harp is expensive. We want to do outreach in our local community and expand public awareness of the harp.

Each year I take some wonderful gem from having attended a masterclass or listening to other teachers adjudicate my students. It is also very important to me that my students hear from other teachers and increase their learning abilities. Summer camp provides the opportunity to be in a relaxed environment where we can think "harp" all day long. The stu-

dents end up with enduring friendships and learn to support one another in their endeavors.

In the near future I hope to expand camp to two weeks. The first week will be for college and high school students with solo and chamber opportunities, and the second will be for younger students ages 10-15. The harp ensembles will continue to do two concerts during the year. We will also be starting our "Harp Club" outreach program with the goal of raising general awareness about this wonderful instrument.

We were able to do a concert at Benaroya Recital Hall in 2003,

which I hope to repeat in 2008. If students are given the opportunity to reach for a large goal, their learning takes a giant leap and the community gains a gem. Many people still talk of the concert that we did at Benaroya. These memories are what make teaching so rewarding for me personally. It is my wish to share these amazing young people with the community and to enrich our lives with music, which enriches the human soul.