

A New Venue for the New Year

Twelve Transpennine harpists braved the cold and lashing rain one Sunday afternoon in late January to make music together. Led by Lucy Nolan this was the first of our regular in-person sessions of 2026. For anyone who hasn't been to one of the in-person sessions recently, they're a mix of all-ability, ensemble and faster-paced music, with parts arranged by Lucy to suit all levels of players.

Our new venue, at Burley-in-Wharfedale Library, has ample room for a large group with harps, comfortable seating for tea and coffee breaks, and enjoying the all-important cake to keep up our energy levels!



The afternoon's playing began gently with Lucy's arrangement of *Banaha*, a traditional Congolese song, but soon moved on to her 4-part arrangement of the *Skaters' Waltz* by Waldteufel. Next came two ensemble pieces, Barbara Ann Fackler's arrangement of the beautiful traditional Welsh, *Queen's Marsh*, and Helen Davies' 4-part arrangement of *Cormacke*, before we paused for a much-needed tea break.



Faster-paced pieces for the last part of the afternoon were Mozart's *Dona Nobis Pacem* arranged as a round, *Beginners Please* (but not a piece for complete beginners, despite the title!) and the *Eliza Aria* from the ballet *Wild Swans*, by Elena Katz-Chernin, arranged for us in parts to suit all levels of ability, by Lucy.

Not everyone lives near enough to come to a in-person session, but if you do live near, and haven't been to one recently, or if you're new to ensemble playing and would like to give it a try, you'll be very welcome at our next 'play

together' afternoon with Lucy at Burley Library. You'll find the library on Grange Road, Burley-in-Wharfedale, LS29 7HD. There's ample parking space, no steps to make harp-moving tricky, and a very warm welcome. Oh, and not to forget it's £20 per session.

Joan Dearnley

Retreat to the Harp - with Keziah Thomas

TPH Newsletter mentioned these monthly Monday evening Zoom Sessions and I decided to try one out - which I did on Monday 19th January, 7 pm, cost £10.00. It seems that Keziah introduces a harp teacher to the themed sessions. This one was well attended by harpists in the UK and abroad. This time it was led Nadia Birkenstock, a harpist, singer and composer based in France and Germany who gave a workshop about some of the various ways you can create accompaniments for yourself while you sing (without playing the melody on the harp).

The session was lovely, calm and unhurried. Nadia suggests that the starting point is to become entirely familiar with the song over maybe a few days or even weeks. Make sure you can sing it whilst doing other things. Think about the mood and what you want to convey. Nadia then introduced a simple melody which included chord symbols (e.g. such as A (A major), Dm (D minor) etc). She then described various ways to make up accompaniments, which included:

1. A simple ostinato (repeated same note) using the main key note (i.e. Doh (as in Doe a Deer a female...etc) / the Tonic / No 1 in the scale) (See Diagram A below)
2. Using notes of the three basic chords in a key made into a simple repeating pattern. The three basic chords in a (diatonic harmony) key are known as the Primary Chords and they are the chords built on notes 1,4 and 5 of the key's scale. So in the key of C, the Primary Chords are ones which are built on the note C (notes C, E and G) , F (notes F, A and C) and G (notes G, B and D). A basic chord is made up of notes 1,3 and 5 in the scale of the bottom note. (or if you prefer - i.e. doh, me, soh / tonic, mediant dominant) e.g. See three of my versions in Diagram B below using the related chords C, F and G majors (which are the primary / main/basic chords in C major). All examples are in root position, although of course inversions would bring more interest and variation)
3. Use just the tonic of the chord played in a octave bottom note / doh/ tonic/ no1 of the chord) (e.g. C and C - an interval of a 8th is called an octave) (See Diagram C below) .
4. Then - the one I really liked the best, it was so unexpected. Play a repeating pattern higher than the melody with your right hand. This sounded fantastic/ magical, and I'm definitely going to have a go at finding a suitable song and trying this out. (See Diagram D below for a couple of patterns made up by me).

Other top tips were:

- make sure you are sit comfortably whilst playing

- do some gentle head movements to become flexible in preparation for when you start to sing as well as play
- sit at your harp and just sing and move your head
- most excitingly, try out different chords and chord sequences with the melody and see what effect they have and how different they may be - this bit really is an adventure ...

I've left you two blank lines of manuscript at the top to print out this page and make up your own patterns if you so wish.

Alex Gledhill

DIAGRAMS - Harp + Sing. Alex Gledhill Jan 26 2026.

DIAGRAM A - A Simple Ostinato

DIAGRAM B - Basic chords in C major

DIAGRAM C - Using the Tonic of the Chord

DIAGRAM D - Accompaniment motif

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The Camac Harp Festival

The Camac Harp Festival in Cardiff was definitely worth the trip! Four really good workshops and six world class concerts. It was brilliant to have a workshop led by Catrin Finch - we concentrated on technique - useful and at last I have a method for relaxing my wrist. Her concert in the evening was an hour of awe and bliss - she took us round the world from Wales via France Russia and South America, different styles but displayed how versatile she is. Apparently she was nervous before the concert - as several of the performers admitted. Who'd have thought.

Tara Minton led a Jazz workshop - we had to go round the room in turn using different modes to do a question and answer session - which I managed to my amazement. Veronika Lemishenko played a lovely concert with an eastern European flavour, as did Tsvetlina Likova. One of my favourite workshops and concerts was Corrina Hewatt, who sang and played; she was so entertaining and carried that through to her workshop on accompanying song - really good principles to share with you! Gwenllian Llyr and Sirius Chau performed a harp and flute world premier - also stunning.

Came back on a real high - not least because I picked up a teal green Teifi Siff Saff from Cheshire on my way home - much lighter than the Eos for everyday out and about! A girl can never have too many harps!!!

Gill Beeley

Do you Zoom ?

It's that time of year again and Zoom fees for the period 6 months from 1 March to 30 August are now due. We are very pleased to announce that despite increasing costs, we are still able to keep the fee for the six months at £30 per person. This is extremely good value as you can participate in all or as many of the zoom sessions as you wish. There are recordings if you can't make the live sessions .

As usual, please make your online payment to:

Clarsach Society - Comunn Na Clarsaich

sort code 40-35-33

Account number 01448986

Use the reference zoom Feb26.

Please be aware that music for the zoom sessions will only be sent to TP members who have paid for them.

A Request

Hi Not sure if you do this sort of thing...if you do...could I put a little note in your next newsletter saying

" I am looking for a carbon fibre harp to try/buy...if you have one you are considering selling let me know! I will come and take a look. contact me

at avril.danczak@gmail.com "

Thanks so much if you can help

best wishes

Avril

Great Idea

Hi, I'm a harp player based in Leicestershire, but I'm unable to travel up regularly for the Transpennine in-person sessions. I was therefore wondering if there are any harp players based in the East Midlands (Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire, South Derbyshire etc) who would be interested in meeting up to play together, and maybe form an informal group if that was workable?

Do get in touch with any suggestions and/or to express an interest! My email in juditha@btinternet.com

Notes from our Convener

U3A Music Group

u3a in Ilkley are looking at starting a music group, this is open to anyone who would like to meet up and play some music, any instrument, at about grade 2. If you are interested please let Jean know.

Concert at Heath Church, Halifax - We have a concert date of Saturday 20th June, at 2.30. We need a minimum of 6 people (the more the better). If you are able to come along and play, that would be great, but you will need to be available for rehearsals. We are going to use some of the music from the Cliffe Castle concert 2 years ago, and you don't have to play every piece of music. If you are able to play at the concert, please contact Jean

Chevin Orchestra - I have recently joined an orchestra, they meet at Old Pool Bank, Otley, late afternoon on Wednesdays. This is open to grade 2 and above, I am the only harp player of course, and I am playing 2nd violin music on my harp. This looks the easiest of their music, sometimes it is only 1 note per bar! At the moment we are looking at some classical music, but they do play other music. If you would like to give this a go, let me know and I will pass on the details. Jean

Harp Hire - do you know we have harps available for hire? If you know someone who would like to try harp playing please contact Jean for harp hire details.

House groups - Up and running, please contact Jean for date and time.