

This article by Denise Grupp Verbon was first published in the October 2020 issue of the Sylvia Woods Harp Center e-Newsletter

You can find Denise's PDFs at www.harpcenter.com/Denise



My harp journey began at the age of 10½. The grade school I went to, a University Laboratory School in Normal, Illinois, owned a 1960s Lyon & Healy Troubadour I Harp. When the school introduced instrumental music in 5th grade, and the photo of the stringed instruments went up on the screen, the instructor said: "The harp is in the other room . . . no one knows how to play it . . . it is too hard." I went home and told my mother I wanted to play the harp! Mr. Kuntz, the very kind string instructor, worked with me (using the "Fun from the First!" books), but he honestly did not know anything about harps.

My dad told me if I was still interested in the harp when the school year was over, he would find me a teacher. So began the weekly 70-mile round trip treks to Peoria, Illinois, to study the harp with Marjorie Winters, the Peoria Symphony harpist. I studied with her for the next five years. Luckily, no other kids in my school were interested in the harp, so I had free use of the Troubadour.



The fall I turned 14 years old, Mrs. Winters told my dad that we had exhausted all the available repertoire for the Troubadour, so he bought me a Lyon & Healy Style 15 pedal harp. Today, as you know, the lever harp and its repertoire have progressed a lot, with so many wonderful luthiers building fine instruments and countless artists creating beautiful compositions and arrangements. But at that time, the non-pedal repertoire was limited.

At the end of my sophomore year of high school, Mrs. Winters recommended that I audition to study with Chicago Symphony principal harpist, Eddie Druzinsky. When I played for him at my audition, he gave me a lesson that very same day! I continued to study with him that summer. During my junior year, I studied with Shirley Blankenship at the University of Illinois but returned to my studies with Mr. Druzinsky the following year.

While in high school, I performed with the Illinois State University Symphony and Concert Choir and several regional symphonies. These experiences helped prepare me for my upcoming college journey, where professional performances continued, including two seasons with the Civic Orchestra of Chicago.

I was fortunate to receive full scholarships and music grants to continue my education. I earned my Bachelor of Music degree from Bowling Green State University (studying under Ruth Inglefield), and my Masters of Music degree from Northwestern University, where I again studied with Mr. Druzinsky.

Following graduate school, I moved to Toledo, Ohio, where I still live. My musical adventures have provided for a wide variety of gigs: weddings, receptions, corporate engagements, public concerts, and restaurants, including nearly four years at the gourmet restaurant called The Boody House (yes, you read that right!). For many years I have performed as a soloist, worked in a duo called "China Blue" with a fine flutist, and performed with a trio called "D'Nise and D'Nephews" (really!).



Besides a busy private teaching studio and solo performances, I now perform as part of Tapestry (Harp and Guitar) with my husband, Michael. We have released three full-length CDs and published many original tunes, arrangements, and instructional books for the harp, including "Harping on Theory" and "Finger Puzzles and Shapes for the Harp." You can purchase all of our products on our Tapestry website.

In 2008, we formed The Harp Gathering, an annual May harp festival held in Archbold, Ohio. Next year's festival will be May 13 -16, 2021, at the lovely Sauder Heritage Inn. The Harp Gathering is your chance to get together in an intimate setting with other harpers and harpists, enjoying concerts, workshops, camaraderie, and just plain relaxation. I hope you'll join us!



Michael and I enjoy traveling. Some of our adventures include: going to California and New Jersey to perform and conduct workshops at The Somerset Folk Harp Festival; a trip to Ireland, where we heard lots of live music; an adventure to Houston where we had a behind-the-scenes tour of NASA, and a visit to Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Park where Michael was able to get some extraordinary photos. We're looking forward to traveling more in the future!

I re-discovered the lever harp about 25 years ago, and after hauling around an 80-pound pedal harp for years, I was in heaven! Michael and I have collaborated with Jeff Lewis of Lewis Creek Instruments to design a line of lever harps. These are the harps that I currently play. Now, the only time I perform with a pedal harp is when the repertoire dictates the need.

In 2001, I began teaching as an adjunct instructor of music at Owens Community College in Toledo. I helped develop the Music Business Technology degree curriculum, including creating several of its courses. In 2016 I became the full-time Internship Manager for the School of Liberal Arts, and I also continue to teach a variety of music classes. I was named the 2005-2006 Adjunct Teacher of the Year by the Ohio Association of Two-Year Colleges.



When I was teaching harp at Siena Heights University in Michigan in 2005 I published Pedal Drill, and Lever Drill soon followed. I hope you enjoy them.

Happy Harping!

Denise