

This article by Thom Dutton was first published in the July 2023 issue of the Sylvia Woods Harp Center e-Newsletter

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

Thom Dutton is our featured arranger this month. Here's what he has to say about himself and his music.

My journey with the harp began almost a decade before I began playing. I was a music education major in college. We had to learn how to play all the different instruments in case we had to teach them someday. There was a concert grand pedal harp at the school, but no one was there to teach it. I thought it might be fun to try someday . . .

After graduating from college, I was asked to sing for the wedding of a good friend of mine. The organist also happened to be a harpist, and she asked if she could accompany me on the harp rather than the organ. I was instantly smitten by the sound. When I moved from Upstate New York to Cape Cod, I couldn't take my piano with me. After a couple of years without an instrument to play (and nine years after laying my eyes on a harp for the first time), I called the Cape Cod Conservatory and inquired about harp lessons. I signed up with aspirations of playing Debussy's preludes on a concert grand pedal harp. I couldn't afford such a harp, and not knowing if this would pan out, I decided to rent a lever harp. After about six months of lessons, my teacher said that if I was going to be playing an Irish harp for the time being, I should learn some music that was written for it. She plopped Kim Robertson's *The Castle Of Dromore* arrangement on the music stand. I took it home and played it for four hours. I had never heard anything like it before. That one piece of music truly changed the direction of my life. My interest in pedal harp quickly waned. I immersed myself in the music, history, and culture of the Celtic nations. I purchased my first lever harp four months after beginning lessons and played my first gig about a month later.



My playing has taken me to:

- the 10th hole of J.J. Clamps Miniature Golf Course on Nantucket
- the mansions of Newport, Rhode Island
- the Kennedy Compound in Hyannisport, Massachusetts
- Cabra Castle in Cavan, Ireland
- playing for the Lord Mayor of Chester, England (see photo)





I have been a member (and, in some cases, director) of every early music group on Cape Cod. My love of early music and theater eventually led to a unique series of gigs -- playing live background music for theatrical productions. Prerecorded music is rigid, while live music can flow with changes in the actors' performances. It started by playing period music for Shakespearean plays. It eventually expanded, leading to awards from the Association for Community Theater Excellence for the play *Eleemosynary* and the Eastern Massachusetts Association of Community Theaters for *Three Tall Women*. The most interesting (and fun) experience was creating the character Sir for the comedy *Who's Who*. The script called for a string quartet for the pre-show music. The director thought that harp throughout the play would

be better. As rehearsals progressed, I began to react to the action on stage, which led to more and more interaction with the actors. I was nominated for an Evie Award for Outstanding Achievement in Sound Design and also for Best Supporting Actor in a play!

One of my favorite concert venues is Willard Chapel in Auburn, NY (shown in this photo). It is the only existing room designed and decorated by Louis Comfort Tiffany.



My musical background led me to start arranging music for the harp. When my arrangement of Jeremiah Clarke's *Trumpet Voluntary* appeared in the *Folk Harp Journal*, Darhon Rees-Rohrbacher of Dragonflower Music contacted me. She said it was the best arrangement of the piece she had seen and offered to publish it in her upcoming Dragonflower publication, *Classic Festive Preludes*. As our friendship developed, she encouraged me to begin publishing my own arrangements, and my company Cape Side Music was born.

It's been a wonderful journey. I can't imagine what the past 35 years would have been like without the harp. I look forward to the journey continuing for a good long time!