



This article by William Jackson was first published in the May 2023 issue of the Sylvia Woods Harp Center e-Newsletter

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

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

My family background was Irish, and I spent most summers at my grandmother's house in County Donegal. I am pictured in the bottom of the doorway here in 1958. I started out on piano at age 11 and tinkered with a few instruments like mandolin and fiddle until, eventually, I found myself being the bass player in a folk band when I was 15. I continued to play double bass and electric bass in bands until I was 20. I was with a band called Contraband in London for a while and made one LP on Transatlantic Records.

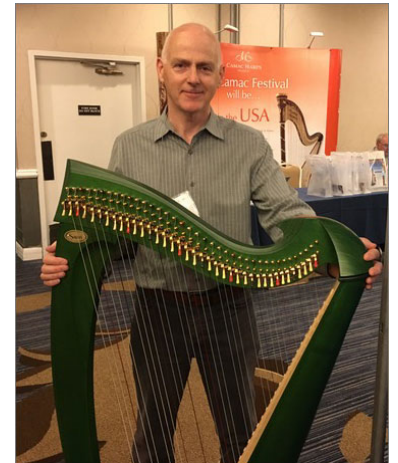


While in London, I often passed a music shop with a small harp in the window, and I used to stare at it for a long time, fascinated by its construction and beauty. After hearing some recordings by Derek Bell and Alan Stivell, I sold my bass equipment and bought my first harp in 1975! It was made by Breton maker Gildas Jaffrennou, who had written a book on how to make a Folk Harp.



Not long after, in 1976, I was a co-founder of the Scottish band Ossian. I continued to play bass a little, as well as harp and pipes.

With Ossian, I toured extensively in Europe and USA for 14 years. We made six LPs/CDs and formed our own label, Iona Records. I was also involved with some theatre productions with Ossian. The third photo below shows me with my harp during a production of *Rob Roy* on the Isle of Barra. I had a small knee harp at this time made by Derrick Sanderson of Alva.



I have had quite a few harps, including ones made by Pilgrim Harps, Jack Yule, Triplett, and Fisher. I would usually tour the US with my own harp, but it was always difficult at airports, etc. The alternative of borrowing harps had mixed results.

In 1993 I trained as a music therapist at the Guildhall School of Music in London, and have worked in that field for 30 years now, using a small harp as well as percussion and piano.

I met Irish Harper Gráinne Hambly in 2003 at Harpcon in Indiana and again at a few other harp festivals. We started touring together soon after, and we now live in Co Mayo, Ireland, with our 2 children. We are co-directors of the Music Generation Mayo Harp Ensemble and have 30 young people rehearsing regularly and performing with us in Ireland.

Over the years, I have composed many pieces for solo harp and for larger ensembles. I usually try to write in a traditional style and get my inspiration from Scotland's history and landscape. I have written commissions for The Scottish Chamber Orchestra, Cape Cod Symphony, and Asheville Symphony. I have also written music for TV and radio productions over the years. A few years ago, I put all my compositions together in one 4-CD package entitled "Composition."

