

This article by Rachel Hair was first published in the May 2018 issue of the Sylvia Woods Harp Center e-Newsletter

You can find Rachel's PDFs at [www.harpcenter.com/Rachel](http://www.harpcenter.com/Rachel)

*I was born and brought up in the beautiful fishing village of Ullapool in the North-West Highlands of Scotland. I first got to try out the clarsach (harp) when I was 10 years old at "Feis Rois", a Gaelic music camp. When I signed up I couldn't decide whether to do bagpipes or clarsach. I eventually settled on harp . . . I think my mother was relieved!*

*The first days of camp finished with a tutors' concert. I remember sitting in the village hall mesmerized by the fingers of the harp tutors dancing over the strings. I was hooked! A week after the Feis ended I was called down stairs as my parents wanted to speak to me about something. I thought I was in trouble, but they were wondering if I'd like to start regular lessons. And so started 5 years of hour long (thank you mum and dad harp roadies!) Saturday morning drives down twisty Highland roads (I used to get so travel sick that I was green for the first half of every lesson!) for lessons with the ever-so-patient Bill Taylor.*

*At this time, I hired a harp through the wonderful Clarsach Society's affordable harp hire scheme. Many of the professional harpists in Scotland started playing this way, and today the society still has over 100 harps that it hires out. Today I own 2 Scottish-made light-weight "Starfish Glenelle" harps, beautiful sounding instruments that are easy to fly with.*

*When I was 16 we moved to Scotland's capital city, Edinburgh. This was a major culture shock to me. I left a school of 215 students to join one with over 1800 students in it! I discovered I'd really taken the Traditional music that I was surrounded with in Ullapool for granted. It can take losing something to really value what you did have. I missed the music that I was once was surrounded with. That made me play and work at sourcing it out even more, learning and arranging tunes from CDs and out of books from the city's music library.*

*Following school I went on to study music in the city of Glasgow. A lot of Highlanders come down to Glasgow as a right of a passage following school and I immediately felt at home there. My father was also from the city. At this time I also started to connect a lot more with Irish music. Some say that Glasgow is the capital of Donegal . . . there's so much Irish music there, and so many folks with Irish roots. So, with a Northern Irish mother, I fitted in well.*

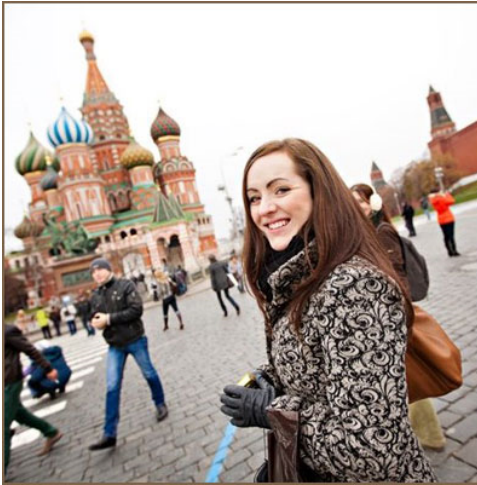
*My teacher whilst at university was Corrina Hewat, the teacher who'd first taught me at Feis Rois when I was 10 years old. She was a great inspiration to me and allowed me to discover my own style of playing.*

*I was incredibly driven whilst at university and was determined not to have to waitress in a restaurant, so I started playing weddings and events. Eventually people heard I was available to teach, too, and so when I eventually graduated I'd picked up enough work to properly turn my passion into my full-time career. I've now settled with my boyfriend in Glasgow (he's also a touring Trad musician) and we have a great network of friends and colleagues working in music and it's surrounding industries in the city.*



*Every week for me is different. My performing and teaching involves a lot of travel (I average 70 flights a year) but I'm lucky that it allows me to see the world.*

*Right now the main stay of my performing work is with the Trad guitarist Ron Jappy. In recent years I've recorded with my trio, (harp, guitar and double bass), but I've decided to rest this for now to concentrate on work with Ron. We're having lots of fun sourcing through old tune collections, recordings and our memories for finding new sets.*



*I still regularly teach and I have a few private students that I see week to week. They're incredibly understanding students who know that I have to go off on tour at times.*

*I also visit the Isle of Man once a month to teach harp. The smallest of the Celtic nations (32 x 14 miles), it's an island of 80,000 inhabitants in the middle of the Irish sea with it's own Celtic culture and music. I teach 23 youngsters "Manx" harp music there and lead the harp ensemble "Claasagh". When I started my boss was the harp player Charles Guard. It was through him that I was first introduced to Sylvia Woods! Culture Vannin had recently funded me to publish a book on Manx Harp music and he encouraged me to get in touch with Sylvia and allow all my books ([Mostly Scottish Harp Vol. 1](#) & [Vol. 2](#) and [Claasagh Vol. 1](#) &*

*[Vol. 2](#)) to be available for download on her Harp Center website. (See the sale section below.)*

*I find it's very important to give back to the harp community, and I do this through my volunteer work as one of the organizers of the Edinburgh International Harp Festival. We have such a strong team organizing it . . . a very special harp family!*

*I believe the festival scene is one of the most unique and special things we have in our harp world. Fellow musicians are always in awe that I keep popping off to teach and perform at harp festivals throughout the world. We have a wonderful circuit of them, and I love running into fellow performers, teachers and attendees. We should treasure this part of our harp world, as it can be such a lonely, solo instrument at times. Really do take every opportunity you can to meet fellow harp players at these gatherings, whether it be an actual festival, an online festival or a harp circle event. Oh, and if you see me at any come and say hello. This year I'll be performing and teaching at the [Somerset Folk Harp Festival in New Jersey](#) in July and the [O'Carolan Harp Festival in Ireland](#) in October.*



-- Rachel Hair

Photo 1: With my first ever harp, hired from the clarsach society

Photo 2: Performing with Manx Harp ensemble Claasagh, at the 2018 Edinburgh International Harp Festival (photo credit: Joost Lighart)

Photo 3: with duo partner, guitarist Ron Jappy (photo credit: Sam Hurt)

Photo 4: Sightseeing in Moscow following performance at ArfaVita Harp Festival

Photo 5: Teaching Scottish tunes to harp students in Osaka, Japan