

Harp making: The history and craftsmanship of the early

Irish harp

Visual Culture

NCAD **DUBLIN**

National College of Art and Design
A Recognised College of University College Dublin

Student Name: Róisín Berkeley

Email Address: 17367546@student.ncad.ie

Year of Study: final year

Semester: second semester

Department (if applicable): sculpture and expanded practice

Are you on the Joint Course? ☐ Yes ☒ No

Visual Culture Tutor: Dr. Anna Moran

Essay Due Date: 31/01/2022

Word Count: 5408

Please confirm the following by writing your initials in the space provided

I have credited the sources of all the images included in this submission.

Initials: R.B.

I have the sources of all quoted and paraphrased text in this submission.

Initials: R.B.

I confirm that this submission is my own work.

Initials: R.B.



National College of Art and Design

School of Visual Culture

I declare that this **Critical Cultures Research Project** is all my own work and that all sources have been fully acknowledged.

Signed: Róisín Berkeley

Programme / department: Sculpture and expanded practice

Date: 27/01/2022

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Dr. Anna Moran for the constant patience, support, and time she has invested in me over the past months of writing. Also, I would like to give special thanks to Paul Dooley and Natalie Surina for providing me with a guided tour of their studio spaces and sharing their knowledge of early Irish harp making with me. A final thanks to Simon Chadwick for his contribution to the revival of the early Irish harp, and for his guidance.

Table of Contents

Page

1. Introduction

5. Chapter 1.

The history, symbolism and social status of the early Irish harp in Ireland

5. Earliest recordings of the early Irish harp

7. The Trinity College Harp

9. How the harp became associated with Ireland

10. The symbolism of the Irish harp

11. Chapter 2.

The relationship between the natural Irish landscape and early Irish harp.

12. Woods used in harp making

13. Peter Kilroy: leaning into the land

17. Chapter 3.

Contemporary early Irish harp makers and the craftsmanship of early Irish harp making

18. Natalie Surina

20. Early Irish craftsmanship

List of Illustrations

Figure 1: Shrine of St. Mogue, (ca. 1000), *National Museum of Ireland, Kildare St., Dublin*. [image] Available at: <https://www.earlygaelicharp.info/mogue/>

Accessed: 22/09/2021

Figure 2: Trinity College Harp (15th century), *Trinity College Dublin*, [image]

Available at <https://dh.tcd.ie/clontarf/The%20Brian%20Boru%20Harp2>:

Accessed: 10/10/2021

Figure 3: David Shaw Smith (1989), *Hands* [image] Available at: <https://hands.ie/product/harp-making/>

Accessed: 23/10/2021

Figure 4: Natalie Surina (c 2010- 2020) *Decorated Professional Jerpoint* [image]

Available at: <http://eriuharps.com/index.php/instruments/clairseach/left-side-web/4>:

Accessed: 01/12/2021

Figure. 5 Natalie Surina (c 2010 - 2020) *Customised Downhill harp* [image]

Available at: <http://eriuharps.com/index.php/instruments/clairseach/imgp3083/>

Accessed: 20/01/2022

Introduction

The Irish harp - being the national emblem of Ireland, has played a prominent role in Irish culture for centuries. Legend has it that a man wandering along the shore of Ireland heard the sound of the wind blowing through the rib cage and gut tendrils of a beached whale. Struck in awe and inspiration, he created a replica out of wood and strings - creating the early Irish harp (Patton, 2010, p. 124).

My first ever encounter with a 'real' harp was when I was six years old. This harp was made from three planks of wood stuck together, and strung with four lengths of fishing line. My father and I built this for a school project. Since then I longed to become a harp player. It took forty minutes to drive through boreens across Mayo to get to my teachers house. After a year of renting a cheap student harp, I had proven my love and commitment for the instrument to my parents. My Grandfather who was a jazz pianist bought me a neo - Irish harp, custom made in Canada by Larry Fisher whose harps are some of the best in the world. However, when the harp arrived I felt a great distance between myself and the instrument. It felt foreign to me and I felt a disconnect between us. I thought that if it spoke to me its accent would be Canadian not Irish. However, the more I played, the more it settled and it soon became an extension of myself. When I am apart from my harp I feel unbalanced and unsettled, but I always come back to it, tip it into my right shoulder and feel whole again. Nothing comforts or soothes like the harp. The famous harp of Dagda had the ability of making the listener burst into laughter, move them to tears or put them to sleep (Patton, 2010, p. 128).

Now, it is clear that the harp has maintained a relatively consistent presence throughout Irish history. From the magical myths and legends of the early Irish harps - sixteen of which are extant, to the ingenious creators and players of the instrument, as well as the weighted symbolism that the harp has carried for our country. Yet, it seems as though we have forgotten the sound of our native instrument.

When I visited the National Museum of Ireland to view an 'Egan' harp (after having to ask two security guards for directions to it) I was appalled to find it negligently placed on the top shelf of a glass cabinet, ignored and unappreciated - To add to my greater disappointment, I learned that the rest of the harps in the hands of the Museum are currently in storage. But I still have hope. The Historical Harp Society of Ireland (HHSI), founded in 2002 aims "to rediscover the old Irish harp with wire strings, which was played until the early 1800s" (www.irishharp.org, n.d). The organisation has made an important and profitable contribution of the revival of this instrument.

In this essay I intend to outline why the craftsmanship of early Irish harp making should be celebrated and maintained. There needs to be a greater space created, and light shone on this craft. I am interested in exploring how the harp has evolved throughout the years, discovering more about the craft of harp making in both a historical and modern context.

There is a very active early Irish harp scene in Ireland. We are extremely blessed to have such incredible harp makers, players, and harp scholars. Many of which have greatly impacted me and taught me so much about the early Irish

harp. Their dedication and passion has greatly inspired this work. Simon Chadwick (harp scholar), and Joan Rimmer (musicologist) have both contributed such valued and expansive research on the early Irish harp. Their works have broadened my scope on the subject massively. The comprehensive work of musicologist - Marie O'Donnell has also contributed massively to my knowledge of the symbolism of the harp in Ireland. Paul Dooley and Natalie Surina are two phenomenal harp makers and players - both based in different parts of the west of Ireland. Both opened up to me about the inner workings of the early Irish harp and showed me what life is like as a harp maker. The HHSI plays a huge part in the revival of the early Irish harp in Ireland. Offering concerts, seminars, and lessons in everything related to the early Irish harp. Watching recorded seminars given by Siobhán Armstrong, Karen Loomis and Ann Heymann (provided by the HHSI) has also furthered my insight on the early Irish harp.

In relation to the more general term - craftsmanship, writers including David Pye and Carol Moldaw have impacted my understanding of early Irish harp making. In my opinion, Pye approaches the art of craftsmanship in a more practical sense, his work is straight to the point and factual. Whereas Moldaw, who comes from a background in poetry, takes a more emotive, perhaps romantic approach when considering craftsmanship. Reading both approaches helped me form an opinion about why the craftsmanship of the early Irish harp is so special.

This essay focuses on the early Irish harp, as opposed to the neo - Irish harp. The neo - Irish harp, also known as lever harp, uses nylon strings, is larger in

size and is more commonly played in Ireland to this day. The early Irish harp has a clear, metallic sound. Whereas the neo - Irish has a softer, less pointed sound. The neo - Irish harp has established an important role in the contemporary Irish traditional music scene. This harp is an adaption from the portable harp created by John Egan for society ladies in the 19th century - which effectively replaced the early Irish harp (Chadwick, 2008, p. 521). There are many wonderful neo - Irish harp makers in Ireland including Kevin Harrington, Brain Callan, Graham Wright and Tim O'Carroll. The reason I have chosen to focus on the early Irish harp is because its roots go deeper in our culture and identity as a nation.

In chapter one we shall look at the history of the early Irish harp. The symbolism of the harp and the role of the harp player from the 12th century to the 19th. As we establish the significance of the early Irish harp, we shall then move on to the art of early Irish harp making and the relationship it has with the Irish landscape, which will be discussed in chapter two. The final chapter will discuss the role of the contemporary early Irish harp maker, informed with an interview with harp maker Natalie Surina and Paul Dooley.

Chapter 1

The history, symbolism and social status of the early Irish harp in Ireland

The early Irish Harp dates back to somewhere between the eighth and tenth century. There are records of a harp-like instrument depicted on stone carvings, an example being Castledermot Cross - found in Kildare (Shaw Smith, 1989).

There is also the shrine of St.Mogue which represents the figure of David playing the Irish harp, dating back to ca. 1000 (Chadwick, ca. 2012-2014).

Though the early Irish harp is also indigenous to the Highlands of Scotland, it is generally recognised as the 'early Irish harp' and I shall be referring to it as this throughout the essay.

I believe it is important to mention, specifically, three early Irish harps - the 'Trinity College' harp, the 'Lamont' harp and the 'Queen Mary' harp. These are the oldest recorded models of the early Irish harp extant, dating roughly back to the 15th century. These harps have acted as an archetype for early Irish harp making.

The 'Lamont harp' is kept with the 'Queen Mary' harp in the National Museum of Antiquities in Edinburgh. Musicologist Joan Rimmer describes the early Irish harp as a "small low-headed Irish harp. The heavy neck, triangular in section, projects over the fore pillar which is mortised into it; the soundbox has substantially the same depth through-out." (Rimmer, 1964, pp. 39-49).

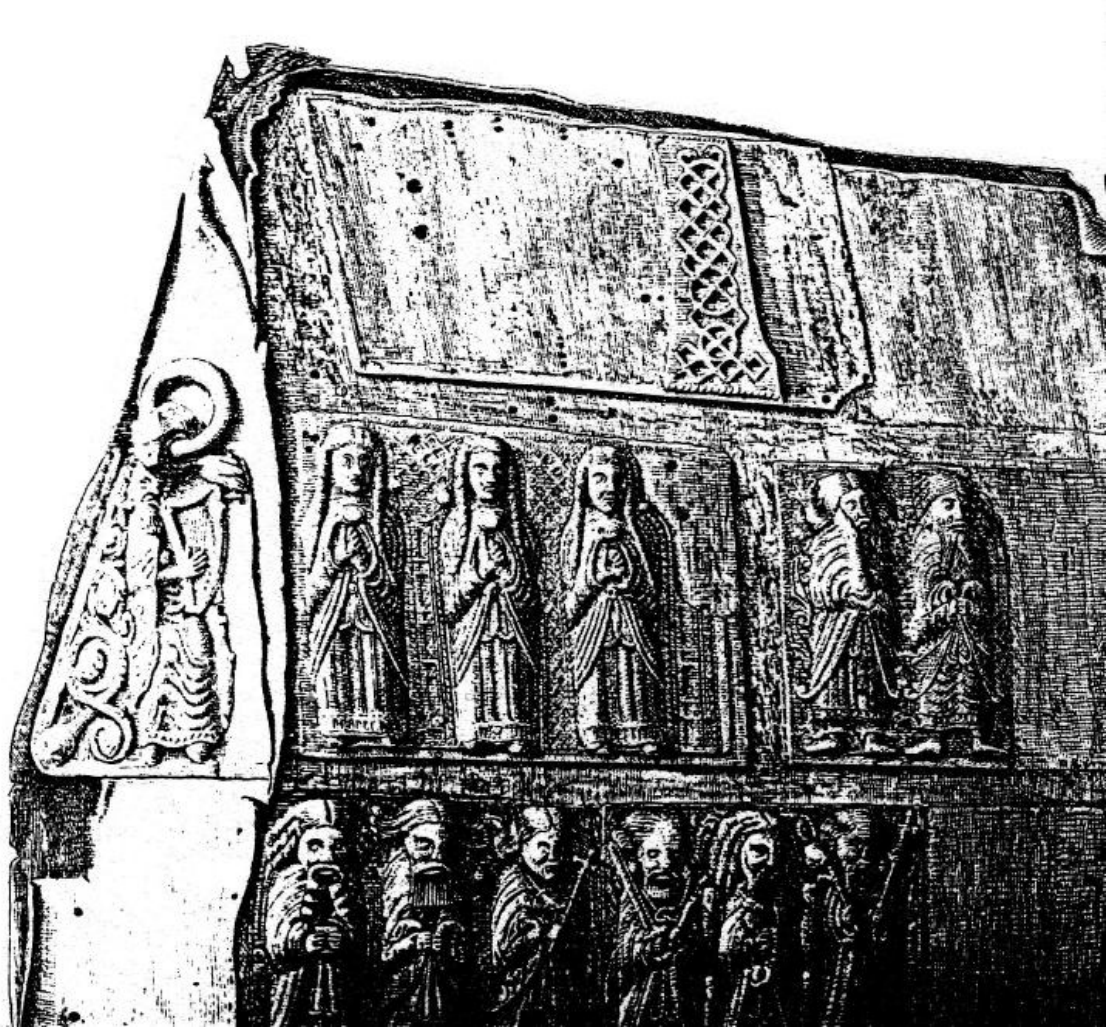


Fig. 1 Shrine of St. Mogue, ca. 1000. <https://www.earlygaelicharp.info/mogue/>

I would like to discuss the 'Trinity College', or alternatively known as the 'Brian Boru' harp which is mentioned in Armstrong's publication *The Irish and the Highland Harps*. Here he states that it is "the earliest specimen of the wire strung harp to be found in Ireland" (1904, p55). There is much speculation as to when the harp was made but the structure of the harp suggests that it was made in the 15th century - which means that it could not have belonged to Brian Boru himself who was in rule in 1014.



Fig. 2 *Trinity College Harp* (15th century) [Online] Trinity College Dublin, Available at <https://dh.tcd.ie/clontarf/The%20Brian%20Boru%20Harp>

The design of the 'Trinity College' harp is based on the 'Queen Mary' harp, though it is slightly larger in size with more elaborate decoration. The 'Queen Mary' harp - though smaller - has a deeper, louder sound.

The 'Trinity College' harp has proven itself to be an incredibly resilient and robust instrument, It has impressively survived since the 15th century - through numerous poor reconstructions and was even stolen and taken hostage in 1969 (Trinity College Dublin, n.d). The harp has previously been played on special occasions but is now considered too fragile to use and the strings are not tuned to their full tension to avoid pressure being applied to the structure. The soundbox is hollowed out from a single block of willow - this was common practice in the construction of early Irish harps. The willow tree is a commonly used wood in harp making due to its flexibility and strength - which enables it to endure tension applied when the instrument is strung.

Though the 'Trinity college' harp acts as a template for early Irish harp making, it is impossible to create an exact replica of the harp. Paul Dooley (who is a contemporary Early Irish harp player and maker residing in the west of Ireland) informs us of the technical challenges and errors in the makings of the 'Trinity College' or 'Brian Boru' harp,

“The present reconstruction, based on the Queen Mary harp, is slightly incorrect and this, coupled with errors and inconsistencies in previously available measurements, has led to difficulties in the stringing and tuning of modern reproductions of the harp.” (2014, p107)

Surviving for centuries, the 'Trinity College' harp acts as an important relic of the 15th century - providing us with knowledge of the instrument harp players would play, and the music performed and listened to.

Written works dating back to the 12th century reveal to us the role of the harp player in Ireland. Harp players were highly respected and valued in society at the time. 'The Topography of Ireland' written by Gerald of Wales after visiting Ireland in 1185, recounts "the wonders and miracles of Ireland" from "the influence of the moon on the waters as well as on natural humours" to the "incomparable skill of the Irish in playing upon musical instruments" (1185, p. 8). Cambrensis was greatly impressed with the skilful harp playing ability of the natives, as well as the positive influence that the early Irish harp has on ones mood. This skill served as a redeeming quality to the Irish, who's social conduct and way of living was criticised by Cambrensis (O'Donnell, 2015)

"The only thing to which I find that this people apply a commendable industry is playing upon musical instruments , in which they are incomparably more skilful than any other nation I have ever seen." (Cambrensis, 1185, p. 71)

Cambrensis continues to mention 'St Kevin's' harp preserved as a relic at Glendalough in the 12th century. This study informs us of the role of the harp player in this time.

...bishops and abbots and holy men in Ireland were in the habit of carrying their harps with them in their peregrinations, and found pious delight in playing upon them. In consequence of this, St. Kevin's harp was held in great reverence by the natives, and to this day is considered a valuable relic, possessed of great virtues.

(Cambrensis, 1185, p 72)

The news of the Irish harp player's excellent talents quickly spread throughout Europe, and so, a reputation was developed and the harp started to become associated with the country (O'Donnell, 2015).

Since the 12th century the harp has been associated with Ireland. Now though, the harp lies amongst other Irish cliches including the feisty, red haired Irish woman, lucky shamrocks, and leprechauns dwelling at the bottom of the rainbow. Unlike these shallow, Irish stereotypes the harp stands for something important. Though it may look and sound ethereal and heavenly, it represents the spirit, courage and will of the nation, and has acted as a beacon of hope during times of darkness.

The Irish nation had to fight to reclaim the Irish harp as their own. The image of a winged, golden harp over a navy background had been used to represent British rule in Ireland from the 13th century. However, both the Volunteer movement (1778) and later, the United Irish men (1791) reclaimed the image of the harp, using it to represent Irish identity. Instead of using a golden harp over a navy background (indicating colonial rule), the harp was now placed over a green background (O'Donnell, 2015), with the motto "It is new strung and shall be heard", and so, "a highly politicised representation of the instrument has been developed over the last two hundred years in Ireland' (Lanier, 1999, p.2).

Guinness trademarked the early Irish harp in the 19th century but the harp faces the opposite way as it does on Government documents, passports,

stamps and coins. The strings must be vertically lined as opposed to the diagonally running strings on the harp of the coat of arms (O'Donnell, 2015).

For centuries the early Irish harp has played an outstanding role in Irish society, became routed in Irish identity and was adopted as the symbol of Irish independence and liberty. However, over the years, this ideology has faded. Though the harp has played a pivotal role in culture, it is often taken for granted and overlooked. Instead of symbolising freedom and 'Irish-ness' its symbolism has faded over the years. Previously associated with legends and magic, ancient Ireland, and the natural landscape, the harp has turned into a bastardised symbol used by RyanAir or on bags of coal. We wince when we receive a letter displaying the beautiful 'Trinity' harp in the post, how did we forget about its magical sound and positive impact on the soul?

Chapter 2

The relationship between the natural Irish landscape and early Irish harp.

In this chapter I would like to explore the craftsmanship of early Irish harp making and how the natural landscape informs this craft. I am interested in specific, unconventional work methods used in harp making where the maker leans into the Irish landscape to construct the instrument.

Firstly I would like to explore the different woods used in early Irish harp making. There are twenty eight trees and shrubs listed in an "old Irish law-text" which determines the nativity of the species being to Ireland. The list is separated into four categories - 'lords of the wood' (*airig fedo*), 'commoners of

the wood' (*aithig fhedo*), 'lower divisions of the wood' (*fodla fedo*), and 'bushes of the wood' (*losa fedo*), (Kelly, 1999). Of this list many trees have been used for early Irish harp making.

Selecting the appropriate wood is a crucial part of harp making, as different woods effect the sound and overall appearance of the harp. Wood is individual and unpredictable. The climate and landscape the tree was grown in has a direct effect on how the tree develops. Trees growing near the coast or in open spaces tend to be unruly, the branches sprawl outwards due to oceanic winds. Trees in a forrest shoot upwards as there is not enough room around them to stretch horizontally and they are more sheltered from the wind. These trees are better for harp making as there are less knots and branches. The climate of which the tree grows in determines the density and pattern of growth rings. It also impacts the shape and size of tree. When the growth rings are close, the sound emitted is loud and bright. An example of this is Scots Pine: this wood was a common enough wood used by old harp makers and still is. It can grow throughout a cold climate so its grains are close together - giving the sound a ringing, resonant quality (wirestrungharp.com, ca 2010- 2021).

Trees are also believed to hold powerful healing abilities and there is deep symbolism and lore associated with different Irish trees. Willow tends to be a favourite in early Irish harp making, however it is now rare and hard to find so alder is a good substitute. Willow is sweet and bright sounding. The willow tree acts as a symbol for rebirth and is associated with feminine and lunar energies (Patton, p391 2010). Alder which is used in the Downhill harp, shares properties similar to willow but is heavier in weight and is denser which lends itself better

for carving (wirestrung.com, ca 2010-2021). This tree is associated with battle and protection. Applewood - which is a dense and durable wood, is “primarily associated with eternity, immortality love and beauty” (Patton, 2010, p. 395,). Though links between symbolism and trees have formed, I have not come across any studies indicating that harp makers have ever considered tree symbolism in their harp making. However, I think it's a really interesting concept to consider when studying the form of the instrument.

The reason why I have included a brief analysis on the materiality of wood used in harp making is because I see them as a direct link from the Irish landscape to the way different early Irish harps sound. As the harp maker works with different woods they develop a sensitivity and understanding to the subtleties in tone that each wood reveals. (Berkeley, 2021)

When considering the art of craftsmanship in harp making I believe it is relevant to discuss Peter Kilroy. There is a strong connection between the land and Kilroy's craftsmanship.

In the RTE documentary 'Hands' (episode 15) 1989, directed and produced by David Shaw Smith and his wife Sally, we learn about the Kilroy family, who moved to rural Kerry just outside of Kenmare to unlock a “forgotten sound” (Shaw Smith, 1989), drawing on landscape to reveal its hidden secrets and materials used in harp making.



Fig. 3 *Hands* (1989) David Shaw Smith, [Online] <https://hands.ie/product/harp-making/>

Kilroy honours the ancient way of harp making and creates early Irish harps based on the shape of the 'Trinity College' harp. He makes two different sizes - the larger twenty nine string and a twenty five string. Kilroy used wood local to him, mainly willow which is as noted, to be a very responsive, suitable and common wood for harp making.

I was immediately inquisitive of the non - conventional harp making practices and theories of Peter Kilroy. After hollowing the soundbox, while the wood is still fresh Kilroy buries it in the bog to absorb minerals and oils from the earth. Burying the wood in peat deepens the colour, it is also believed that by doing this, it acts as a defence from woodworm. I reached out to Simon Chadwick to learn more about this process. This technique is not often practiced in harp making, but in traditional furniture making, so perhaps that is what inspired Kilroy. Breton harp maker Joel Herrou adopted this technique into his work when hearing about Kilroy's methods (Berkeley, 2021). Kilroy would leave the soundbox lie in the bog for three months and when extracted, gave it another three months to dry.

I visited Paul Dooley, previously mentioned, who is an early Irish harp maker and performer based in the west coast of Clare to find out more about such topics. Dooley, who was once commissioned to make a harp, having rested in the bog for a period of time, describes the process as being nightmarish. With the temperamental and expanding nature of the wood it is a very blind mission when burying the wood in the bog, with many factors playing against the maker. It took him a number of attempts for the wood to remain intact and unflawed, lengthening the process drastically with the cons outweighing the pros. It is merely a fantastical and idealised notion which does not lend itself well to harp making itself. (Berkeley, 2021)

Though burying the parts of the harp in the bog may not be practical, and for the most part troublesome, the concept is beautiful. I can only imagine what it would be like to play an instrument having gone through such a process. Not only is

that harp an extremely beautiful and alluring instrument, having spent time sleeping in the anaerobic environment where old Irish artefacts, bog butter and even bog bodies have been found in seems deeply enchanting.

Turning to the bog yet again, Kilroy extracts bog pine buried deep in the peat. The method of extracting bog wood was prevalent in times of forestry shortage; woodworkers turned to the bogs to extract wood buried under the peat. The wood has absorbed minerals from the earth which affects the sound created. Silica salt which is included in the mineral composition of the earth improves the harps natural resonance (Shaw Smith, 1989). The wood Kilroy extracted for his back board could be from five to ten thousand years old, and has grown for around three hundred years (Shaw Smith, 1989). This practice is not common in harp making. When digging for bog wood it is hard to tell if the wood will be suitable or not, it's a very unreliable, blind practice, though has its charm.

In this episode there is a brief mentioning of druidic connections to early Irish harp making and its ties to Ogham scripture. Corrie Kilroy - Peter's wife, who is also a harp player believed that the "harp was once the symbol and transmitter of a druidic knowledge of the alchemy of sound". (Shaw Smith, 1989). This controversial theory was written about by Sean O'Boyle, 'Ogham: The Poet's Secret', however his work was full of inaccuracies (Berkeley, 2021)

The early Irish harp requires its maker to be responsive and have a deep understanding of the natural landscape of Ireland. By leaning into the natural landscape of Ireland, the maker may access certain attributes only accustomed

to nature, the maker puts their trust into the land and creates a unique instrument.

Chapter 3

Contemporary early Irish harp makers and the craftsmanship of early Irish harp making.

The early Irish harp has been played for centuries, but where is it now? True, we might see it when we have taxes due, or when we fumble through coins to pay for a parking ticket, or perhaps when drinking stout, but when do we ever see or hear a real harp? Who is responsible for making harps now? In this final chapter I would like to discuss the role of the contemporary harp maker in Ireland.

Being a harp player gives me an insight into the music and workings of the Irish harp. I felt compelled to meet with a fellow female harp player and modern day harp maker to discuss the instrument and learn more about the building process. This lead me to Natalie Surina who is a harp maker and player based in Connemara. Surina makes reconstructions of ancient wire strung harps including the 'Trinity College', 'Queen Mary' and 'Downhill' harp along with her own design of a smaller portable harp.

I was welcomed into her stove heated studio, surrounded by neatly stacked woods of different origins, a large scale sketch of the 'Downhill Harp' pinned onto the wall, in the middle of the studio there was the early beginnings of the

'Trinity Harp' shaped from willow. We sat at her desk beside the fire with her rescued greyhound who wore a knitted jumper and discussed her work.

With a background in Irish mythology studies, Surina moved from her home in Moscow to Ireland in the early 2005. Surina accidentally stumbled upon harp making when wishing to own her own early Irish harp, which she was unable to afford at the time. With a firm interest in Irish mythology and literature, it was always a dream of hers to play the early Irish harp. First based on Inis Mór where she practiced self sufficiency and organic farming, Surina then embarked on a harp making apprentice with renowned luthier Paul Doyle in Galway city.

Not only is Surina an established harp maker but is also an extremely talented player, this informs how she builds her harps and what tone she needs, how the string tension should feel and what sound qualities she strives for, which she describes as "very bright and sweet" and "clear in the treble". (Berkeley, R., 2021)

Being a mainly male dominated career or industry I wondered how this may impact Surina. She retold an incident when exhibiting her harps in her community hall when a local man undermined and discredited her hard work and skill by accusing of not constructing any of the harps, insisting another man had done it. However, she laughs this off. When she first moved to Inis Mór, Surina met a female carpenter and at the time was shocked that a woman was working in such a "masculine job" (Berkeley, R., 2021), though years later she found herself working in a similar trade. This demonstrates a positive progression in redefining gender roles. Though her initial reaction to the female



Fig. 4 Natalie Surina (c 2010- 2020) *Decorated Professional Jerpoint* [Online]. Available at <http://eriuharps.com/index.php/instruments/clairseach/left-side-web/>



Fig. 5 Natalie Surina (c 2010 - 2020) *Customised Downhill harp* [online] Available at <http://eriuharps.com/index.php/instruments/clairseach/imgp3083/>

carpenter was of confusion and shock, I believe it also proved to Surina that craftsmanship was not just for men, but for everyone.

I wanted to learn more about the tedious task of decoration in Surina's harp making. Being the only harp maker in Ireland to deliver the most accurate replication of the ornamentation on the trinity harp, Surina can spend up to eight hours a day hunched over a harp elaborately decorating the wood free hand. Without anyone assisting her, and as her main source of income, Surina relies on her own skill and expertise to create the instrument. It took years of practice to develop and perfect this skill. Each side of the harp displays different motifs which are applied using lapis lazuli and egg tempura. The decoration stage is one of her most valued times in the task of making an early Irish harp.

Another important part of the process is the relationship formed with the client. It is highly personal work and she likes to make it as much about the customer and know exactly what they desire in a harp. This lengthens the process greatly but enables her to create a bespoke instrument.

The length of time it takes to build an early Irish harp varies, but if you look at it from the beginning stage of choosing and cutting the tree, drying it, selecting appropriate parts of the tree to use in the harp, to putting it all together, applying on the brass sheeting and and tuning pegs, stringing it, tuning it and decorating it, it could take years. The process is long and requires you to be in tune with your materials. It is admirable for someone to dedicate so much of their time to the art of harp making.

There is always uncertainty when it comes to workmanship. In the case of harp making there can be cracking, bending, snapping strings, harps have even known to explode from all the tension caused when strung (Berkeley, 2021). The possibility of such incidents and failure makes the harp sound sweeter when completed. There is great admiration for the skill, patience and talent the maker has when constructing the instrument. The love of labour shines brightly through and can always be heard through the sound of a well made harp. When writing on the risks and spontaneity of workmanship Pye states that

“This perhaps has special importance because our natural environment, and all naturally formed or grown things, show similar spontaneity and individuality on a basis of order and uniformity.” (Pye, 1968,p. 344)

I met with Paul Dooley in his workshop in the west of Clare when writing this work to discuss harp making. Both makers were extremely humble and eager to share their knowledge with me. The craftsmanship of early Irish harp making cannot be bought or be learned over night, there is no convenience to it, it is a high risk-high reward practice. The craftsman must give themselves up to their trade, when I spoke with Surina she informed me that she prepares all her meals for the week in order to time save and devote all her time to her craft. It is a lived tradition, sacrificing ones time and social life to spend developing the craft. When considering craftsmanship the poet Carol Moldaw encapsulates and celebrates the pursuit.

“Craft, at its core, is attentiveness...Attentiveness involves both openness and discipline; it involves taking risks, trying things out, tearing

it all up and trying something else, perhaps again and again. Like many people, I also believe that absorption in craft has another equally important benefit: it works to divert the controlling part of the mind so that the unconscious, the normally heavily guarded and caged treasure, is freed.” (Moldaw, 2012, p. 121)

Conclusion

In this study, we have begun at the first known records of the early Irish harp, observing the position of the harp player and instrument around the the time of the 12th century. By later discussing the symbolism of the early Irish harp and its role during colonial rule in Ireland, determines the importance of the early Irish harp in a contemporary setting and clarifies why the harp is so deeply ingrained in both Irish culture and in the makeup of our nation’s DNA. Being present in Ireland for centuries it is crucial for us to honour and preserve the early Irish harp and the craftsmanship surrounding it.

The correspondence between the early Irish harp with nature adds great depth to the instrument. It also emphasises its salience in Irish culture. Being able to create, and then play an instrument that links the maker, player, listener to the Irish landscape is rare and extraordinary.

Furthermore, by interviewing modern harp makers we learn about the role of harp maker in a contemporary setting, proving that the early Irish harp is still relevant in todays society. Discussing the early Irish harp through the lens of craftsmanship and artistry - instead of simply ‘instrument making’, has been

rarely discussed. Coming from an artistic approach we consider the harp in a more emotive and sensitive way.

Though this study focuses on the craftsmanship and history and the early Irish harp, the Neo-Irish harp is also important in the culture and traditions of the Irish nation. Organisations including 'The Achill International Harp Festival', 'The HHSI', 'Harp Ireland', and 'Cairde na Cruite' enable harp playing to be accessible, while promoting the music of both the early and neo - Irish harp, and thus, keeping the culture alive and relevant.

The neo - Irish harp is also being used in popular music in Ireland. In her debut EP, Gemma Dunleavy released 'Up De Flats' in 2020. Narrating stories and celebrating her often misrepresenting and misunderstood inner city community, we hear the harp music of a harp player from West of Ireland intertwined with the 90s, pop, dance music produced by Dunleavy. The Irish harp - be it Early or Neo remains current and relevant to our society, it continues to progress and evolve, stretching beyond boundaries or limitations.

Early Irish harp making - in my admittedly biased opinion - is a pure embodiment of love. One does begin the craft in order to make money, nor are they drawn to it for personal gain. There are risks and sacrifices the maker must take in order to strive for greatness in their craft. It is full of trial and error, it takes time, focus, perseverance, skill, inspiration and of course love. The tradition of early Irish harp making connects us with our past, present and future, long may the tradition survive and flourish.

Bibliography

Armstrong, R (1904), *The Irish and The Highland Harps*, Edinburgh : Douglas D.

Berkeley R., (2021) Interview with Natalie Surina, (2 December)

Berkeley R., (2021) Email to Simon Chadwick (16 December)

Berkeley R., (2021) Interview with Paul Dooley (17 December)

Breac Maedóic reliquary (shrine of St. Mogue) Available <https://www.earlygaelicharp.info/mogue/> Accessed January 2022

Cambrensis, G. (c. 1188) *Topographia Hibernica*, pp. 71 -72

Chadwick, S. *The Early Irish Harp*, *Early Music*, vol. 36, no. 4, Oxford University Press, 2008, pp. 521–31, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27655252>.

Dooley, P. (2014), 'Reconstructing the Medieval Irish Harp', *Galpin Society Journal*

Epic, *How the harp became the symbol of Ireland*, Available: <https://epicchq.com/story/how-the-harp-became-the-symbol-of-ireland/> (ca. 2016 -2021) Accessed: Nov. 2021

Kelly, F. *The Old Irish tree-list*, *Celtica*, vol 11 (1976) pp. 107-124

Lanier, S. C. "‘It Is New-Strung and Shan’t Be Heard’: Nationalism and Memory in the Irish Harp Tradition." *British Journal of Ethnomusicology*, vol. 8, British Forum for Ethnomusicology, 1999, pp. 1–26, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3060850>.

Moldaw, C. "Craft as Conduit." The Massachusetts Review, vol. 53, no. 1, The Massachusetts Review, Inc., 2012, pp. 116–22, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23210173>.

O'Donnell, M. 'Ireland's Harp: shaping a nation's identity - (March., 2015) Transcript' City Public Libraries and Archive Podcast

Patton, J.P. (2010), The Poet's Ogam: A Living Magical Tradition, Belfast: Uliad, Erin.

Pye, D. (1968), 'The Nature and Art of Workmanship' in Adamson, G (2010) The Craft Reader, Oxford and New York; Berg, pp. 340-353

Rimmer, J. (1964) 'The Morphology of the Irish Harp', The Galpin Society Journal Vol. 17, pp. 39- 49

Shaw-Smith, D. (1989), 'Harp Making', Hands, no.15.

Trinity College Dublin (n.d) Battle of Clontarf, 'The Brian Boru Harp', Available <https://dh.tcd.ie/clontarf/The%20Brian%20Boru%20Harp> Accessed October 2021

The Historical Harp society of Ireland, (n.d) 'What is an early Irish harp?' Available: <https://www.irishharp.org>, Accessed October 2021

WireStrungharp, 'Historic Harps', (2010- 2021) Available: https://www.wirestrungharp.com/harps/historic_harps/ Accessed: October 2021