

Perspectives on Irish Harping, 2012.

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The Irish Harp Census was an initiative carried out in 2011 by the author and *Cairde na Cruite* with the support of Dundalk Institute of Technology.¹ It aimed to find out information about key issues in harping in Ireland today. These included: gender, age profile, geographic location, education, names of harp teachers, number of years playing, performance contexts, festival attendance, types of harps played, types of music played, teaching and learning methodologies, performance on other instruments, teaching and level of professionalism. This article presents a contemporary analysis of the harping tradition in Ireland based on previous research and the data from the Irish Harp Census.²

As a committee member and secretary of harping organisation *Cairde na Cruite* the author oversaw the 2011 harp census. *Cairde na Cruite* (Friends of the Harp) was founded in 1960 with the aim of promoting the Irish harp. The organisation is still in existence today. Activities include an annual international harp festival, concerts, publication of new music and music collections, harp hire schemes and the facilitation of harp teaching.³ The impetus for this survey came as a result of the growing number of harpers and opportunities for harping in Ireland and was an attempt to capture previously un-quantified data in relation to the variety of activities, styles and performance contexts now in evidence. It has yielded interesting information for both academics and musicians alike. The original census survey form and a graphic representation of the results are now available on the *Cairde na Cruite*

¹ The author wishes to acknowledge the generous support given by *Ionad Taighde Ceoil*, The Centre for Research in Music at Dundalk Institute of Technology for this research.

² See for example: Helen Lawlor, *Contemporary Irish Harping* (PhD Dissertation, University College Dublin, 2010) and Helen Lawlor, *It Is New Strung: Irish Harping 1900-2010* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2012) (forthcoming).

³ For further details see: <http://www.cairdenacruite.com/about.html>, accessed 6th April, 2012.

website at: <http://www.cairdenacruite.com/pdf/news/CensusGraphs.pdf>. Census forms were posted to harp teachers and harpers throughout Ireland. The distribution through teachers proved particularly effective as they have first hand access to a range and breadth of harpers.

The instrument in question generally has 34 strings (gut, nylon or carbon fibre) and is semi-chromatic, fitted with a semi-tonal lever on each string. The harp rests on the right shoulder, with the right hand playing the treble and the left hand playing the bass. This harp is sometimes referred to as the ‘neo-Irish’ harp. A comprehensive organological study is Joan Rimmer’s *The Irish Harp*.⁴ Research into the history of the instrument has been carried out by Colette Moloney, Gráinne Yeats, S.C. Lanier, and this author, amongst others.⁵

Gender

Issues of gender have long been a central issue in the tradition. While the twentieth century has been dominated by a very close association between females and the harp, in previous centuries the opposite was the case. Renowned Irish harpers and composers Turlough Carolan (1670-1738) and Denis Hempson (1695-1807) were taught by females. Bunting noted that ‘at twelve years old he [Hempson] began to learn the harp under Bridget O’Cahan; “for,” as he said, “in these old time, *women* as well as men were taught the Irish harp in the best families, and every old Irish family had harps in plenty”’.⁶ However, there is little evidence of compositions by females in the harp repertoire today, thus suggesting that either the music of female harper-composers was not passed on orally and therefore didn’t survive; or, the more likely scenario, that while women taught the harp they did not necessarily have the same

⁴ Joan Rimmer, *The Irish Harp* 3rd Edition (Dublin: Mercier Press 1984).

⁵ Colette Moloney, *The Irish Music Manuscripts of Edward Bunting (1773-1843)* (Dublin: Irish Traditional Music Archive, 2000); Gráinne Yeats, *Féile Na gCruitirí, Béal Feirste 1792* (Dublin: Gael Linn, 1980); S. C. Lanier, “‘It Is New-Strung and Shan’t Be Heard’: Nationalism and Memory in the Irish Harp Tradition, *British Journal of Ethnomusicology* 8 (1999); Helen Lawlor, see footnote 2.

⁶ Edward Bunting, *The Ancient Music of Ireland* (Dublin: Hodges and Smith, 1840), p. 74.

career and performance opportunities as their male counterparts in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. There is evidence of female participation at the Granard Balls of 1781, 1872 and 1783 and likewise at the Belfast Harp Festival of 1792 in which Rose Mooney was third-place prize winner.⁷

During the nineteenth century both musical fashions and contexts changed. The rise in popularity of the European concert harp and music for drawing-room settings coupled with the end of the social order that supported the male-dominated travelling harper system resulted in widespread changes in the harp tradition. The introduction of Egan's portable harp, complete with semi-tone ditals allowed for the introduction of elements of chromaticism into the realm of Irish harping. In addition, the beautifully ornate designs and petite size of these harps made them ideal for music making by ladies in the drawing rooms of the nineteenth century. Egan's harps were popularised further when Lady Morgan, the Marchioness of Abercorn and Lady Aberdeen purchased these harps. Transmission methods also changed from oral to literacy-based and by 1829 Egan had to reprint his 1822 book *Harp Primer*.⁸ The feminization of the harp continued into the twentieth century when the harp was taught by nuns in girls Catholic Convent primary and secondary schools, such as Loretto Abbey, Rathfarnham and Dominican College Sion Hill.

The history of the harp in the twentieth century is one that is very much dominated by females. Interestingly, the earliest twentieth century publication (of arrangements) for Irish harp is by a female, Mother Attracta Coffey of Loretto Abbey, Rathfarnham. She was a well-known teacher and arranger for the Irish harp, as was her successor Mother Alphonsus O'Connor.⁹ In the pre-revival period (up to the 1950s) Dublin-based family, Róisín, Máirín and Neassa Ní Shéaghda (also Ní Shé)

⁷ The Granard Balls of 1781-83 were organised in an attempt to revive the ailing harp tradition. They drew significant crowds but a limited number of harpers. For further details see: Bunting, *The Ancient Music of Ireland*, 1840.

⁸ William Henry Grattan Flood, *A History of Irish Music* (Dublin: Browne and Nolan Limited 1906)., p. 322.

⁹ Mother Attracta Coffey, *Irish Airs* (London, Vincent Music Co., 1902).

were very active as teachers and performers. During the revival Mary O'Hara, Caitlín Watkins and Deirdre Ní Fhlíonn popularised the harp on the world stage to a level not previously witnessed in the tradition. In 1960 *Cairde na Cruite* was founded by Gráinne Yeats, Shelia Larchet Cuthbert and Mercedes Garvey (among others) to promote Irish harping. While this organisation was not formed exclusively by or for female harp players, the central body of work carried out was by female harp players. Even with the emergence of traditional-style harping in the 1980s, the most prominent harp players were female, although Derek Bell and Michael Rooney did much to redress the gender imbalance. While there are more male harpers in the tradition today, it remains an overtly female tradition. The harp census results returned a 94% to 6% female-male response, thus showing quite clearly that the tradition is being experienced and transmitted by females in the over-whelming majority.

2. Age Profile

The revival of the harp tradition began in the 1950s, first when the harp was popularised as an accompaniment to song; secondly in the 1960s with *Cairde na Cruite* and the popularisation of art music and the Irish harp and third; from the 1980s onwards with the emergence of traditional-music style harping. One of the central founding aims of *Cairde na Cruite* was to facilitate the teaching of the Irish harp. This was done by setting up an annual residential summer course for harpers (1985) and by making resources available to student harpers.¹⁰ These resources have proved very valuable to student harpers as before their publication there was little available repertoire for the Irish harp, particularly of a pedagogical nature. In her 2010 MA thesis, Dawn Finnerty analysed the pedagogical repertoire for the Irish harp

¹⁰ Mercedes Bolger & Gráinne Yeats, *Sounding Harps* (Dublin, *Cairde na Cruite* 1990-1998); Sheila Larchet-Cuthbert, *The Irish Harp Book*, (Dublin, Mercier Press, 1975); Aibhlín Mc Crann, Áine Ní Dhubhghaill, & Anne-Marie O'Farrell, *Rogha na gCruitirí, Harpers' Choice* (Dublin, *Cairde na Cruite* 2010).

and highlighted the importance of this repertoire in the transmission of the harping tradition.¹¹ Harp lessons are now offered at a range of institutions including the DIT Conservatory of Music and Drama (Dublin), the Royal Irish Academy of Music (Dublin), Kylemore College (Dublin), through the network of Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann branches (Ireland, Britain and U.S.A), the Meath Harp School (Meath), The Irish Harp Centre (Limerick) and many other schools throughout the country. An active network of harp teachers is essential for the survival and promotion of the tradition. The census results returned the following data in relation to age profiles:

Table 1 Age Profile

Age Range	Percentage
0-12	8%
12-18	31%
19-25	22%
25-30	4%
30-40	9%
40-50	3%
50+	19%
N/A	4%

The highest single age group is the 12-18 year olds. This is the group that are presently at full-time secondary school and most likely to be engaged in instrumental tuition on a regular basis. The 19-25 year old group is the second largest group, representing the most common age group for third-level level (university) education. It is unsurprising that 61% of respondents were under the age of 25. This is most likely due to two reasons. Firstly, the census was distributed partially through the network of Irish harp teachers and therefore it reached the student cohort of harpers

¹¹ Dawn Finnerty, *Irish Contemporary Harp Music* (MA Thesis, Dundalk Institute of Technology, 2011).

with great efficiency. Secondly, it shows the growing popularity of the Irish harp and the growing number of harp players in Ireland. The various stages of revival over the past 60 years have consolidated the tradition and facilitated this new popularity of the harp.

3. Geographical Spread

In his introduction to 'Transforming Tradition; Folk Music Revivals Examined', Neil V. Rosenberg offers the following characterisation of revivals and revivalists 'they constitute an urban middle-class intellectual community that, in seeking alternates to mass culture music, develops an interest in, appropriates, and consumes the music produced by the people for whom informed scholars act as advocates'.¹² Initially in the revival of the harp during the twentieth century Rosenberg's comments would have had significant validity. Much of the harping activity was centred around urban areas with a particular focus on Dublin. The main sites for education and performance were in the capital (Loretto Abbey, Rathfarnham, Dominican College, Sion Hill, DIT Conservatory of Music and Drama and the Royal Irish Academy of Music), as were many of the teachers. In discussing the 1970s Máire Ní Chathasaigh explained that at that time the harp was still strongly associated with urban areas: 'There were hardly any teachers outside of Dublin. There was nobody decent at all outside Dublin, actually. The harp had become very much an urban instrument.'¹³ The results of the harp census from 2011 show quite a different picture. While Dublin still represents the highest percentage of harpers, at 28%, 21 different counties were represented in this survey. Meath also showed a high percentage of harpers with 21% of respondents listing Meath as their home county. This is most likely due to the existence of the Meath Harp Academy, directed by Dearbhail Finnegan. The remaining 19 counties were spread evenly throughout the country, north, south, east

¹² Neil V. Rosenberg, 'Introduction' in *Transforming Tradition. Folk Music Revivals Examined* edited by Neil V. Rosenberg, 1-26 (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), p. 19.

¹³ Mairéad Sullivan, *Celtic Women in Music* (Kingston, Ontario: Quarry Press Inc, 1999), p. 135.

and west; including counties Antrim, Derry and Down from Northern Ireland. This even spread throughout the county represents an important development for Irish harping as it shows a maturation of the tradition as it spreads around the country, no longer dependent on a small group of individuals in the capital city. The proliferation of harp schools and teachers throughout the country is testament to this.

4. Respondents Presently Studying Harp and Harp Teachers

The survey posed the question ‘who is your present harp teacher?’. While 60% of respondents listed a teacher, 40% responded as not presently studying with a teacher. Those listed represented a cross-section of teachers operating across the full spectrum of harp styles including traditional-music style, art-music style and the early-Irish (or wire-strung) harp. This is a positive return as it shows the breadth of activity in harp teaching today. Furthermore, the fact that 40% replied as not studying with a teacher is also very positive. This shows that harpers are continuing to engage with the harp after finishing lessons and that the drop-out statistic is actually quite low. It is unsurprising that the larger number of respondents are students for two reasons, firstly as the census was partially distributed through teachers and secondly because of the sustained growth in popularity of the instrument which would imply a larger number of next-generation or student harpers than established ‘graduated’ harpers.

A further question asked respondents to list any harp teachers they had studied with in the past. The aim of this question was to ascertain who has been active in harp teaching over the twentieth century. The data returned listed a total of 76 different teachers, many of whom are still teaching today. It also showed a musical lineage back to the 1940s and thus a continuous system of transmission over the twentieth century is evident. This statistic further reinforces the successes of the various stages of harp revival over the course of the previous century. Harp transmission has proliferated throughout the country via a variety of different teachers. This is again

important in the further promotion of harping as it moves from a dependency on a small number of individuals to a more autonomous musical position, operating in a number of musical styles.

5. Number of Years Playing Harp

Respondents were asked how many years they had been playing the harp. The data returned showed a full range, from 1 year to between 70 and 79 years. 56% of respondents have been playing the harp for less than ten years; 20% have been playing from between 10 to 20 years and the remainder have been playing harp for over twenty years (excluding 6% of respondents that did not supply an answer for that question). This particular question gave more insight into the proportion of students versus non-student harpers presently active in the Irish harp scene. The majority are still at the student stage as it takes a substantial amount of time to master the harp. There are no present guidelines or statistics in relation to the average amount of time spent studying the harp but most students take harp lessons during the six years of secondary school and possibly several years either side of that. Further information in this area would be quite useful in terms of assessing transmission and educational practices for music in Ireland and may be possible to ascertain from any future research into the harp tradition.

6. Performance Contexts

One of the key factors in the division of styles in Irish harping is performance contexts. While these alone are not indicative of style and do not constitute style in itself, differing performance contexts are associated with both art-music and traditional-music styles. A further perspective also includes those performance contexts associated with the early-Irish harp. Traditional music-style harping occupies the same spaces and places as other mainstream traditional instruments. The most common performance contexts include informal traditional sessions (both

informal and paid), festivals and gigs. Harpers operating in the traditional-music style often play in ensembles, such as *grupaí cheoil* and smaller group ensembles. They perform as part of session groups at regular sessions throughout the country and at festival performances. Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann tour groups always feature a harper, who provides both accompaniment to the singers and instrumentalists and plays solo numbers.¹⁴ This form of harping has also been evident on recent commercial recordings, including that of Moya Brennan and Cormac de Barra.¹⁵ The harp is also used in commercial traditional bands, most notable at present are The Chieftains and Liadán. The experience of ensemble playing is important for any musician. The availability of such opportunities within traditional-music style aids the transmission of regional or other stylistic musical features and knowledge of the tradition in general. More importantly, however, they provide a social and community-based context for music making in a non-competitive or exam-based environment in which music making is experienced as an enjoyable social activity for its own sake.

Art-music style harping offers a similar type of musical experience to other art music instruments (such as piano, for example) and is often taught through the conservatory model of music education. A central problem for the Irish harp in this context is that it occupies a slightly ambiguous role as the concert harp is used for orchestral playing and thus many of the regular ensemble opportunities for art musicians are unavailable to the Irish harper. This is due to instrument construction rather than any agenda against the Irish harp; the concert harp is fully chromatic, with an average of 42 strings and therefore is compatible with the harmonic structures of western art music and has been used for such over the past two-hundred years. The Irish harp, on the other hand, is semi-chromatic with an average of 34 strings. It cannot offer composers the same flexibility in terms of harmonic range. Despite the

¹⁴ www.comhaltas.com

¹⁵ Moya Brennan & Cormac de Barra, *Voices & Harps*, 2011.

pioneering performances of some harpers (most notably Anne-Marie O’Farrell who has arranged concert harp music for Irish harp to great success) the Irish harp is not likely to replace the standard concert harp in orchestral contexts. Ensemble playing within the context of art-music style harping is more limited than that of traditional-music style. There are some opportunities, including harp ensembles and chamber ensembles but the relative lack of published music for Irish harp in ensemble creates a difficulty for the student harper. The experience of the art-music harper, particularly at the student stage, is often an individual or solo one, save for attendance at lessons or harp summer schools and festivals (such as *An Cúirt Cruitearachta* for example). Table 2 presents the division of performance contexts returned by harp census respondents.

Table 2 Performance Contexts

Context	Percentage
Traditional Sessions	9%
Chamber Music	4%
Concerts	8%
Weddings	8%
Liturgical Contexts	9%
Festivals	6%
At Home	16%
Hotels	5%
Pubs	3%
Background Music	7%
Corporate Gigs	4%
School	7%
College/University	3%
Exams	8%

Feis (Annual Competition)	3%
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There is a well-balanced spread between a variety of performance contexts, including secular and sacred in addition to those associated with the art-music and traditional-music styles. It is possible that the high return rate from student harpers contributed to the relatively low percentage of harpers playing in pubs but this is also a recent phenomenon in Irish harping in general. The context types can be separated into two divisions; those applying to professional or established harpers and those applying to students. The former include sessions, chamber music, concerts, weddings, liturgical contexts, festivals, at home, hotels, pubs, background music and corporate gigs. The latter include school, college, exams, feis, concerts, liturgical contexts and at home.

One statistic that is slightly worrying is the 16% of respondents whose main forum for music making is in the home. While music-making in the home in itself is not a problematic activity, the age range and geographic spread of those respondents was even across all parameters. According to this survey then, 16% of harpers experience little or no music making as a social activity and concentrate their experience on solo music making in their private homes. Allowances can of course be made to the figures for respondents who engage in ensemble practices in the home but these would most likely be minimal. While ensemble playing is not fundamentally more important than solo playing (and also, solo performance is essential in terms of practice and finding one's own musical voice), it contributes to the transmission of style, companionship, sense of belonging and identity as a musician. It is a concern if a high proportion of harpers are not experiencing the full spectrum of performance opportunities. This is an area that requires further study, possibly across a range of instruments and styles. It is quite likely that a similar study on piano playing in Ireland might yield a similar statistic. Furthermore, it highlights an important issue for music organisations, educational institutes and funding bodies, all of whom can

have a positive impact on the musical experience of both students and non-students alike.

8. Harp Festivals

Festivals occupy a significant role in the transmission and promotion of music making in general and harping in particular. There are several dedicated Irish harp festivals: *An Cúirt Cruitearachta* (A court of harpers) is run by *Cáirde na Cruite* in June each year.¹⁶ This is a week-long residential festival, located in Termonfeckin, Co. Louth. The festival offers harp tuition for all standards, workshops, lectures and evening recitals. The classes are offered in group format with an exposure to a range of teachers and styles. For the past four years a singing teacher (Seosaimhín Ní Bheaglaoich) has also been present and has provided group classes in *sean-nós* singing to all participants. There are no competitions at this festival and it caters exclusively to harpers. Not only does it provide tuition of the highest calibre to students but it also offers the much-needed social music-making opportunities that have proved difficult to cater for in some contexts.

The O'Carolan Harp, Cultural and Heritage Festival, based in Nobber, Co. Meath celebrates its 25th anniversary in 2012.¹⁷ This annual weekend-long festival offers workshops in both harp and other traditional instruments in addition to competitions, concerts, lectures and a historical tour. While it caters for a range of instruments the harp is the primary focus of the festival. The timing is also appropriate; it is run each October and thus offers an Autumn offering to student harpers, when the majority of festivals take place during the summer months. The annual O'Carolan Harp and Traditional Music Festival in Keadue, Co. Roscommon takes place the first weekend in August.¹⁸ This festival offers harp and instrumental classes with harp competitions and is a central event in the harping calendar, along

¹⁶ <http://www.cairdenacruite.com/festival.html>

¹⁷ <http://www.carolanfestival.com>

¹⁸ <http://www.ocarolanharpfestival.ie>

with Nobber and *An Cúirt Cruitearachta*. *Scoil na gCláirseach* offers tuition and concerts on the early-Irish harp and is run by the Historical Harp Society of Ireland each August.¹⁹ Their focus is on the transmission and interpretation of early music techniques and styles with an emphasis on the music of the Irish harper composers and the eighteenth century harp collections. This event is the only festival dedicated to the early Irish harp each year. Other festivals and summer schools including *Scoil Éigse*, the Willie Clancy festival, and the Joe Mooney Summer School in Drumshambo offer traditional harp classes alongside other instruments.

The harp census yielded some results in relation to festival participation. The most highly attended festival was *An Cúirt Cruitearachta* with 36% of respondents having attended this festival. 16% had attended the The O’Carolan Harp, Cultural and Heritage Festival in Nobber and 14% had attended the O’Carolan Harp and Traditional Music Festival in Keadue. These figures show that out of the respondents in this survey 66% had chosen to attend festivals that specialise in the harp. This may indicate a further preference for solo playing, or more positively, a dedication to and focus on the instrument. The remaining figures represent a variety of national and international festivals such as the World Harp Congress, the Festival Interceltique, Lorient, the Dinan Harp Festival.

9. Instruments

Table 3 shows the division of harps played by survey respondents.

Table 3 Type of Harp

Type of Harp	Percentage
Irish Harp	76%
Concert Harp	5%

¹⁹ <http://www.irishharpschool.com>

Both (Irish and Concert)	15%
Early-Irish/Wire-Strung Harp	3%

91% of respondents play Irish harp with 5% and 3% respectively playing concert and early-Irish harps. A further statistic showed that 77% of respondents also played another instrument, with only 22% playing only harp. Out of that 77%, 59% of those played piano. Further research is needed into these musical choices to ascertain information regarding performance contexts and styles. However, the issues regarding musical experience remain relevant for those 59% whose other musical outlet (piano) is often associated with solo music making. A wide range of instruments were listed: tin-whistle, fiddle, concertina, banjo, bodhrán, accordion, mandolin, piano accordion, flute, guitar, organ, keyboard, voice, violin, viola, clarinet, viola da gamba, cello, bassoon and recorder. These represent a range across both traditional and art-music styles. There is no specific preference shown for particular instruments, apart from the piano. Furthermore, melody, accompaniment and percussion instruments are represented.

10. Types of Music Played

Colette Moloney explained in her 2000 publication that ‘as there was a stipulation at the Harp Festival [Belfast, 1792] that harpers play only Irish music, and also considering Bunting’s subsequent interest in notating this ... it is possible that the harpers had other styles of music in their repertory which were not collected.’²⁰ In terms of historical context therefore, it is quite possible that harpers always played a variety of styles, even with the limited harmonic range of the early-Irish harps. Moloney also makes the point that ‘The harpers at the Belfast Festival [1792] appear to have performed in at least two ways: accompanying singing (or possibly recitation)

²⁰ Moloney, *The Irish Music Manuscripts of Edward Bunting (1773-1843)*, p. 87.

and playing solo instrumental pieces ... there are references to indicate that Higgins sang, and that Black 'sung to the harp very sweetly'.²¹ In the 2011 harp census respondents were asked about the types of music they played. This was a multiple choice question and there was no upper limit on the number of choices they could select. 94% of respondents selected Irish traditional music as the type of music they played on the harp. 40% used the harp for harp accompaniment to voice with 43% using the harp for accompaniment to other instruments. 61% play Classical music on the harp, 27% play Baroque, 23% play Romantic and 24% play Contemporary music. Other categories were early-music (14%), jazz (9%) and chamber music (22%).

Definitions of 'traditional Irish music' are fluid and varied, ranging from music of the harper composers to the dance tune repertory. John O'Flynn's 2009 publication examined definitions of Irish music and showed the breadth of associations and descriptions of Irish traditional music.²² Further investigation into harpers' definitions of what constitutes Irish music would most likely yield interesting ethnomusicological data. The fact that 94% of respondents included Irish traditional music (by any definition) shows once more the strength of the harp revival. Since the late 1970s/ early 1980s the harp has been assimilated into mainstream traditional music. At that time the harp was a severely minority instrument but over the proceeding thirty years it has gained widespread popularity within traditional music.

11. Teaching/Learning Methodology

Irish music is often described as being an oral tradition. Indeed elements of orality are essential in the transmission of certain musical and stylistic features, namely ornamentation, variation, rhythmic emphasis and styles. However, there are also available to the musician music collections dating back over two hundred years. The Bunting collections (1796, 1809 and 1840) are of particular interest to harpers as

²¹ Moloney, *The Irish Music Manuscripts of Edward Bunting (1773-1843)*, p. 86.

²² John O'Flynn, *The Irishness of Irish Music* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2009).

Edward Bunting (1773-1843) collected the music of the harpers at the 1792 Belfast Harp Festival and subsequently from harpers he met there. His collections give an unparalleled insight into what and how the harpers of eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries played, at a time when the ancient harping tradition was severely diminishing.²³ Further collections of music in the twentieth century provide access to the traditional music repertory. The unique position of the Irish harp as an instrument that straddles several style worlds has resulted in the availability of a significant amount of published works for the Irish harp. Sheila Larchet Cuthbert's 1975 *Irish Harp Book* contains works commissioned by *Cairde na Cruite* from contemporary Irish composers. Scores are necessary for their transmission and therefore is music literacy.

The survey showed that 95% of respondents used literacy-based methods for at least part of their transmission. 60% either learn or teach both with music and orally; 35% learn or teach only with music and 5% learn or teach only orally. It is reassuring to see that 60% of respondents have capabilities in both oral and literate methodologies as this renders the entire stock of oral and written repertoire potentially available to them. However, the orality of Irish traditional music (of which 94% of respondents participate in) demands elements of oral tradition. It would be helpful then in terms of a holistic approach to transmission for all students/teachers to employ both oral and literate methods in learning.

14. Description

Table 4 shows the descriptions chosen by census respondents.

Table 4 Description of harpers

Description	Percentage
Amateur	24%

²³ For further information see: Moloney, *The Irish Music Manuscripts of Edward Bunting (1773-1843)*.

Semi-Professional	9%
Professional	14%
Full-time student (Primary School)	9%
Full-time student (Secondary School)	24%
Full-time student (Third Level)	18%
N/A	3%

51% of respondents are in full-time education. These are the next generation of musicians and therefore this is a healthy statistic for harping. It shows increased uptake of the instrument from generation to generation and the success of the various stages of the harp revival. 14% of respondents described themselves as professional harpers. This again is very positive as the harp clearly offers a viable opportunity for sustained employment, through teaching and a variety of performance contexts. The 24% of respondents listed at amateur represent a cohort of respondents who are engaging in music making for enjoyment purposes rather than for financial or education gain. This is again a very positive outcome of the work that has been done by harpers and harping organisations over the past fifty years.

Conclusion

The Irish harp is experiencing levels of popularity never previously experienced and is now operating across a variety of styles (traditional, art and early music). The stages of revival from the 1950s to today have resulted in a diverse and continuously growing harp scene both in Ireland and internationally. This article, and the census from which some of the data is drawn has shown that there are now a wide range of performance opportunities for harping, that traditional Irish music is of key importance and that unfortunately there still exists a gender imbalance in the tradition. Future research, which would be beneficial across a range of instruments could focus

on the length of time spent studying instruments in Ireland and the rationales behind performance contexts, choice of second instruments and perceptions of what constitutes Irish traditional music. Overall the results have been very positive and indicate the diversity and vitality of the harp tradition today.

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