

This article by Megan Metheney was first published in the October 2015 issue of the Sylvia Woods Harp Center e-Newsletter



You can find Megan's PDFs at www.harpcenter.com/Metheney

GREEN...the color I want my music to be... like a living, organic thing that grows and evolves. A musician's work goes through periods of hot and cold, summer and winter. I want my music to be something that happily differs from day to day and season to season yet remains alive and green.

I first saw the harp when a lady came to my grade school in Phoenix, Arizona to give a short concert and demonstration. She called two people out of the audience to join her on stage to try it out for themselves. She picked me! I found middle C. I played a glissando. It was a done deal. For the next year, my parents heard me talking about the harp harp harp harp and how I wanted to learn how to play the harp. It was burning inside me. Tears were shed. The harp found me like the magic wand found Harry Potter.

Now having played for over 25 years (my gracious parents gave in), the harp has become not only a passion but a profession. The music I play is a mix of jazz, folk, contemporary, and classical styles. I often work with songwriters, composers, dancers, visual artists, poets, and studio musicians. Our instrument is so unique, and I still feel like IT chooses me sometimes, like it wants me to find its resonance, its possibilities, and its magical voice not only by itself, but with other musicians and artists.

Green harp

I love the idea of "green" harp because it means that I can be myself from day to day and year to year, and allow my music to change and grow as I change and grow. For the past four years, I've been a full time mom. Now a mother of two girls, my time at the harp is very selective. When I get the luxury of tuning and sitting down to play, it's focused and juicy. I don't have time to take on every project that I want. I get to (have to) do only what truly gives me fulfillment.

Recently, I recorded an album of original compositions with vocalist/percussionist Rebekah West. We "discovered" a tiny chapel with unreal acoustics and decided to create music there. We now perform regularly together, and are super excited to be planning a concert tour of the US next summer. This the first time that I've really set out to play "my own" compositions, and even sing with the harp.



Another recent project has been *Bernard's Christmas*. I've taken several pieces by the French harp composer Bernard Andres and mixed them together with some of my favorite carols from Christmas to create something that I think sounds like peanut butter and jelly. I've really enjoyed this project, and it has lately taken the form of not only arranging and recording, but publishing the arrangements.

Education

I hold a BM in harp from the University of Arizona where I studied with jazz harpist Carrol McLaughlin and a MM from the University of Texas at Austin where I studied with Delaine Fedson. I also gained a *Premiere Prix* diploma from the music conservatory in Grasse, France. I cherish the memories of my first harp lessons at the age of 12 with Adrienne Bridgewater.

My formal education in harp has helped me lay a solid foundation in technique, repertoire, and performance. I am reminded of Pablo Picasso and the crazy unique paintings and he created after he was "trained" to be an artist. Kind of "out there" but very interesting! But if you look at his early stuff... still life, portraits, fruit. He spent years going through the process of learning how to paint and figuring out how to put an image on canvas. It's so true for any artist: that time of learning technique, cranking out piece after piece, and analyzing the works of great artists is invaluable; it's a no-way-around-it investment of time and energy to enable us to create something unique and a little more "out there." I'm so thankful for my teachers, but I'm also grateful to have that training under my belt to be free to play/create as I desire and from deep within.

That learning process is never over. It changes, but it's never over. I still put on a pot of tea and do harp exercises. I still dissect a new piece hands separately. I still see my mentors for their ear and advice.

One thing that has helped the "Picasso process" in me is *improvisation*. To be able to explore and listen to spontaneous playing without judging myself is so healthy! I try to make it a part of each practice time.

Teaching

Improvisation is also integrated into lessons with my students. I have been teaching for about 15 years either privately or through schools. I served as director of one of the United States' largest public school harp programs in Odessa, Texas from 2008-2010, teaching harpists age 10-18. I am also a former faculty member at the University of Texas of the Permian Basin and Odessa College. My approach to learning the harp is a mix of my own teachers' methods and the Suzuki method. I don't ever set out to create a professional harpist with a student, but encourage them to incorporate music and *harpistry* into their unique life, using music as a tool to master other human disciplines (concentration, coordination, social skills, listening, creativity, goal-setting, time management, and so much more). I currently teach from my private studio.

France

It was never my goal, but I live in beautiful Southern France. I arrived in Nice ten years ago to study under an inspiring harpist, Elisabeth Fontan-Binoche with the intention of staying for two months. A year later, I was still there, and sure enough, it was love that pulled me to stay longer. I met my husband at a café in a little village called Cabris where we currently live with our daughters. It's not always easy to live in a "foreign" country, but I feel very at home here. I enjoy the quality of life, the food, the language, the way French people appreciate art and music, the culture in general, and the four seasons of the Cote d'Azur.

