



HARP

Chamber Music at Play

by Saul Davis

I was once engaged to perform and teach at a summer chamber music course for adult musicians — amateurs, students and professionals. After some effort at a mailing and publicizing the program, the only response was from another professional harpist who also wanted to perform and teach. The director concluded that very few harpists play chamber music. Can this really be the case?

Chamber music should be part of every harpist's experience, especially as a student. The learning of ensemble skills is crucial to development, even as a soloist. The very areas in which harpists tend to have problems, such as rhythm, ensemble, listening while playing, reading, projection and balance, phrasing, and style, are all confronted immediately in chamber music.

There are so many reasons to play chamber music. It is a joy to hear the harp combined with the sounds of other instruments — the liquid purity of flute and harp, the bosky recorder or strings and harp, the brilliance of brass... Likewise, the musicians who get to play with harp expand their horizons, learning totally new repertoire, differences in attack and response, and a chance to develop their sensitivity to overtones which will improve their tone quality. The fun of weekly get-togethers to play

music with people who are likely to become good friends is a good and a real experience. My parents have a recorder group that has been meeting weekly for about 30 years, through generations of members. There's also the social cachet of being in "a Band!"

The most rewarding combinations are likely to be: flute and harp; flute, violin/viola and harp; flute, cello and harp; flute, violin, viola, cello and harp; string quartet and harp; any string instrument in duo with harp; flute, bassoon and harp; wind quintet and harp; harp duo or ensemble; soprano, flute and harp; two sopranos and harp; tenor and harp.

The chamber music literature is vast. In medieval and renaissance music, the harp can play chords, drones, bass or melodic lines. In baroque and early classical music, the harp is used as any other continuo instrument (only don't expect us to sightread everything or improvise accompaniment). The salon music of the 19th century, and composers and arrangers throughout the 20th century provide more literature.

For easier chamber music, try the following composers: Bernard Andres, Hendrik Andriessen, Henk Badings, Granville Bantock, Hector Berlioz, Luigi Boccherini, Luciano Chailly, Chou Wen-Chung, Luigi

Cherubini, Jan Dussek, Lex van Delden, Hans Eissler, Gabriel Faure, Arthur Foote, Philippe Gaubert, Mikhail Glinka, Carl Nielsen, Vincent Persichetti, Maurice Ravel, Alan Rawsthorne, Camille Saint Saens and Lazare Saminsky.

There are also excellent editions and transcriptions, by Carlos Salzedo, Dewey Owens, Lucile Lawrence and others, of composers such as Beethoven, Debussy, Mozart, Ravel and Telemann. Don't think less of transcriptions. When well done they are equal to or better than the original, and it is a longer-standing practice than that of designating a piece for one instrument only.

Saul Davis performs and teaches in Philadelphia. He is a regular contributor to the American Harp Journal. Born in Minnesota, he studied at Macalester College and with Lucile Lawrence at Tanglewood and Manhattan School of Music. He performed at Chautauqua Institute and studied at the Salzedo School with Alice Chalifoux. He has received grants and scholarships from Macalester College, Tanglewood, Chautauqua Institute, the Pultusker Fund and the Presser Foundation. He composes, edits and arranges harp music. †