

Report from the 2009 Harp Gathering

by Pat Eisenberger

How many harpists does it take to replace a light bulb?

Just ask the folks from the Heritage Inn at Sauder Village in Archbold, Ohio. That's where on May 15, 2009, The Harp Gathering came together again at the beautiful Heritage Inn, with 60 harpists and their companions, harp makers, exhibitors, performer/instructors and the staff from Viewpoint Productions, LLC.

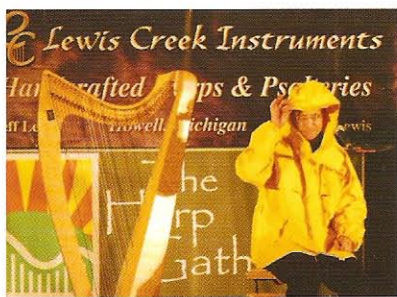
Being of Scottish descent, the Harp Gathering's name intrigued me because I recognized the term "Gathering" as a tradition where clans were called home to celebrate major events, share information and make important decisions about the future. To my pleasure, when I arrived at the Heritage Inn in the early afternoon, I was immediately greeted like long-lost family. A lovely young harpist played in the cozy lobby which gave a wonderful feeling that said, "Relax. You're home now."

The workshops began the first afternoon with artist/instructors Pamela Bruner, Timothy Harper and Kim Robertson. The wealth of topics they offered made it difficult to choose which workshop I wanted to attend. Although ultimately I chose Kim Robertson's workshop, I know I would have enjoyed and learned as much from the other instructors. When classes ended the workshop doors opened, but harpists lingered inside not wanting the workshop to end. As they slowly filtered out into the hallways, they were smiling and chatting about the amazing things they learned.

After a companionable dinner

under the two story tall oak tree in an interior gathering area, we were treated to a concert featuring Tapestry and Frank Voltz. Denise Grupp-Verbon on harp, and Michael Grupp-Verbon on the guitar, are the artists who weave the magic into Tapestry. They began the evening with songs either written or arranged by the artists/instructors participating in the conference. It was the perfect way to showcase not only the participating artists but also Tapestry's own amazing abilities to enchant their audience with both ancient and modern music.

The electric Frank Voltz then wowed the audience with his



Frank Voltz Concert

lightening quick lever changes which brought forth gasps and applause from musicians who truly understood the level of skill this technique requires. His personality emanated from his harp as he played gospel and pop tunes that were as charming as Frank himself.

Friday evening also brought the opening of the Exhibit Hall. The hall was filled with new harps from several harp makers, sheet music, flutes, psalteries, accessories, CDs and all things "harp." Even though several participants were fatigued from their long trip and the excitement of the day, many stayed up late to play in the evening jam session, or just hung around to listen to the fun. Workshop instructor Timothy Harper guided the first timers through the elements of the session, and soon everyone was contributing twists to songs old and new.

Saturday was a full day, with workshops in the morning and afternoon led by Denise Grupp-

Verbon, Timothy Harper, Kim Robertson and Frank Voltz. Afterward several harpists joined Frank to rehearse his arrangement of Scott Joplin tunes, and Denise Grupp-Verbon's arrangement of "Greensleeves." It was a challenging task for harpists who were accustomed only to playing solo, but Frank stood like the captain of a ship and gently eased everyone into formation.

The Saturday night concert brought Timothy Harper and Pamela Bruner to the stage. Timothy Harper can be best explained as a beautiful soul, full of grace. He wears a black kilt, black t-shirt and black boots. This sounds intimidating, but then you see his ever-present joyful smile. Timothy demonstrates all that is wonderful about folk music with his original songs accompanied by harp and harp-guitar. His songs tell stories that tug at the heart-strings.

Pamela Bruner's music is a reflection of her calling as a life coach. At times the audience sang along and got out of their seats to dance. Her style is so light and airy that I had visions of little girls dancing with home-made fairy wings on. Then Timothy and Dave Woodworth (luthier and husband of Pamela Bruner) stomped through a waltz in front of the stage. Whoever said that harpists are prim and proper...? All that remained of the evening was more socializing in the Exhibit Hall and another jam session, this time led by Sara and Pete Walthery.

Sunday morning dawned, and devotions, for those inclined, were graced by Jo Lynn Messer who is a highly requested performer at charity events and churches. Then it was time for the remaining workshops where I finally had the opportunity experience the joyful energy of Denise Grupp-Verbon. She has an abundance of knowledge to share and takes great joy in sharing it. This is evidenced by her frequent, "Wait until you hear this - it's really COOL!" The Sunday concert began with the ensemble performance,

which was thoroughly enjoyed by the audience and performers alike. As the ensemble took seats in the audience, we were all in for a treat as Kim Robertson took the stage. A combination of dry



Kim Robertson & Ensemble

wit and exquisite technique, Kim never fails to charm an audience.

One more important detail remained to the day - The Harp Hunt and Gather(ing) raffle. With over 30 prizes, ranging from gift certificates to the Grand Prize of a Lewis Creek harp, the harpists cheered and applauded as each winner was announced. Prize winners assembled on the stage for photographs, surrounding the grand prize winner who cried grateful tears.

Artists, instructors, exhibitors and participants all had high praise for Denise Grupp-Verbon, Michael Grupp-Verbon, The Heritage Inn at Sauder Village, and all those who organized this event. As the Heritage Inn slowly released the participants of the Harp Gathering, there were exclamations of, "Great meeting you," "Loved seeing you again," and "Can't wait until next year!" And of course, there will be a "Gathering" next year. Once again we will gather to celebrate, share knowledge and dream of the future, next time with four time National Scottish Harp Champion and multi-Wammie winner Sue Richards as guest artist. Featured again will be Pamela Bruner, Timothy Harper, TAPESTRY (Denise and Michael Grupp-Verbon), and Frank Voltz.

Just one question remains: how many harpists does it take to replace a light bulb?

None. They bring their own light!