

KAREN MARSHALSAY BIO from www.karenmarshalsay.com

Karen Marshalsay is one of the few modern players using fingernail (as well as finger pad) technique on gut and wire-strung clarsachs (Scottish harps), bray harp and Paraguayan harp, specializing in the traditional music of Scotland and Latin America, and her own compositions. Her playing has developed through the folk world of feisean, festivals, workshops and instruction from leading players such as [Alison Kinnaird](#) (Scottish) and Bill Morgan and Rito Pedersen (Latin American). Karen received a Distinction in her LTCL recital in 2010 - the first time this has been awarded to an all Scottish traditional repertoire. She is currently the wire harp tutor at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland.

COMPOSITION The acclaimed [Russian String Orchestra](#) (Misha's Gang) conducted by Misha Rachlevsky performed her works, *The Road to Dalginross* and *The Girl with the Purple Harp* in new orchestrations by Karen for harp and string orchestra, in four concerts in the Edinburgh Fringe in August 2018 with Karen as guest soloist. She joined them again in August 2019 for several concerts with a new March, Strathspey and Reel set orchestration including Karen's tunes *Isabel Gow's Welcome to Edinburgh* and *The Rhymer's Reel*, and a reprise of *The Girl with the Purple Harp*.

Karen was Composer in Residence with [Harps North West](#) for 2015-16, writing a new piece for harp ensemble, *The Lay of the Land*, which was premiered on 11 December 2016.

The Road to Dalginross for string quintet was performed by [Mr McFalls's Chamber](#) at the Tolbooth Stirling in April 2016 as part of the Distil Showcase. Karen had previously been invited to take part in a Distil weekend mentored by Greg Lawson and Jim Sutherland the previous October.

Karen's involvement with Distil, an initiative funded by the [SAC](#) and [PRS Foundation](#) as a retreat course for traditional musicians active in composition, began with [Distil 2](#) in March 2003 when the tutors were Tom Bancroft, Dave Heath and Dick Lee. This led to a rehearsal in 2004 of a short piece for chamber ensemble entitled *Culross*, based on music from the 1635 Scottish Psalter. A new piece based on the story of *Thomas the Rhymer* was premiered under the musical direction of Rick Taylor in the Distil Showcase on 20 October 2006 at the Tolbooth, Stirling. This featured a string section along with border pipes, accordion, soprano sax, bass clarinet, modern clarsach and bray harp. A second piece, *Winter Sun*, in a more classical style, was performed by Mary McCarthy (piano) and Colin Steele (trumpet) at the Distil Showcase in November 2008. Karen has also written for the bray harp in a new piece *The Forth Bridge*, which was performed by Karen and Mr McFall's Chamber on 23 October 2009.

As part of the prestigious [Celtic Connections](#) *New Voices* series Karen's commission *Journeying*, written for three harps (Karen was joined by Bill Taylor & Heather Yule) and two percussionists (Davy Cattanach & Keith Bleasby) was performed at the Glasgow Royal Concert Hall on 31 January 1999 to critical acclaim. The piece was performed again in Glasgow Cathedral as part of Celtic Connections 2000, along with new works *Promises to Keep* and *The Neo Gosteg*, for harp and fiddle, (performed by the composer, [Bill Taylor](#) and [Iain Fraser](#) on fiddle).

Ida y Vuelta, for solo harp, was commissioned by the Northborough Harp Festival 2001 (later known as the Stamford Harp Festival), with assistance from the Arts Council of England.

In early 2004 Karen arranged the music, rehearsed and conducted The Scots Music Group Big Band, a 'folk orchestra' run by the [Scots Music Group](#) and open to all abilities ages 16+.

PERFORMANCE PROJECTS Karen currently performs as a solo harper, with the Cathal McConnell Trio alongside Kathryn Nicoll (fiddle/viola), and has recently been playing with The Whistlebinkies. She is also exploring the interpretation of pibroch on the wire strung clarsach, working in conjunction with [Allan MacDonald](#). This was initially as part of the Edinburgh International Festival's series *From Battle Lines to Bar Lines*, August 2004. She released her solo album [The Road to Kennacraig](#) in 2019.

PREVIOUS PERFORMANCE PROJECTS

The Equilibrium Ensemble - exploring digital and traditional instruments and music with [Drake Music Scotland](#), [Hands Up for Trad](#) and fiddler [Eilidh Steel](#). 2015-17

Work with flautist and composer Eddie McGuire, and violinist Mark Hayward.

Yatra, a collaboration for the Edinburgh Mela in 2008 featuring Mugenkyo Taiko Drummers, classical North Indian dhrupad singer Prakriti Dutta, tabla players, and Scottish pipers was recommissioned for the mela in 2009. The Scottish musicians included Allan MacDonald, Jenna Reid and Barnaby Brown. Indian classical dancers and visuals were added the following year.

Electro-acoustic performance at the RSAMD of a new work *Sibilance*, by Vivian Barty-Taylor for saxophone, clàrsach and live electronics. (Dec 2004)

Performing with the Tolbooth Sound Orchestra under the direction of [Brian Irvine](#).

HARP & STORYTELLING DUO WITH HEATHER YULE : 1998-2000 A music, song and storytelling duo which performed in the Edinburgh International Festival's Scottish Harps series that year and recorded a track for the associated Greentrax CD. Other performances included Linlithgow Renaissance Fair, Scottish International's TSB Hogmanay House, the Famous Grouse House (Edinburgh Festival Fringe), Edinburgh Folk Club and the Edinburgh International Harp Festival.

THEATRE WORK: 1998 Touring with Theatre Highland's production of *Don Juan*, performing Andy Thorburn's score for clàrsach, cello and bass trombone. Also performed with Clyde Unity Theatre.

AFRICAN INVOLVEMENT: 1996 Playing with Gambian kora player [Seiko Susso](#) and his band AfroMandin Sound at Edinburgh Fringe and Tribe of Doris Drumming Festival and traditional Ghanaian drumming band [Kakatsitsi](#) at various venues in Brixton and other parts of London.

FESTIVAL APPEARANCES

Various festival and folk club performances including [Celtic Connections](#), [Hebridean Celtic Festival](#), [Edinburgh International Festival](#), [Edinburgh International Harp Festival](#), Crawfordjohn Spring Fling, Stirling and Edinburgh Folk Clubs, Carrbridge Festival of Music, Tinto Folk Festival.

International festivals include [Celtic Days on Lake Constance](#) (Switzerland), St Chartier and the Irish Rhine Valley Association Feis Ceol, Vosges Mountains (France), [Port Fairy](#) and the [National Folk Festival](#) in Australia, and the [Virginia Scottish Games](#) (USA). In 2018 Karen was an invited harper to 'Féill nan Laoch' festival in Cúil Aodha, Co. Cork, held by Peadar O'Riada in memory of his father Sean O'Riada, which is held every seven years, and honoured as one of the 8 members of the Harpers Parliament.

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

- Wire harp tutor at the [Royal Conservatoire of Scotland](#) 2016-2020, guest harp lecturer 2021-22, PhD supervisor since 2020.
- Guest lecturer on the Robert ap Huw ms for the University of Glasgow music department, since 2013.
- Guest lecturer on Scottish Harps for the [University of the Highlands and Islands](#) BA Scottish Cultural Studies since 2013.
- Clarsach tutor at [The Mary Erskine School](#) 2017-18
- Musician/teaching artist with [Paragon](#), an inclusive new music company based at the CCA, 2014-2016

- Co-tutor with Bill Taylor for the Wire Branch of the Clarsach Society's Edinburgh monthly workshops 2011-16
- Clarsach tutor at [The National Centre of Excellence in Traditional Music](#), Plockton High School 2003-2010, also taught theory and groupwork.
- Taught an annual Highland music clarsach course at [Sabhal Mòr Ostaig](#) 2000-08
- Taught a Women In Their Own Write class in 2019, a Modern Trad tunes class in 2017, a March, Strathspey & Reel class in 2013, a Scottish Tunes class at the 2008 and 2009 [Edinburgh International Harp Festival](#) and a Scottish source material class in 2004.
- Other classes at the Harp Festival include a wire-strung course for beginners in 2006 and for players in 2009, 2013 (Music from the Elizabeth Ross MS), 2014 (Introduction to Pibroch), 2015 (Laments and Airs), Working with Source Materials (2016), and Latin American classes (1999-2001 and 2003-04).
- Wire and bray harp tutor for the [Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama](#) (2004-06).
- Academic co-ordinator for the BA (Scottish Music) degree at the RSAMD (2002-04)
- Delivered the BEd 1 Scottish Music lecture course at the RSAMD (2001-2007).
- Involved in South Lanarkshire Council's Traditional Music Project 1996-2001, teaching harp and tin whistle.
- Taught clarsach at the Mount Cameron PS Gaelic Unit.
- Visiting tutor at Balnain House in Inverness (sponsored by the [Clarsach Society](#)), at The Harpmaker's Workshop in Fordyce, and at [Gordonstoun School](#) and Aberlour House.
- Taught at various feisean including Fèis Spè, Fèis Bharraigh, Fèis dun Eidean, Fèis Ghaidhlig Ghlaschu, Fèis Lannraig a Tuath, Fèis Latharna, Fèis Mhoireibh Fèis Rois and the Gordon Gaitherin.
- Musical Director (1997/8) of Glasgow all-women drumming group SheBoom who recorded one of her pieces *Weekend Pterodactyls* on their CD *Guid Wimmin*.

RESEARCH

Karen was Learning and Teaching Officer for the [HOTBED](#) project team of the RSAMD's Research Department, evaluating the use of networked digital sound resources in the teaching of traditional music (2001-04). She also holds a PhD from the University of Glasgow on the attempts to found a Scottish National Theatre in the early twentieth century - thesis available [here](#). The guidebook written by Karen for a Hunterian Museum exhibition on popular theatre and entertainment in Scotland, centred round the work of Sir Harry Lauder (*The Waggle o' the Kilt*) is available [here](#) on the University of Glasgow's site.

PUBLISHING

Karen ran the publishing company Marsharp Music, 2009-2022, set up to publish arrangements of harp music, tutor books and more.

EXAMINING TRADITIONAL MUSIC

- In 2005 Karen acted as consultant on traditional music to the [SQA](#), leading to the publication of [teachers' resource material](#).
- As part of her role as clarsach tutor at the [National Centre of Excellence in Traditional Music](#) Karen worked with [Trinity Guildhall](#) in devising JAG exams in clarsach, and recital certificates and diplomas in traditional instruments. Karen was the Trinity Representative for the National Centre of Excellence in Traditional Music until 2013.
- Clarsach adjudicator at the Royal National Mod in 2007 (Lochaber), 2009 (Oban), 2013 (Paisley), 2014 (Inverness) and 2017 (Lochaber), and both the Glasgow and Edinburgh local mods.

- Music judge at the Ballymena Traditional Music Festival, Virginia Scottish Games and various local mods and music festivals including Lochaber, Inverness and Moray.
- Scottish harp examiner at the RSAMD.
- One of the judges of the BBC Scotland Young Traditional Musician of the Year competition in 2011.

REPRESENTATION

Karen Marshalsay is represented by [Rob Adams Music Touring](#).