

Harping at Milwaukee Public Schools

by Richard Regent

Jeanne Kahn is Director of the Milwaukee Public Schools Harp Ensemble. It takes a gymnasium sized room to hold the many harps and her student harpists when they perform a program of ethereal music. With over 200 students and 38 harps, Jeanne Kahn leads the largest school harp program in the United States. Her students are drawn from all grade levels, Kindergarten through Grade 12.

The ensemble performs regularly under her leadership throughout the Milwaukee metropolitan area. Recent performances were held at the Milwaukee Honors Project, Mount Carmel Lutheran Church and various churches and schools. Beautiful harp selections include: *Canon in D* by J. Pachelbel; *The Ash Grove*, a Welsh Folk Tune; *Theme from The Thornbirds* by H. Mancini; *The Water is Wide*, an American Folk Tune; and *Simple Gifts*, an American Folk Tune arranged by A. Copland and D. Burton.

Over 5,000 years ago a hunter's bow was developed into a harp and as more strings were added it was played at processions, ceremonies and banquets. The modern harp, best known for its heavenly chromatic arpeggios, is one of the largest of all orchestral instruments having 46 strings with a 6 and a half octave range. The harp is played tilted against the player's right shoulder. Several double-action pedals allow a harpist to raise the pitch of the strings by either a semitone or a tone. A harp reminds me of the inner workings of a piano. However, the strings of a piano run parallel to the resonator, while the strings of a harp run perpendicular to the resonator. The strings of the harp can be plucked with finger tips or dampened with the flat of the hand, sounding the open and stopped strings.

Jeanne's pleasant teaching style invigorates Milwaukee's young harpist's in an old ancient musical instrument. It is no longer just the dreamy instrument played by women. Her students now include several young men who quickly learned to play the harp. Besides being the first Harp Major at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, her Aunt, **Jeanne Henderson**, a well-known Milwaukee harpist, taught and encouraged her. Ms. Kahn teaches those skills to her public school students. It is no wonder that she received the 1998 Music Teacher of the Year Award from the Civic Music Association of Milwaukee.

For more information about harp lessons, please contact Ms. Kahn at Celebrate@aol.com or phone 414-906-9546.

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