

# MÁIRE NÍ CHATHASAIGH

## BIOGRAPHY

Máire is "*the doyenne of Irish harp players*" (**Scotland on Sunday**) and one of Ireland's most important and influential traditional musicians: she was described by the late Derek Bell as "*the most interesting and original player of the Irish harp today*". As a teenager in the 1970s she invented a whole new style of harping that quickly became the norm amongst both her contemporaries and the younger generation of Irish players. In 2001 she received Irish music's most prestigious award, that of Traditional Musician of the Year - Gradam Cheoil TG4 - "*for the excellence and pioneering force of her music, the remarkable growth she has brought to the music of the harp and for the positive influence she has had on the young generation of harpers*". A busy international touring schedule has brought her to twenty-two countries on five continents.

She began to play the harp at the age of eleven. Her background in a well-known West Cork musical family steeped in the oral Irish tradition was at that time unique among harpers, the Irish harp having declined since its 17th century heyday into an urban parlour instrument alien to life in rural Ireland. Having no role models, she developed a variety of new techniques, particularly in relation to ornamentation, which made it possible for the first time to play this music on the harp in a stylistically accurate way - thus re-introducing the harp into the mainstream of the living tradition. She won the All-Ireland and Pan-Celtic Harp Competitions several times throughout the 1970s. In 1985 she recorded the first harp album ever to concentrate on traditional Irish dance music, *The New-Strung Harp* - "*a mile-stone in Irish harp music*" (**The Irish Examiner**). Her approach has been profoundly influential wherever in the world the Irish harp is played - "*a single-handed reinvention of the harp*". "*Her work restores the harp to its true voice.*" **The Irish Times**

Notable among many TV appearances since her first in 1971 have been televised concerts for TG4 (Ireland) and Rai Uno (Italy) and performances on BBC2, BBC Northern Ireland, S4C, HTV, Tyne-Tees TV, WDR Cologne, PBS (USA), ABC (Australia) and France 3 (France).

She has made a large number of radio broadcasts throughout Europe, North America and Australasia.

She's featured on *Celtic Harpestry*, the major 1998 Polygram USA Celtic harp album and associated TV special, and on *Bringing it All Back Home*, the major BBC 2 TV series on Irish music. She's also featured on Irish rock legend Rory Gallagher's posthumous 2003 album on BMG, *Wheels within Wheels*. Máire is harp and voice soloist with the New English Chamber Orchestra and the Choir of New College Oxford on John Cameron's *Missa Celtica*, released by Erato Disques, Paris. The Goldcrest film *Driftwood* features her singing, and her harping and compositions feature with other luminaries of the Celtic music world on Dan ar Braz's Gold Disc-awarded album for Sony France, *Finisterres*.

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## ❧ BIOGRAPHY (CONTINUED) ❧

Máire has played at many harp festivals around the world, most recently the 21st Swiss Harp Festival, the International Harp School, Wells, B.C., Canada, the Welsh Harp School, Cromarty's Harp Village, the 7th Rio Harp Festival held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil and Cairde na Cruite's International Festival for Irish Harp held in Termonfechin, Co. Louth. As the only Irish headline performer at the 11th World Harp Congress held in Vancouver in July 2011, she represented both the Irish harp and Irish musical traditions.

Previous harp festival appearances include the 2010 Istanbul Harp Encounter (part of that city's European City of Culture celebrations), 16e Festival "Harpes en Avesnois" (Mubeuge, France), the 7th European Harp Symposium (Cardiff), XIIes Journées de la Harpe, (Arles, France), Rencontres Internationales de la Harpe Celtique, (Dinan, France), the 5th World Harp Congress (Copenhagen, 1993 - the first occasion on which the Irish harp was featured at the Congress) and the 9th World Harp Congress (Dublin, 2005), the World Harp Festival (Cardiff), the Edinburgh International Harp Festival (on nine occasions), the International Festival for Irish Harp (Co Louth, Ireland – on fourteen occasions) and Festivals held in Belfast, Dublin and Boston to commemorate the bicentennial of the 1792 Belfast Harp Festival.

Her "celebrated virtuoso partnership" (**The Daily Telegraph**) with Chris Newman, "one of the UK's greatest guitarists" (**BBC Radio 2**), has made seven critically acclaimed duo albums. Their performances have been described as "music of fire and brilliance from the high-wire act in traditional music" by **The Irish Times** and they tour worldwide. They've performed at most of the major folk festivals in Europe, the USA and Australasia; at a significant number of arts festivals; and have given almost two thousand concerts in venues ranging from the tiniest of historic churches in rural England and Italy to London's Barbican, the Shogun's Palace in Kyoto, Sydney Town Hall and the Philharmonie in Cologne.

Their new seasonal CD, *Christmas Lights*, was released in December - "A delightful... satisfyingly original, often refreshingly unpredictable take on festive favourites... Gorgeous and uplifting" **The Living Tradition** - and their associated new Christmas show played to sell-out audiences: "(Their) mastery and magic... produced a rapt response" **The Guardian**. Of their most recent regular duo CD *FireWire* – voted "Best Celtic Instrumental Album" in the 2009 Just Plain Folks Awards, Nashville - the critics said: "Máire Ní Chathasaigh is in a class of her own" **The Guardian** "An eclecticism and spirit of adventure that is quite thrilling... Virtuoso playing... bewitching string fantasies and a wonderfully clear and expressive voice" **The Times** "Dazzling virtuosity... The speed and complexity is to be marvelled at... Exquisitely delivered... delightful" **The Daily Telegraph**

In 2008 they recorded a quartet CD, *Heartstring Sessions*, with Máire's fiddle-playing sister Nollaig Casey and guitarist Arty McGlynn: "Inspired... a contender for album of the year" **fROOTS** "Traditional music at its very best" **The Irish Times** "An amazingly eclectic mix... Astounding" **The Ulster Herald** "Magnificent... Virtuoso... Outstanding" **The Scotsman** "World-class" **Irish Music Magazine** "Two of the mightiest pairings in current folk combine to give a tour-de-force of breathtaking order. Classic." **The Living Tradition** "Exceptionnel... brilliant..." **Le Peuple Breton** "Attention - chef d'œuvre! Bravo!!!" **TRAD Magazine** (France) "A dream quartet - the sweetest and most exciting music to emerge for a long time. Matching virtuosity with sheer good taste, this album of traditional and original music pours joyfully from the speakers... amazing, majestic, delightful" **Dirty Linen** (USA)

Máire has published two volumes of harp arrangements, *The Irish Harper* Vols. I and II and contributed two articles about the Irish harp and modes in Irish music to the Companion to Irish Traditional Music (Cork University Press). She's profiled in several books devoted to Irish music, including *Celtic Women in Music* (Mairéad Sullivan, Quarry Music Books, Canada) and the *Rough Guide to Irish Music*; and in a wide variety of magazines and newspapers.