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The Harp Of Brandiswhiere: A Suite For Celtic Harp



Synopsis

(Harp). Contains the full story of the legend, beautifully illustrated by the English artist, Steve Douglas. Also includes the written music of the suite, which can be played on Celtic or pedal harp or piano.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Sylvia Woods' Suite for Celtic Harp, The Harp of Brandiswhiere, has become a major part of the harp literature. The suite (with and/or without the story) has been performed by harpists, harp groups, and harp societies all over the world.

The concept for this suite originally came from my husband, Tom, who created the names of the characters of Brandiswhiere (our hero) and Gourenspur (the villain). As I composed the music, the music influenced the evolution of the story, and the story inspired more music. I hope you enjoy this suite.

Most of the songs in this book are very pretty. I especially like Lament and Morning Calm. Along with being lovely performance pieces, I think they can also be good warm-ups and background music. I could do without the story (overuse of adjectives and a cliché plot line do not an epic make), but since that's not the main reason I bought the book, it's not a big deal. I currently play a 22 string harp, so some of the songs get out of my range on the high end. Usually just dropping down an

octave works to get around that, but if you have at least a 29 string harp, you will have no problems with range. If you want some songs that are original and pretty but generally not too difficult--I would say intermediate level, mostly--this is the songbook for you.

I own a small Celtic harp and thought this book would be a nice change of pace to oversimplified Celtic tune books and overly difficult "modern classical" composers, but I quickly realized that these songs sound equally marvelous on the piano and now I much prefer to play them on keyboards. Not all harp music is interchangeable with the piano, but these songs are mostly very feasible for the task. The front of the book contains a cute invented myth (nothing genius, but still a bit cute), and the music is almost intended as a series of interludes between narrations of story sections. The songs are subtly related and it is a joy to spot the connections while playing through them. Specifically, "The Harper's Vision" is a little repetitious, but it is nonetheless such a very, very fine song that the repetitions are welcome melodic emphases (I hesitate to call it "minimalism" because that implies negative things, but the concept is roughly equivalent in this case). Sylvia Woods plays this song rather quickly in the recorded version, but I have found that it also sounds quite good as a slow and contemplative song - in fact, I think there is even MORE magic and mystery if it is played a bit on the slow side. "The Legend" and "Lament" are also strong pieces. You will be challenged by some of the hand stretches involved to play some chords, but there aren't many nasty surprises (key changes, incidentals, chromatic notes, etc.). These take some practice to sound really polished, but they are such a delight to listen to that you won't mind drilling the extra time in. Some time signatures are a little unusual, but they are consistent (there are very few changes within songs). One word of caution: the printed size is rather small in this book. I suppose this is meant to save on pages (page turns are clumsy in some songs, so it was not done for strategic musical reasons). The print quality is excellent, but this is just a heads-up if you don't have great reading vision or were planning on playing these songs in a dimly-lit setting.

Sylvia Woods' compositions are very original and delightful to play. What is neat about this book is that all the songs match a story about a harper named Brandiswhiere and his apprentice, Telenia. You can read the story outloud, and then play where it is indicated, but I've found that playing individual pieces works just as well. I particularly liked the lively Gypsy Mirage and the mournful Lament. However, a couple of the songs are too long to play, and do not keep your audience's attention (in general). If you decide to play these pieces, I would recommend buying the tape or CD of Sylvia playing, so that you may hear her own interpretation.

I have all of Sylvia's books but return often to play the beautiful, original pieces in the Harp of Brandiswhiere. This suite is performed by many harp ensembles, and solists along with the story narration. I find the pieces also stand alone, and I enjoy always performing them. My favorites are the waltz-tempo, In The Forest, the hauntingly beautiful Lament, and Morning Calm. Because of the beautiful melody and rubato style Morning Calm lives up to the name. I know others will enjoy this highly creative, original score as much as I have. Judy Diaz, Harper

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