



John Marson was born in 1932 and died in 2007. He studied the harp with Marie Goossens at the Royal College of Music in London, and in 1958, while still a student, began his professional career with the Carl Rosa Opera Company. A week after leaving college he joined the London Symphony Orchestra for two years before embarking on two decades of freelance work, where he played solos, chamber music and concerti, worked with all the London orchestras and spent much time in recording studios. He played in many outstanding feature films including the original 'Star Wars', and with The Beatles, including the iconic album, *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*. In 1982 he was appointed Principal Harp of the BBC Symphony Orchestra and subsequently resumed his freelance career while increasingly engaging in composition, both for the harp and for other instruments and voice. He played for many West End and National Theatre productions including over three years as harpist in Lloyd Webber's 'Aspects of Love'.

The roll call of musicians with whom John has worked include The Beatles, Richard Rodney Bennett, Leonard Bernstein, Pierre Boulez, Benjamin Britten, Charlie Chaplin, Bing Crosby, John Dankworth, Duke Ellington, Benny Goodman, Liberace, Martha Graham, Hans Werner Henze, Herbert von Karajan, Otto Klemperer, Zoltan Kodaly, Lorin Maazel, Neville Marriner, Pierre Monteux, Jessye Norman, Laurence Olivier, Luciano Pavarotti, Gennadi Rozhdestvenski, Frank Sinatra, George Solti, Leopold Stokowski, Igor Stravinsky, George Szell, William Walton, John Williams, Stevie Wonder and countless others.

In 1964 John was one of the two founders of the United Kingdom Harp Association, edited its magazines for many years and became President of the Association in January 2005.

Two years before his death, John Marson wrote *Book of the Harp* (2005), a charming ragbag of little known facts, serious scholarship, pleasant anecdotes, and witty, perceptive observation. He also wrote, early in his career, *The Complete Guide to Harp Glissandi*, which was a study analysing all 2,187 possible pedal settings.

At his death in 2007 his music manuscripts and personal papers were donated to the International Harp Archives at Brigham Young University, USA. The Marson archive includes musical manuscripts, concert programs, press clippings, and extensive correspondence. In addition to his personal papers, John donated his private collection of scores and sound recordings of harp music, totalling more than 1,000 items.

## Gabriella Dall'Olio

Born in her beloved Bologna, Italy, Gabriella has inspired audiences throughout Europe and the Middle East with solo recitals and chamber music concerts for the past three decades. After training in Italy and France with world renowned professors and pedagogues Pierre Jamet, Fabrice Pierre, Jacqueline Borot, Giselle Herbert and Anna Loro, Gabriella has recorded for international radio and television corporations, including BBC, Radio France, RAI, Bayerischer Rundfunk and Radio Suisse. She has appeared regularly with Hebrides, Red Note, Uroboros, Gruppo Musica Insieme di Cremona, Wiener Virtuosen and with the German ensemble Kontraste, playing hundreds of premieres and works by twentieth-century and contemporary composers.

Her recordings have received critical acclaim and include solo CDs with Claves, EM, Naxos, AVS, Toccata Next, Koch, Stradivarius, Dal Segno, Delphian and Ambitus. Gabriella settled in London in 1995. Orchestras she worked with include the Orchestra of the Royal Opera House, BBC Symphony Orchestra, London Symphony Orchestra and the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment; abroad she has played regularly with Chamber Orchestra of Europe, Berliner Philharmonikern and Wiener Philharmonikern, Symphonie Orchester des Bayerischen Rundfunks, SWR Symphonie Orchester and countless others, under the batons of the mighty and great conductors such as Nikolaus Harnoncourt, Mariss Jansons, Claudio Abbado, Daniel Barenboim, Lorin Mazel, Sergei Osawa, Bernard Haitink and countless others.

Gabriella has also enjoyed working also in the pop world with Tina Turner, Sting, Phil Collins, UK champion Beatboxer FaithSFX, Kazabian, Elton John and the Petshopboys, and recording for film tracks and jingles, and also in community, outreach's and educational projects.

Alongside her busy performing career, Gabriella is deeply committed to teaching and developing the careers of young harpists: she works with passion and dedication at Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance in London, UK, where she is Head of Harp Studies since her appointment in 2005; her students cover important posts as teachers and performers around the world, and she has received a Professorship in 2018 in recognition of her achievements.

Gabriella Dall'Olio writes:

I met John when I first came to London and occasionally we worked together with the BBC Concert Orchestra and in a jazz big band. Sometimes we shared car journeys as we were almost neighbours and he would often come to dine at our home - my husband was an excellent cook and though John was vegetarian and we weren't, there were plenty of meat-free dishes to interest him. He introduced me to his music and I duly learnt and performed it whenever I could.

He gave me a manuscript copy of his newly written work, '*El Picaflor*', and when I played it to him at home he told me how he would like the piece to sound and he performed it. Whenever I played his music in concerts he would often attend. On my 40th birthday he arrived at the party very early with a little bundle of paper that turned out to be a piece he had written as a present. He sat down and played it to me, and only afterwards could the party start!

There are many anecdotes I could share, including that John knew so much about all things harp that listening to him was always a pleasure and an inspiration; he also had a dry, shy sense of humour. Always dressed like a real English gentleman, he was often somehow...out of space, a little out of place, but always grateful in the company of friends. When he died, I was so surprised and honoured to be bequeathed his beloved harp, one of two identical ones; the other went to Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance, where I have been Head of Harp since 2005, together with a legacy to fund a Harp Prize in his name; since 2008 it has been awarded each year to outstanding young harpists studying at TLCMD, and part of it is to play a concert where one item is a work by John Marson.

In 2020, during the pandemic, I had the idea to work in a recording studio, together with students and alumni to record some of John's work, nearly forgotten until then. It has been a rewarding journey, leading to the re-discovery of much of all his published and unpublished work. It is beautiful music, well crafted, interesting and quirky enough to deserve to be better known. This is the first volume that we present with Alaw Music Publishing, Wales, with the ambition gradually to publish and perform many others.

Gabriella Dall'Olio

Editor's notes from Gabriella:

Pedals have been written in a more practical way than in the manuscript, mostly in a rhythmical and logical place; the right foot above the left; where there is a square around the pedal mark, it means that it should be played with the 'other' foot.

Metronome markings were not written originally in the manuscript but added in pencil at some point later when the work received its première; the editor found that slightly different, generally faster, tempi would be more effective and suggested also some practical solutions to tempo changes. As they were in very light pencil, clearly added later and sometimes by different hands, they referred in my opinion to a performance and what speed might be possible with specific players and acoustics of the concert hall in question. They are definitely not part of the original score, and I therefore felt comfortable to keep to my suggestions. In any case, tempi, and to a degree dynamics, can be a matter of personal preference.

Dynamics are exactly as John marked them in the score. In some places slightly softer dynamics (or different dynamics in separate parts) might work better in my opinion, but that is an entirely personal choice and I would not dare change them. I recorded this work with Trinity Laban students in 2020; by listening to the recording one can refer to what they hear in our version.

I hope you will enjoy learning and performing this beautiful work and give joy to many audiences with it!

Gabriella Dall'Olio

*The first recording was made on 30th November 2020 at Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance, London. Gabriella Dall'Olio played the principal part together with current Trinity Laban students Laura Marquino-Falgueras, Gloria Rappo, Chloe Kousmerr-Kerr, Imogen Emmett, Xinji Wu, released in 2022 on Da Vinci Records*

# Prelude, Song and Dance

for six harps

by

John Marson

More correctly this piece should perhaps be described as a concerto for solo harp and five ripieno harps. This form appealed to me because it would allow the soloist a freedom which is hard to achieve within an ensemble, and combine this with the interesting textural and harmonic elements possible when several harps play together.

Throughout the piece the interval of a semitone is important. The *Prelude* opens with bitonal (D major/ C sharp major) in the ensemble, and the C sharp/ D clash returns in many guises. Not all is dissonant, however, and the first movement ends with a comfortable resolution.

The semitone idea announces the beginning of the *Song* which, after the solo introduction, is purely lyrical, utilising the chromatic tension (this time F major/ G flat minor as a harmonic basis for the opening phrase of the *Song*, which originally had words, now forgotten).

The *Dance* is nothing of the sort: I could not think of a better title. Its opening theme relegates a semitone to no more than a grace note before a 3/8 motif that sounds as if it must become a fugue before too long. It never does. A collage of Salzedo effects (harpists will understand the reference) colours a middle episode, and the work ends joyously in D major with just a hint of C sharp piquancy.

*Article based on the program note for the first performance at Rolduc, Holland, 16th July 1979 when the work was played by the composer, with Frances Kelly, David Dunn, Karen Vaughan, Rachel Masters and Isabelle Frayling-Cork.*

John Marson

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