

FOREWORD

By Professor Skaila Kanga,
Professor Emerita of Harp, Royal Academy of Music, London.

When Kathryn first mentioned that she was writing a book on harp technique I was delighted, as over the years many of her students who have come to study at London's Royal Academy of Music have impressed me greatly with their solid technical foundation. This has meant their progress musically has been unfettered by months of remedial work.

What is outstanding in this book is the gradual building up of security of hand position, common sense explanation of every step and each part of basic harp technique explained clearly with warnings of what can go wrong!

It is important to spend each day slowly learning and repeating each exercise paying great attention to the tone quality and evenness of each finger. With due diligence and patience Kathryn's students have proved this approach has given them such a head start in their musical studies.

I particularly liked the paragraphs on warming up, footwear and gigs! I highly recommend this book to all teachers and students of all ages.

Professor Skaila Kanga, September 2025.

Kathryn Rees

Kathryn has established herself as one of Wales' foremost teachers, and in 2022 was appointed Head of the Harp Department at the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama, Cardiff. Her teaching career at the college began as a tutor in technique and she is a passionate advocate of encouraging students to develop a beautiful tone, beginning with these foundations. Kathryn's past and present students have achieved remarkable success at competitions both nationally and internationally.

Kathryn graduated from the Royal Northern College of Music and went on to gain her Masters in Harp Performance and Literature at the Eastman School of Music, Rochester, New York. She enjoyed a varied performing career, initially working as a freelance orchestral harpist in New York State along with harp teaching during her summers at Interlochen Arts Academy in Michigan. Kathryn continued to travel extensively with her work and gave recitals in Canada, the USA and the Middle East and worked as a freelance orchestral player in Germany and the UK.

Kathryn eventually returned to Wales and began studying medicine at Cardiff University and raising her family. This hiatus from the harp world ended with Kathryn's appointment as a tutor at the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama. She gives regular masterclasses and workshops and is frequently in demand as an adjudicator at competitions.

She is a proponent of encouraging harpists to perform new music and to explore the varied potential of the harp within a diversity of genres. Consequently, Kathryn has established Academi Telyn Cymru, a harp academy for youth in Wales focusing on performance skills and collaborative musicianship. She considers fostering this passion for harp playing in young players an intrinsic part of developing and supporting a future for the instrument, along with encouraging a curiosity for exploring its voice within an ever-changing cultural landscape.

Introduction

As a teacher myself, one of my primary objectives is that my students create a beautiful, rounded tone that projects well. In tandem with this, the aim is that they play without holding on to any unnecessary tension. The earlier these good technical habits are implemented, the better. However, I know from personal experience that it's entirely possible to change habits at a later point in your harp journey with enough perseverance and determination. It's never too late!

In this book I've included a guide to the basics of good technique, followed by exercises and studies to help you work on these foundational harp skills. The chapters that follow focus on my most discussed topics with my own students, including executing an even *bisbigliando*, achieving beautiful harmonics and playing even-sounding chords.

My own path to developing a good technical foundation began later in my harp journey. At the time I was beginning my degree studies at a conservatoire and had not fully realised until that point the fundamental importance of good technique. I found myself immersed in a harp programme that insisted on these basic principles. As a result, I quickly realised that the adjustments I was making were transforming my sound and ease of playing in a dramatic way.

Technique is the cornerstone of producing a good tone and projecting sound effectively; it requires a holistic consideration of the position of the body and its alignment right through to the articulation of the fingers.

The skills in this book are the fundamental building blocks of your playing. If you are able to master perfect scalar passages and even arpeggios etc., this will have a direct impact on the quality of your sound and your performance.

Kathryn Rees, September 2025

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