

Valerie Wedel - Harp Concerts

\$1,200 Grant from the Alex Wilson Legacy Fund - March 2023

Valerie Wedel is a harper and singer. She specializes in ethnic music and early music, as well as her own compositions. Since the pandemic began, playing opportunities have been more limited. She applied to the Fund with the desire of creating programs for some new audiences, including schoolchildren.

Report by Valerie Wedel
Submitted May 18, 2023

Three programs were created, one for older elementary, one for younger elementary, and one for middle school students. The story of the Stolen Bairn and the Sidh was woven with harp music for younger elementary students. This is a very old Scottish tale of a mother who rescues her child from the fairies. The older elementary students heard the tale of Dagda and his Magic Harp. Middle School students heard a shorter tale of Brian Boru and got a sample of different types of music notations they could compare with modern notation, which they all read. All age groups got an introduction and a very short history, plus music and song. There was also time for Q&A for each performance.

**Maple Grove Elementary School
Golden, CO
2 performances, March 16, 2023**

All students in grades from K-5 were reached through two school-wide assemblies. Students and faculty were wonderful! Stories, music, and the bits about the history of the music and instrument, were all a hit. The students really loved the storytelling and hearing songs sung in Welsh and Irish Gaelic.

**Mountain Phoenix Choice School
Wheat Ridge, CO
2 performances, March 17, 2023**

There were two large school assemblies, the first for 7&8 grades, the second for k-5. Six graders missed both concerts, due to being on a field trip. Here also the staff and students were wonderful and loved both music and storytelling!



At Maple Grove, the big harp helps Valerie Wedel tell stories to elementary school kids.



Close-up of both harps and harper as Valerie Wedel performs at Mountain Phoenix Choice School.



Seventh- and eighth-grade students listen to performance at Mountain Phoenix Choice School.

Regarding the remaining two concerts - I decided to reach out to Denver area schools. Harp can be very healing, and they have had trauma from recent events which have been in the local news.

The weaving of story and harp is a great new adventure I plan to do more of! Fun note - a friend in Europe, Dr. Vincent Laine, is a native Gaelic Speaker and harper. He has awarded me the title Scealach - an old Scots Gaelic word meaning "Weaver of Tales, which also implies "the one who speaks and is heard and speaks as the high point of a gathering." It is a compliment! He also gave thumbs up on Gaelic pronunciations for songs that were sung in Gaelic.



Valerie Wedel plays small Scottish wire-strung harp at Maple Grove Elementary School.

Denver East High School - Arts Walk
Denver, CO
Two-hour concert, May 11, 2023

This event completed the final two hours of the generous grant you awarded. East High School's annual Arts Walk celebrates the arts, including works by students at the high school and community members. It is normally held outdoors, but the event was moved indoors on this very rainy night.



Valerie's performance area at the East High School Arts Walk.

I was stationed in the library, surrounded by books and art! It was a lovely venue with outstanding acoustics. There was a seating area with a couch and armchairs, tables and wooden chairs. People dropped in and out at their leisure. I estimate at least 250 people came through to listen. Some stayed. One group of ladies informed me they were "hiding out" to listen to the music! They turned out to be faculty members and said they really needed this music! It was also great fun when families with very small children came through. The littlest ones loved the music, lit up, and danced. :)

This was a two-hour concert presentation. I brought a mixture of medieval Spanish music, Celtic music, a handful of modern pieces from Spain, and a few of my own compositions. Some people wanted to simply listen, others wanted to visit and ask questions. It was somewhat more informal than the pitched concerts for the other schools. That lent an intimacy where we could all interact a bit and was really lovely.

One favorite group arrived at the very end of the evening: three high school students, who came by and settled quite close. One had a clarinet and had just played with a student group elsewhere on campus. I invited him to improv with me, but he felt shy and said he would like to just listen. This young man's two friends were both art students. We chatted and then I played the songs I had been saving for the end. These students were really lovely people. They listened deeply and we made a beautiful connection. They had never heard a harp before!

The healing qualities of the arts were on full display on this evening. Kudos to all the artists, performers and community who showed up. One could feel the grief among the people that persists after recent incidents, but also that no one was giving up or in. This was a great gift, and inspiration - to perhaps contribute in some small way to healing. My harp music went out through the school with my personal intention for healing and joy.

Thank you again for your support. I am very grateful! Thank you very much for this Alex Wilson Legacy Grant!



A perfect place to listen to music on a rainy night.