



David Watkins: An Intimate Portrait

by John Browne

Editor's Note: In honor of Professor David Watkins' 80th birthday, we present an intimate portrait of this iconic harpist, teacher, composer and arranger. This is the first article in The American Harp Journal about Prof. Watkins and is the culmination of numerous visits by John Browne to Prof. Watkins' remote home in Bwlch y Cibau,¹ Wales for interviews, conversations and archiving assistance. (Thank you to Elizabeth Huntley and Karen Vaughan for "sowing the seeds" for this article.)

Early Years in Corbridge, 1938-1952

DAVID was born in Corbridge, Northumberland, in northeast England, on 1 June 1938, the eldest child, and only son, of Donald and Margaret Watkins.² Donald was an engineer working for the Armstrong Whitworth Company³ of nearby Newcastle-upon-Tyne.

Some of David's interest in music came from his mother who played the piano. However, it was listening to broadcasts of Mozart symphonies that sent him, he says, "into ecstasies," and he expressed surprise when his parents did not display the same level of excitement. He started the piano at age five and took lessons from age six with a very strict piano teacher. Ultimately, it was his father who helped him develop other skills as a young boy, encouraging him in engineering and design.

David used these skills to enhance his early love of music as well. While attending Corbridge Preparatory School,⁴ David used a crystal set⁵ he had made with his father to listen to music under his bedclothes in his dormitory. And when his piano teacher gave him a keyboard salvaged from an old piano, he drew a design for its case in chalk on the concrete floor of the garage at their home. Though lacking the skills to finish the project at that early age, he did take the keyboard with him to Oundle⁶ in Northamptonshire, a school specialising in engineering. David remembers travelling there with the keyboard sticking out of the roof of the car, wondering what he might do with it.

School Days at Oundle, 1952-1956

At Oundle, David met Jared Armstrong, an inspirational piano teacher who introduced him to harpsichords and clavichords. As he was required to spend one week of every term in the school workshop, David used the piano keyboard he had brought from home to make his first musical instrument, a clavichord. It debuted in a speech day⁷ exhibition, with clumsy joints filled with plastic wood,⁸ but it did play.

1 Welsh words are notoriously difficult for English speakers to pronounce. This place name in Montgomeryshire, Wales, is pronounced "Boolkh ih Kib-eye" (the kh is like the ch in a Scottish loch).

2 David's sisters, Susan (Sue) and Helen, were born in 1941 and 1944, respectively.

3 The Sir W. G. Armstrong Whitworth & Co. Ltd was a major British manufacturing company, which later became Vickers-Armstrong. David's father, Donald, was a pioneer in the development of diesel electric locomotives in the 1930s.

4 David Watkins attended Corbridge Preparatory School from ages 5 to 13, (1943 to 1951).

5 A crystal set is a simple radio receiver. It is easy to construct and is powered by the radio waves that it receives.

6 Oundle is a public school that David Watkins attended from ages 14 to 18, (1952 to 1956).

7 "Speech day" occurs at the end of the summer term, which is the end of the academic year. At the exhibition, graduating students ("leavers") are wished well by school administrators, teachers ("masters"), and patrons in a ceremony on the stage.

8 Plastic wood is a proprietary wood filler that looks like wood when dry. It is used for filling gaps in wood joinery.

He then began work on a double-manual harpsichord and taught himself inlay⁹ and cross-banding.¹⁰ The harpsichord was a better instrument and it was subsequently used in many concerts.

Robert Thurston Dart¹¹ was an important musical influence at this time. David would travel from Oundle to Dart's room at Jesus College, Cambridge and listen, spellbound, to him play the forty-eight preludes and fugues from J.S. Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier* on the clavichord. Other important influences at this time were Robin Bagot of Levens Hall in Cumbria, northwest England, who made harpsichords, and Father Cyprian Smith, an inspirational Benedictine monk from Ampleforth in North Yorkshire.



The double-manual harpsichord David built on which he taught himself inlay and cross-banding. This instrument was subsequently used in many concerts.

David's first encounter with a harp was on the stage in the Great Hall at Oundle, where the masters gave cabarets for the boys. One of the masters had strung the instrument with rubber bands and was using it to flick paper pellets into the audience. After the harp was returned to the basement of the science building, David went to look for it. He found it under a pile of coal, retrieved it, dusted it off, and

9 Inlay is a technique whereby a different material is embedded into the body of the instrument as a decoration.

10 Cross-banding is a technique whereby an additional layer of veneer is placed beneath the final layer, with its grain set at right angles.

11 Robert Thurston Dart (1921-1971) worked and taught at Jesus College, Cambridge from 1947 to 1964, and was a professor of the Faculty of Music at King's College, London from 1964 to 1971. He made a number of recordings of early English music, Handel and Bach on the clavichord.

THE MASTERCLASS

"À plat!" The student places her hand flat against the strings, her lack of French being no barrier to understanding. "*Gonfle, joue,*" continues the tutor, and she inflates her hand "...comme un ballon"...like a balloon. The masterclass in north Wales is going well. Prof. David Watkins has explained how a French government scholarship enabled him to study pedal harp in Paris with Solange Renié, niece of Henriette, hence using French to pass on this detail of technique. Having inflated her hand, the student is to hold onto the strings with her fingers, then squeeze as she pulls her hand away to "get the juice out of the strings," sonority being everything in harp performance. And David has plenty of words of encouragement for his pupil, telling her that his tutor Gwendolen Mason at the Royal Academy of Music in London would say, "Never put yourself down as plenty of others will do that," adding "and no matter how hard you practise, always have something to play when you have the opportunity." David has given many masterclasses and adjudicated many harp competitions over his long career as a professional harpist. He has travelled the world in doing so and has met and worked with many of the world's greatest harpists.

strung it up with some of the harpsichord wire that he had on hand, painting the C and F strings their required colours. Then, as a master was later to say, "An inky-fingered schoolboy sat down and started to learn the harp."

Now intrigued by the harp, David was keen to learn more. His father had a colleague whose wife played the harp, and to David's good fortune, this turned out to be Frances Callow, who had studied with Henriette Renié in the early 1920s.¹² Frances provided David with a good foundation in harp playing, and was later to leave her beautiful Lyon & Healy harp to him in her will. For now though, David needed his own instrument and, fortunately, he was able to find and buy an Erard Gothic harp for £2 10s (£2.50). It was not in particularly good

12 David Watkins began studying with Frances Callow at age 17, in 1955.

condition, but it did have a full set of strings and once polished, strung and regulated, it turned out to be rather fine. This allayed his father's fears, to a degree, as he thought his son had been "ripped off."

During his last year of school, in 1956, the music director and another master were dismayed to realise that David thought the harp was the most important instrument in the orchestra.¹³ To 'bring him down a peg,' the music director made David cart his harp across town on a wheelbarrow and then took the orchestra through the "Overture" to Wagner's *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* while omitting the harp passages. During this time, David also asked the music director if he could audition for Ruth Railton¹⁴ and her National Youth Orchestra. This request was refused, and though David cannot remember how he managed to play for her, he did and was engaged. After only two years of playing the harp, David found himself playing with the National Youth Orchestra at their concert in Colston Hall, Bristol in January of 1957.¹⁵



David with Dame Ruth Railton after a concert in the Chapel of the Royal Hospital Chelsea in 1993. She was the founder of the National Youth Orchestra in 1947 and auditioned and engaged David in 1956.

13 Pierre Boulez once said to David at an orchestra rehearsal that he would prefer an orchestra be made up of twenty-five harps and only one violin.

14 Dame Ruth Railton (1915-2001) created and was the first music director of the National Youth Orchestra from its inception in 1947 to her retirement in 1965. She travelled throughout the British Isles to audition the best players of all instruments.

15 David joined the orchestra just in time, as the upper age limit for participation was 18 years old and David was to have his 19th birthday in June. David has a recording of this concert, which was conducted by Walter Susskind. The harp arpeggios at the beginning of Bizet's *L'Arlésienne Suite* sound especially good on his £2 10s harp.

Harp Studies, 1956-1960

David's father was worried about his son's continuing interest in the harp. David overheard him saying to his uncle on the phone, "My son wants to be a harpist; I thought harpists were ladies in long dresses." And to David's headmaster he said, "We must send him to a famous harpist who can get the silly idea out of his head." Marie Goossens¹⁶ was contacted and wrote back in 1956 saying, "He is so terribly keen that it would be cruel not to let him have a musical training." And so at the age of 19, David obtained his scholarship to the Royal Academy of Music to study piano and harp. While his piano playing at a concert in St Martin-in-the-Fields, London was well reviewed in the newspapers, it was the harp that really captured his attention.

In 1960, David, now 22, won a French government scholarship to study with Solange Renié, but his father was still not convinced that the harp was a suitable career for his son. He contacted Sir Adrian Boult for advice, who wrote back saying, "He will greatly profit [from his study with Solange Renié]," adding, "I too was an only son and when I was about seventeen my father, who had hoped that I should carry on his business after him, decided to re-arrange his affairs in order that I might become a musician. I am glad to say he lived long enough to enable him not to regret that decision." He then wrote to David directly to congratulate him on his scholarship and to wish him well in Paris. Later when David joined the London Philharmonic, he played and recorded with Sir Adrian, and was always immensely grateful for the advice and support he had received.

The Paris Scholarship, 1960-61

Crossing the English Channel to Paris in 1960 was exciting. David's harp was loaded onto a palette and swung by a giant crane into the hold of the ferry. For David, being in Paris was like being let out of school. He had a room in his teacher's apartment and took

16 Marie Goossens (1894-1991) and her sister Sidonie (1899-2004) were highly regarded professional harpists in the London area throughout much of the 20th century.

his meals at a restaurant called *Chez Rosalie*.¹⁷ David met many eminent musicians in Paris, including Francis Poulenc, who told him that he found writing for the harp very difficult, and found the pedals, in particular, to be rather complicated. This appears confirmed in compositions such as *Les Biches*, which has one or two awkward passages, but ultimately, David thinks the way Poulenc uses the harp is quite wonderful. Sadly, David was never able to persuade him to write a piece for solo harp.

Early Compositions – *Petite Suite*, 1961

Solange Renié wanted to keep her young pupil on scales and studies for at least a year. David now acknowledges she was absolutely right to do so, but at the time this frustrated him, so he started to compose. His first composition, *Fire Dance*, took about half an hour to write, and because he had ‘rattled it out’ in such a short time he felt that surely it could not be any good. In fact, of all his compositions, this is perhaps the one most often played. It was inspired by the music of Paraguay, and as David still says in his recitals, “It’s a hot little number.”

Two other pieces in his *Petite Suite*, “Prelude” and “Nocturne,” came afterwards and took several months to compose. David felt better about these, and confesses that he has a particular soft spot for the “Nocturne.” Both pieces were inspired by the Seine River, which runs at the bottom of the garden of Solange’s country house near Rouen. Watching the clouds part and the light shine on the moving Seine River one stormy night, David was inspired to insert a harmonic sequence from Kodály’s *Psalmus Hungaricus*, a piece that he had recently played, into the middle section of his “Nocturne.”

When David showed Solange his composition, she thought that it was too difficult for him to play and suggested that she learn it instead. She also sent a recording of her playing it to the Northern California Harpists Association’s international competition where it won first prize. Her grateful student was pleased not only by this honour and the “rather handsome cheque” that came with it, but also by

news of its publication by United Music Publishers Ltd. in 1961.¹⁸ This became David’s first published work, and he has been writing and publishing ever since.

Feeling a little guilty, David wrote to Zoltán Kodály in Budapest, Hungary, to confess what he had done. Shortly afterwards, he received a letter back saying, “How exciting! When are you coming to Budapest? I’ll arrange a recital for you.” Kodály and David became close friends and David spent time with him and his wife Sarolta whenever they came to London. On one occasion, David took Kodály¹⁹ to a dress rehearsal at Covent Garden for a production of Schoenberg’s *Moses und Aron*. The music was difficult to understand and not many tickets had been sold, until the *Evening Standard* ran the story, “Soho Strippers in Orgy Scene at the Royal Opera House” and the performance sold out. David often wondered what Kodály made of all this.

Even though his *Petite Suite* was composed more than a half century ago, David continues to receive mail from students thanking him for the piece. Recently, David was especially excited to find a letter from Dmitri Shostakovich, on Royal Garden Hotel letterhead notepaper, written when the composer was in London in 1972. Originally written in Russian, and only recently translated, Shostakovich expressed his “heartfelt gratitude” to David for his *Pe-*



With Maxim Shostakovich after a concert at the Royal Festival Hall (both from the same day!?)

David with Maxim Shostakovich, Dmitri Shostakovich’s son. As Maxim and David looked alike, colleagues in the London Philharmonic took this picture of them together after a concert in the Royal Festival Hall, London in the early 1980s. Maxim had come to England to conduct the orchestra.

¹⁷ Picasso, famously, also ate here.

¹⁸ *Petite Suite* is now published by Adlais.

¹⁹ Sarolta stayed behind on this occasion.

tite Suite and wished him “further creative success in [his] art.” Found with the letter is a picture of David with Maxim Shostakovich, Dmitri’s son. The picture was taken by colleagues in the London Philharmonic in the early 1980s because they thought the two musicians, both born in 1938, looked very much alike.

After the Scholarship Ran Out

The scholarship only lasted eighteen months, which passed all too quickly, and although David’s father had said he would help him financially so he could prolong his studies, David decided instead that he must earn his keep. He stayed on in Paris and worked for an ensemble called *Ars Rediviva*,²⁰ tuning the harpsichord and copying music. The ensemble was financed by Swiss composer Harry Brown, and one day when they were working on one of Harry’s new compositions, the man himself walked in. Gentle and charming, he told David that he had already heard a lot about him, but was worried about David’s health as he was down to seven stone²¹ and as thin as a rake. He insisted David lunch every day at his apartment and that when he was away, his cook would prepare his meals. A few months later he took David to his home in Baden in Switzerland, where David learned that Harry was part of the Brown family of Brown Boveri²² and that David’s father had done an apprenticeship in diesel-electric locomotives with Harry’s father. The Brown house contained many Renoirs and Cézannes, and David found himself practising his harp in front of a different picture every night.

In 1962, David competed in the Israel Competition and although he had made enormous progress with Solange he was unaware of the stamina and experience required to support a technique still not fully formed. His performance of Faure’s *Impromptu* was described by Pierre Jamet as “quite good for an

Englishman,” but Carlos Salzedo’s *Variations* did not go so well and David stormed off stage to drown his sorrows. Maria Korchinska suggested that he give up the harp and return to England to become a solicitor or accountant, but Phia Berghout told him not to take any notice. Later when he took lessons from Maria, she instilled in him a greater sense of rhythm and a practical approach to performance, training him in what might be called the Russian technique that has informed his sense of sonority.

There were many eminent harpists in Paris in the 1960s and David was able to learn a great deal from them and make many good friends. These included Lily Laskine, who was an incredible influence with her wonderful musicianship and humanity, Clelia Gatti-Aldrovandi, the dedicatee of the Hindemith Sonata, and David’s great friend and contemporary, Marielle Nordmann. And then in later years, he was proud to add Isabelle Moretti to his list of close friends. David also knew Marcel Grandjany well and wanted to study with him, but, unfortunately, this never happened. Learning from and working with all of these harpists broadened his horizons and eventually led to opportunities to adjudicate in international competitions around the world.

Early Professional Life – Sir Georg Solti, Early 1960s

Upon his return from Europe in 1964, David learned that the Royal Opera House was holding harp auditions. He telephoned to inquire and was told that the auditions had finished, but that if he liked he should put his harp in a taxi and come straight over. He did that and played various cadenzas and accompanied the leader²³ of the orchestra. Sir Georg Solti then came down, looked at David’s score of the Hindemith Sonata, which was scribbled all over in red ink, and he said that he liked that. Solti did not realise that the markings were Solange’s, not David’s, but he was engaged anyway. David learned early that sight-reading would be an important skill to have at the Opera House. Once he had to sight-read a ballet

20 *Ars Rediviva* was an ensemble specialising in early music and based in Paris.

21 Seven stones is the equivalent of 98 pounds.

22 Brown Boveri was a Swiss group of electrical engineering companies that entered into a licensing agreement with the British manufacturing firm Vickers in 1919. This enabled the British company to manufacture and sell Brown Boveri products to various parts of the world.

23 A “leader” of the orchestra is the commonly used British term for concertmaster. In this case, the leader was Mr. Charles Taylor.

when his colleague was ill. The tempo was fast and while trying to work out what was next, he missed the chords of the harp solo. Another time, he had to sight-read *Madama Butterfly*.

Playing at the Royal Opera House was an incredible experience. There were marvellous ballets with Margot Fonteyn and Rudolf Nureyev; Maria Callas's last performance of *Tosca*; and so many great singers. These included Jon Vickers in Berlioz's *Trojans*;²⁴ Joan Carlyle in Verdi's *Otello*; Elizabeth Vaughan in Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*; Elisabeth Schwarzkopf as the Marschallin in Strauss's *Rosenkavalier*; Birgit Nilsson in Puccini's *Turandot* and Strauss's *Electra*; Gwyneth Jones as Sieglinde in Wagner's *Walküre*; Hans Hotter as Wotan in Wagner's *Ring*; and many, many more.



David discussing a musical point with Sir Colin Davis during rehearsals for Berlioz's *The Trojans*, one of the most spectacular productions David ever experienced during his time at the Royal Opera House.

Auditioning to Join an Orchestra in the 1960s

In the 1960s, there were many vacant orchestral positions throughout Europe and David reckons it was fairly easy for players without a large amount of playing experience to secure a position in an orchestra. The auditions were also rather relaxed affairs, certainly compared with what is required nowadays for a harpist, i.e. many orchestral excerpts, solos and

sight-reading. But David never had to do an audition like this. He went to the Welsh National Opera when it became a fully professional body in 1973. Its conductor, James Lockhart, had already heard him play at Covent Garden, and when he was asked to join the Royal Philharmonic in 1975, Rudolf Kempe, the conductor, also knew David from Covent Garden. Then one summer when there was not much going on with the Royal 'Phil,' David had a call from the London 'Phil' to say that their harpist was not able to finish the season and asked if David could fill in. When the season was over he was told, "That was your audition; you've got the job."

Playing in an Orchestra in the 1960s

When David looks back at the workload of an everyday orchestral player he finds it hard to believe. There were many 'three-session' days, a morning and evening at the Royal Festival Hall and perhaps an afternoon recording at Wembley or Watford. World tours were exhausting, and it could be difficult to practise. The harp was always the last instrument out of the van, and by the time it was on the platform the brass would be practising loudly, making it difficult to tune. On one occasion in 1986 the orchestra flew back to London from their engagement in Los Angeles, recorded Vaughan Williams's *Sinfonia Antartica* with Bernard Haitink that day, and then the next day David flew to Copenhagen to perform the Glière Harp Concerto and Debussy's *Danses* from memory with the Radio Symphony Orchestra in a live broadcast.

Leaving the Orchestra, Late 1980s

Leaving the London Philharmonic Orchestra after thirty-five years of orchestral playing was quite a shock, not only for the lack of regular income but for the loss of the discipline of its schedule. However, this enabled David to focus his energies on researching early harp repertoire, composing and practising. It also allowed him to get away from the 'heavy' technique used in orchestral playing and to better understand 18th-century techniques and different approaches to interpretation.

²⁴ The *Trojans* was one of the most spectacular productions David ever experienced during his time at the Royal Opera House. A battery of six harps sounded as impressive as they looked, and the opera contains the touching aria *Chant d'Iopas* with its beautiful harp obbligato.

For a time he kept teaching at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London (from the late 1980s) and at Manchester's Royal Northern College of Music (from the late 1990s). He also returned to the orchestra on occasion, and in 2000 found himself Principal Harp in the *World Orchestra for Peace*²⁵ at a Prom concert conducted by Valery Gergiev.

Recordings

David has recorded over forty albums with the London Philharmonic Orchestra, the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and the London Symphony Orchestra under the batons of Sir Adrian Boult, Sir Colin Davis, Bernard Haitink, Sir Georg Solti, Leopold Stokowski and Klaus Tennstedt. But his first foray into solo recordings was when David's recording engineer friend, Evelyn Gluck, heard him play and suggested he make a recording. The first session, in 1975, gave him the chance to record his *Petite Suite* for the first time, and when this was presented to RCA they accepted it and issued it as an album. He was able to make a second recording the following year of Spanish harp music. He had become immersed in this music after his composer friend Antonio Ruiz-Pipó introduced him to fellow composer Salvador Bacarisse and pianist Alicia de Larrocha.

Many of David's orchestral recordings have been critically acclaimed, and although there are too many to review here, one that deserves special mention is Haitink's recording in 1973 of Stravinsky's *Three Great Ballets*. This included three harps, which were played by David, Cherry Isherwood²⁶ and Frank Sternefeld.²⁷ It was interesting to see David's reaction when this recording was once again put on a turntable in 2017. David immediately started miming the harp actions to the *Firebird* as if he were still behind his harp in Haitink's orchestra.

David's only regret is that he did not do more recordings when opportunities arose. On one occasion

David had gone to Solti to see if he could be absent from one rehearsal as he had been asked to play the harp part in the incidental music for the major television series *Brideshead Revisited*, but Solti asked him to "hang around." He missed that opportunity, but on another occasion in 1978 he did 'feign a headache' so he could do the Ravel *Introduction et Allegro* with the National Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Charles Gerhardt.²⁸ There were three sessions: David played other works by Ravel in the morning and the afternoon, and then at seven o'clock in the evening, made two recordings of the *Introduction et Allegro* from memory. This recording became a best-seller in America, but it was not without its critics. This version of the Ravel, with its bigger orchestra and bigger string section, had been previously done by Nicanor Zabaleta, who was similarly criticised. David was very happy with the recording saying, "It sounds sumptuous in places." David later found a letter from Ravel to the conductor Ingelbrecht²⁹ indicating that extra strings would sound "better than the original."

Publishing Early Music – The Four Anthologies

In the early 1970s David published his four *Anthologies*, collections of early music for the harp that have retained their popularity. His interest in early music started with the work of his youth making harpsichords, which led to a passion for the repertoire of the harpsichord, clavichord and virginals. The notes accompanying each *Anthology* volume make fascinating reading, not only for the history of early harp music (and other early music that can be played on the harp), but for the reflection of attitudes of the time.

John Parry's *Sonata in D major*, written for the triple harp, was one of the first pieces of early music

25 Founded by Georg Solti and made up of principal players from around the world.

26 Cherry was well-known for her harp playing with the Liverpool Philharmonic in the 1950s, and died in 2009, just short of her 90th birthday.

27 Frank also lives in Bwlch y Cibau, Wales.

28 This London-based orchestra was made with all the principals of the London orchestras.

29 Désiré-Émile Inghelbrecht (1880-1965) was a French conductor and, along with Ravel, Florent Schmitt and others, a member of *Les Apaches*. He later wrote a biography of Debussy. Ravel wrote to him about the *Introduction et Allegro* on February 26th, 1911 saying, "The string quartet could be doubled or even tripled. And with the exception of several solos, it would sound even better than the original."

David discovered along with William Croft's *Passacaglia*. Having found these treasures, he then started to look for other original pieces, but it was certainly his love of early music, in particular the lute music of the 1600s, that inspired him to write transcriptions of early music for the harp.

Some of the early music David uncovered comes from John George Morley's harp shop in Kensington, London, and from Clive Morley's library. At the end of the 19th century, the Morley harp shop had become an international meeting place for harpists, and as John's wife Cecilia was a distinguished harpist and the dedicatee of many compositions from famous musicians, the library continued to grow. It now contains many letters from harpists and a large collection of quality music.

David also feels there must be many other treasures awaiting discovery. John Weipert's³⁰ *Divertimenti for Two Harps*, for example, is a wonderful set of pieces which David says are successful in concerts. He has also discovered much harp music in libraries such as the Fitzwilliam Museum Library in Cambridge with help from friends and colleagues, such as Marielle Nordmann. David is presently working on the *Krumpholtz Harp Concerto No.6 in F major, Op. 9*,³¹ which he believes is a remarkable piece of music, possibly Krumpholtz's finest work, and very much like some of the Mozart piano concerti. It was very much loved in London in the 1790s when played by Krumpholtz's widow, Anne-Marie, with Haydn conducting. Clementi and Stephen Storace³² also made arrangements of it for the piano.

David also has a large library of pieces from 18th-century harpists. One of these is a volume by François Petrini,³³ who wrote some lovely pieces. David says that searching out interesting lost pieces has been a "wonderful adventure" and he suggests

that, with orchestras dispensing with salaried harpists these days, young harpists do new things, including researching early music. There is still a huge amount of work to be done in finding interesting pieces from the 18th century, much of which are in private collections.

Other Compositions

A full, updated list of David's compositions is available on his website, www.davidwatkins.info, which is maintained by Tim Creighton Griffiths of Creighton's Collection. Of David's many compositions, his two harp concerti deserve special mention. The first, *Concertino Pastorale* for harp, flute, clarinet and strings, was commissioned by Victor Salvi in 1978. Scored for the same combination as Ravel's *Introduction et Allegro*, it is written in a piquant, neo-classical style with a haunting and poetic slow movement. The second, *Concerto Grosso* for two harps and strings, was commissioned by the American harp duo, Tick-Tock in 2000. It is written in a 'faux-Baroque' style and is subtitled the *Courtempierre Concerto*, as it was written at Marielle Nordmann's residence in France.³⁴



David with Jana Boušková, Andrea Vigh, Susanna Mildonian and Marielle Nordmann. This was taken at the Budapest International Harp Festival in 2003 where David played his *Concertino Pastorale* and his *Concerto Grosso* for two harps.

30 John Erhardt Weipert (1766-1823) was a harp teacher based in London.

31 See "Current Projects" below for more information about David's work with this piece and others.

32 Muzio Clementi (1752-1832) was an Italian-born British composer. Stephen Storace (1762-1796) was a composer born in London to an Italian father and an English mother. His sister Nancy was a famous opera singer, and was the first Susanna in "The Marriage of Figaro."

33 François Petrini (1744-1819) was a harpist and composer; his father was harpist to Frederick the Great.

34 The Chateau de Courtempierre is located in the Loiret department in north-central France.

PUBLISHED MUSIC (www.davidwatkins.info)

Four Anthologies of English Music - *Stainer and Bell*

1. 1550-1650 Faruaby, Morley, Byrd, Bull, Dowland, Peeron, Johnson and Gibbons
2. 1650-1750 Croft, Purcell and Blow.
3. 1750-1800 John Parry and Arne.
4. 1800-1850 John Field and Parish Alvars.

Four Folk Songs - *Stainer and Bell*

Scarborough Fair, Now is the month of Maying, Barbara Allen and Summer is i'cumen in.

Sonata VI for Harp, Violin and Cello, J.C.Bach - *Stainer and Bell*

Petite Suite - *Adlais*

Prelude-Nocturne-Fire Dance

Dance Suite - *Salvi*

Renaissance Dance, Lament, Bolero and Hungarian Flute Dance.

Three Pieces Manuel de Falla - *Chester Music*

Corregidor's Dance - Hommage to Debussy and The Millers Dance.

Three Nocturnes Geoffrey Burgon - *Chester Music*

Three Welsh Melodies William Mathias - The Gwynn Collection Wales

Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring - *Adlais*

Passacaglia In Memoriam Tsunami - *Adlais*

A Welsh Landscape - *Adlais*

A Garland for the Harp - *Adlais*

Concertino Pastorale for harp with flute, clarinet, string quartet (or string orchestra) - *Salvi*

Concerto Grosso for two harps and string quartet (string orchestra or piano) - *Salvi*.

Sinfonia Conceto - for harp and strings J.C. Bach - *Salvi*

Harp Quintet (Harp and String Quartet) Florent Schmitt - *Salabert*

Six Easy Pieces - *Boosey and Hawkes*

Complete Method for Harp - *Boosey and Hawkes*

Wainamoinen makes music for choir and harp

Kodály-Watkins - *Boosey and Hawkes*

MONOGRAPH - Analysis and History of Ravel's Introduction and Allegro

The David Watkins Collection - *David Watkins / Creighton's Collection*

Volume I - 'ADAGIO and RONDO' K617 WA Mozart

Volume Ia - *A keyboard accompaniment for I above*

Volume Ib - 'ADAGIO for SOLO HARP' K617A WA Mozart

Volume II - 'DIALOGUE' for Harp and Harpsichord (or Keyboard)

Volume III - 'THREE SHAKESPEARE SONNETS' for Voice & Harp (or Piano)

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Volume XV - SONATA in G minor PJ Meyer

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Performing Today

These days, David is at his happiest when playing solo harp, but he will do other harp playing too when opportunities arise. There is a certain thrill to performing live with an orchestra that, once experienced, is hard to abandon. For example, David recalls playing Debussy's *Danses* at a London Proms concert with Sir Simon Rattle, with thousands of people in the audience, and thinking, "Isn't this absolutely wonderful; I get to decide when to cue the conductor to begin the performance. It is always at that precise and perfect moment when the audience becomes quiet and yet the air is still electric."

David endeavours to bring a creative edge to his solo playing and has learned a great deal by accompanying singers, working in opera and with an orchestra. There are many different approaches to playing, and spending all of one's time as a harpist in an orchestra runs the danger of suffering from a more limited perspective. Other areas of performance that David has enjoyed during his long career include the duo with his sister, the mezzo-soprano Helen Watkins, which gave rise to many songs that he dedicated to her, and in more recent years, performances with violinist Michael Bochmann³⁵ and soprano Jane



David with his sisters Sue and Helen, Mstislav Rostropovich and his wife Galina in 1991. David and Rostropovich were being made Fellows of the Guildhall.

Leslie Mackenzie.³⁶ David also enjoys his many recitals and masterclasses, although he does not travel as far as he used to.

³⁵ Principally known as the founder of the Michael Bochmann String Quartet, Michael has also played the Bach Double Violin Concerto with Sir Yehudi Menuhin. He lives in Gloucestershire.

³⁶ Jane studied with Elisabeth Schwarzkopf and lives in Kent.

David's Harps

David used to have several harps, but now only has two: the small Lyon & Healy (a Style 17, but with a straight soundboard), made in 1905, that was left to him by his first teacher, Frances Callow, and a single-action Erard harp, made in 1820 with a late 18th-century design. The Lyon & Healy is a wonderful instrument for solo and chamber music, as well as for general use. Powerful, sensitive, and with a huge range of sonorities, David has even used it to play concertos with big orchestras. David finds his single-action Erard harp to be perfect for recording early music. Eventually, David hopes to get another harp, perhaps a 19th-century Erard, but for now he is concentrating on technique and interpretation, and writing more compositions.

Current Projects

When asked about retirement, David remarked, "I don't think I'll retire until I'm nailed down into my coffin," adding, "or if my fingers or my brain refuse to work." David gets great joy from practising every day and learning new pieces; it is hard to imagine him ever giving up.³⁷ As mentioned previously, he is currently rehearsing the Krumpholtz *Concerto for the Harp, No. 6 in F major, Op. 9* in preparation for a recording with his colleague Adrian Butterfield in early 2018. This largely unknown piece was recorded by Lily Laskine in the 1960s and the music appeared to be lost until David's colleague, composer, Adrian Cleaton, located it online. Together they have arranged it for harp and string quartet. The recording will also include a violin concerto by Joseph Bologne,³⁸ as well as newly written cadenzas by David for the Krumpholtz Concerto and the Mozart flute and harp Concerto.

David's life remains full and busy in Bwlch y Cibau, Wales, with a seemingly endless number of visitors, many of whom are famous harpists, as well

³⁷ David reminds us that Pablo Casals reputedly said he was still practising his cello at age 92 as he was still eager to improve.

³⁸ Joseph Bologne's royal title was "Chevalier de Saint-Georges." During his lifetime, he was referred to as the "black Mozart."



David with Monica Mason and Michael Portillo. Monica Mason was the former artistic director of the Royal Ballet and one of the dancers in Prokofiev's *Romeo and Juliet*, along with Margot Fonteyn and Rudolf Nureyev. David played the harp in the acclaimed film version of this performance of Prokofiev's *Romeo and Juliet*. This was taken at the Mall Galleries, London.

as other famous musicians and singers. If he is not practising for a forthcoming concert, he is working on his next harp project, such as new recordings, relearning different playing styles, writing new pieces and cadenzas, and considering what to publish next. Life is certainly not dull, and any passing harpist is sure of a warm welcome. Just give him a call beforehand so he can get the kettle on.

[Contact details for David's music and recordings: Creighton's Collection, 244 Cathedral Road, CARDIFF, CF11 9JG, UK, Tel: +44 (0)29 2039 7711, Email: tim@creightonscollection.co.uk]

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

John Browne is a neighbour of David Watkins', living in the neighbouring village of Llanfyllin,* Wales. He is a keen amateur musician and also plays the harp "to the standard where I appreciate how much skill is required to play this most demanding of instruments."



* The approximate pronunciation of Llanfyllin is "Llan-fuh-llin."

A CONCERT IN HIS 80TH YEAR

Summer has come to an abrupt halt here in mid-Wales in 2017, having turned distinctly chilly at the start of September. On Friday, September 8th, sixty eager audience members travel along the remote Montgomeryshire valley leading to Saint Melangell's church in Llangynog, Wales. Inside the temperature is less than 50°F, akin to a refrigerator, and in front of the 15th-century oak rood screen* stands the resplendent gold Lyon & Healy harp that once belonged to his teacher Frances Callow. Despite being in his 80th year, and the cold, David can still deliver an impressive harp recital. The programme starts with early harp music, most of the pieces from his earlier *Anthologies*, and continues with Spohr's *Fantasia in C minor*, Godefroid's *Concert Étude in Eb Minor*, Debussy, Tournier and several of David's own compositions, including his famous *Petite Suite*. David has a great rapport with his audience, introducing each piece with interesting background information or amusing anecdotes. He tells the audience that the *Fantasia* was composed on Spohr's honeymoon to his harpist wife Dorette Scheidler. Always the showman, David adds with a touch of glee, that he hopes Spohr managed to reserve a little of his time for her!

* A rood screen is a dividing partition in a medieval church, and is usually made of highly intricately carved oak. 

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