

Long Bio



Alys Howe began playing the harp at the age of seven, and since then she has pursued studies in both Celtic and classical music in Scotland, Ireland, and across Canada. Born in Vancouver, British Columbia, Alys credits her early interest in music to the Orff program implemented by the Vancouver Waldorf school, which she attended during her elementary years. Early harp instruction was with Alison Hunter, Miranda Brown, and especially Elizabeth Volpé, the VSO Principle Harpist. She also worked with American harpists Kim Robertson and Deborah Henson-Conant. Alys' love for traditional music led to two Gold Medal-winning performances in the Advanced Harp competition at the Vancouver Mod, (a Scottish Gaelic music festival; 1997, 1999), appearances with Lori Pappajohn of Harps International and Winter Harp (1995-1999), performances for CBC Television private functions (Vancouver, 1998), entertainment for a Jane Goodall lecture at The Orpheum (Vancouver, 1999), a spot on Vancouver Television's breakfast show (weddings, 1999), and interviews and performances in a documentary about the Vancouver Gaelic Choir, called "Road to the Isles" (1999). She has contributed to several recordings, including the seasonal "A Saviour is Born", and an album of duets with flautist Justine Bliq. A participant in various ensembles, Alys was a member of the Vancouver Bach Youth Choir (1995-1999) and the Vancouver Gaelic Choir (1997-1999), whom she appeared with as a concert soloist and whom she also accompanied on harp over a season of concerts (1998-1999). Having twice been a member of the Vancouver Opera Children's Chorus, Alys performed in *Turandot* (1997) and *La Boheme* (1998).

In 1999, Alys was the first overseas student accepted into the B.A. Scottish Music and Ethnomusicology program at the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama in Glasgow, where she was awarded the Trust Fund (2000). While at the RSAMD, Alys received harp instruction from clarsach tutors Patsy Seddon (better known as half of the duo *Sileas*), Wendy Stewart, and

Corrina Hewatt, in addition to private studies with Savourna Stevenson, and Mary MacMaster (the other half of *Sileas*). Alys studied Scottish Gaelic with Mina Smith, Gaelic Song with Kenna Campbell, and Scots Song and Ballads with Alison McMorland and Andrew Hunter. In Scotland she appeared in various venues throughout Glasgow, Edinburgh, the Orkney Islands, and Skye (1999-2000), as a harp soloist, in a two-harp, fiddle and vocal ensemble with Rosie Morton and Kirsty Cottar, as a harpist for the RSAMD Scottish Music concert tours, as accompanist to Emily Smith (1999-2000), and as a member of the Glasgow Gaelic Choir for the "Gaelic Women In Song" concert series (1999). Alys also recorded her own album, mainly of Scottish traditional music, while she was in Glasgow (2000). Based on this recording, Alys was offered full scholarship to attend the Banff School For Fine Arts (2001).

After moving to Toronto to study harp with Sharlene Wallace, Alys graduated with a BFA Hons. in Music Performance from York University, where she also studied music composition with William Westcott and improvisation with Casey Sokol. In Eastern Canada, Alys has continued her Scottish Gaelic language and song studies with David Livingston-Lowe (through the U of T Celtic Studies program), and also with Catriona Parsons, Hector MacNeill and Angus MacLeod (at the Gaelic College of Celtic Arts and Crafts in Cape Breton). She has studied Cape Breton-style piano accompaniment with Anne Lederman (York University) and with Kimberley Fraser (the Gaelic College of Celtic Arts and Crafts). Her appearances in Ontario include The Toronto Harp Festival (2001), where Alys was invited to perform as a soloist, was accompanied by Graham Kennedy on percussion, and gave the premiere of her own composition "Nocturne" for two harps (with Sharlene Wallace). She has also given performances on solo harp for such diverse occasions as: Christmas by Lamplight at Pioneer Black Creek Village (2002), the Canadian College of Armed Forces (2003), Osgoode School of Law (2002), York Orientation (2002), and York Alumni Association (2001). Alys has appeared as harpist for the York University Women's Choir performances of Britten's *A Ceremony of Carols* (2002), and performed as harpist, singer and arranger for her own graduating recital at York, with Luxon Burgess on flute and vocals and Andrew Mason on bass and cello. She has also performed on harp and vocals with Casey Sokol's Improvisation Ensemble (2002/2003) and has given performances on harp, vocals, and Cape Breton-style piano for Anne Lederman's Celtic Canadian Ensemble (2001-2003).

The recipient of a Canada Council Grant and the Watkins Fellowship (2003), Alys completed her Masters at the University of Limerick in Performance of Irish Traditional Music (2004), graduating with First Class Honours. At UL, she studied harp with Fionnuala Rooney, Laoise Kelly, Janet Harbison, Michael Rooney, Catriona McKay, Karen Tweed (accordion), and Clive Carroll (guitar). Taking piano lessons with Geraldine Cottar, Alys engaged in a comparison of Irish piano accompaniment styles versus those found in Cape Breton. Studying vocal technique for traditional singers with Elaine Cormican, as her elective, Alys also studied Scottish Gaelic song with Christine Primrose through electronic media, a co-operative initiative between Sabhal Mor Ostaig and UL. Alys took the opportunity to research material for her thesis while writing an ethnography contrasting the styles of Sharlene Wallace, Kim Robertson, and Janet Harbison. Based on interviews with harp players and other musicians in North America, Ireland, and

Scotland, Alys hopes to discuss the role of musicians who approach Celtic and traditional music from the standpoint of cultural outsiders. As part of the music technology module on the course, Alys recorded and engineered a demo CD. Alys has given performances for the Prime Minister of Slovenia (at the Limerick City Museum, 2004), for the UL Alumni Association (2003), at the Lunchtime Concert series in the Performing Arts Centre (as featured artist, accompanied by Bridget O'Connell, Nicholas Yenson and Alison O'Connell (2003); accompanied by Sarah-Jane Woods and Alan Colfer (2004); in ensemble A, ensemble "Fanny Power", as accompanist to Olivia Ryan (2003), and for her own graduating recital).

Alys Howe's career as a teacher spans the breadth of Canada, from the East Coast of Cape Breton to the Sunshine Coast in British Columbia. In addition to the private students she has taught in Vancouver, Scotland, Toronto, and Ireland, Alys has been a harp presenter at the Coast Summer School of Celtic Music (2003), assistant harp instructor to Rosie Morton at the Edinburgh Harp Festival (2004), as well as to Heather Yule at the Gaelic College of Celtic Arts and Crafts in Cape Breton (2003), has taught harp and piano for Presto Music Studios in Ontario (Dorothy Stavrinou Lavkulik, director), and has been on faculty for harp at Toronto's Classical Music Conservatory (Lusiana Lukman, director), and Amati String Studio in Vancouver (Amy Levinson, director). She was also engaged to give harp instruction to both M.A. and undergraduate students taking harp as their elective at University of Limerick. Returning to the Gaelic College of Celtic Arts and Crafts during the summers of 2004 and 2005, Alys offered harp instruction to students of all ages throughout July and August. Since moving back to Vancouver, B.C. in 2004, Alys has been teaching privately, at Prussin Music, Celtic Woollens, and has also been performing in such local venues as Aberthau House ("Monday Night Live", 2004), Amati String Studios (2004), and for the studios of Elizabeth Volpe, where she also gave a masterclass (2004) and a recital (2005). 2005 also marked the release of Alys Howe's debut recording, *Phosphorescence*, which was featured on the KRVS Radio program "Harpestry: Classical and other Musics of the Harp," hosted by Valerie Green. Alys enjoyed appearing as a soloist and accompanist in concert with the Vancouver choir *Pandora's Vox* (2005), and also performing on harp and vocals for the Alliance for the Arts Cultural Presentations, held at Vancouver City Hall (2005). Appearing frequently at The Hall of the Clans in Cape Breton during July and August (2004/2005), Alys was also a featured performer for *Highland Village Day* in Iona (2005).

Alys has worked as a busker (street musician), an extra, and an actor - the highlight of which was playing Amy in United Players' production of *Little Women* (1996). At UL, Alys was cast as Audrey in the Drama Society's production of *Little Shop of Horrors*. Besides her love of music and theatre, Alys continues to pursue her interests in creative writing and literature. Accepted as a double-major into the Creative Writing Program at York, Alys is the author of four plays, two of which were performed at the Vancouver Fringe Festival (*Critics* 1991, *The Ownership of Women* 1992), another winning second place in the Vancouver Teenrites playwriting competition and subsequently performed at the Gastown Actors' Theatre (*AWOL* 1995), and the fourth, short-listed for publication in the UK "Sacred Earth Dramas" playwriting competition (*Arc En Ciel* 1996). Alys has had two works of short fiction published in the Douglas College journal "Pearls" (*Rapunzel's Revenge*

and *Pomegranate Seeds* 1998). In 2002, Alys received Honourable Mention for Poetry in the York President's Prizes competition (*Monogamous Moon*). She has also published poetry in "Existere Magazine" (*Altered Conditions* 2003), "The Fence: a Bi-Women's 'Zine" (*Monogamous Moon* and *Heartburn* 2003), a short story in "Garm Lu" academic journal (*The Children of Lir* 2003), and various articles in "The International Society of Folk harpers and Craftsmen" and "B.C. Harps" magazines (1995 - 2000).

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