

Two special pieces has been chosen as the compulsory piece for the upcoming 2024 Rave Harps International Prestige Award Solo competition – “**Evening Lights**” by **Dr Ho Chee Kong** and “**The Cry of the Flamingos**” by **Şirin Pancaroğlu**. We take this opportunity to find out more about the composers and pieces.

INTERVIEW WITH ŞİRİN PANCAROĞLU TURKEY

For Turkish harpist, **Şirin Pancaroğlu**, discovering the variety of musical identities of the harp is a central endeavor. Trained as a classical harpist at Geneva Conservatory and Indiana University Jacobs School of Music, she is equally active in the realm of Turkish music, improvisation, contemporary music, tango and semi-staged performances as she is in the mainstream harp repertoire. With concerts in over twenty countries, twelve album recordings and a multitude of collaborations to her credit, Şirin has been sharing her musical roots with audiences, connecting the traditional to worldly ideas. Her work on unearthing the historical Turco-Ottoman harp, the *çeng*, has earned her a unique place in harp history, leading her to become closely acquainted with traditional Turkish music. First transcribing and arranging from the traditional Turkish music repertoire, she later started composing music for harp with ties to the tradition and beyond. “The Turkish Harp” embodies experiences and knowledge she has accumulated since 2007, which she wishes to share with the international harp community.

THA: You are an established classical harpist. How did your music journey lead you into writing for more harp music?

Actually I would have to say that this was surprise for me. There are a few things however that have shaped this new creative area for me as a musician. First of all, I have always been very interested in making up tunes. Even as a child, when I would feel a little sad or confused I would start improvising melodies on syllables. However, as I progressed in my musical studies the knowledge I have acquired about the creative processes of composition were through composers I met and collaborated with. They were specialists so to speak, and I could not do what they did. This held me back for years. Then in 2008, came a moment when I started to be really interested in Turkish music mainly because I wanted to play the forgotten and historical Turkish harp, the *çeng*. After reviving this tiny harp I started playing simple Turkish music on the *çeng*, mostly early music and then I thought I could try more dynamic Turkish music on the lever and pedal harps. And then one day, at a festival abroad, harpists asked me if they could play these pieces as well, had I written them down? I had not. I was working from tunes that are written down on a monostaff which came of course with no harmony and no left hand. So working on pieces like that made me focus on transcribing and arranging. It felt like half way composition! I did that for five to six years and then I wrote a hymn. A composer I knew sort of tried me on it. The song was in the Turkish music style. Then a tango. The tango felt like something in between Turkish and Argentinian tango music. And then a little waltz and nothing after that for eight years. I was in a context where there were composers who supposedly were excellent at their craft and I kept holding back. Later in a project in 2021 I put my foot forward and I compose half the pieces. I wrote an instrumental piece and four songs which were performed and they got a warm reception. While all this was happening I was working on preparing a sheet music collection of Turkish music where I had included early pieces and also recent pieces by a living composer. Eventually the latter fell out of the project and I had to fill in. I wrote ten pieces in a very short amount of time. It was a great feeling and led to “The Turkish Harp Project”.





THA: How do you see the connection between the Turkish harp with the modern harp?

A historical lap harp can not race against the advantages of the technical features and potential of modern harps in a general sense. But it is a harp, and it reminds us of the essence of harps which is really ancient and have this very primitive aspect. It connects us to the past and I really enjoy this. It also has a few features that I have not come accross in modern harps. For one thing, çeng is an angular harp, and does not feature a triangular closed frame. As a result, I gather that the sound that comes from plucking a string seems to behave a little differently. This may also be due to the leather skin that fuctions as the soundboard. It is somewhat easier to create a legato phrasing. And you play it sitting on the ground. You get this wonderful connection with the earth. In terms of the music collection I have created for modern harps, I think the Turkish music lends itself beautifully to the modern lever and pedal harps. It is a very rich tradition and although the harp can not represent the whole of Turkish music-mostly because of its vocabulary which also includes a lot ot microtonal intervals at times-what it can represent is a vibrant music with beautiful melodic lines and very intricate rhythms. Those speak very beautifully on the harp.

THA: Your piece “The Cry of the Flamingos” is a compulsory piece in the RH International Prestige Award 2024 next year. What was the inspiration behind the piece.

I composed this piece after a visit to one of the large flamingo habitats in Turkey. Turkey is home to some of the most populated flamingos habitats in the world. I was able to observe them from a very close distance and I was really filled with emotion as they moved through the water reserve. I saw a couple of them fly as well. There is something so fragile and yet so strong in their movements. Soon after this visit I came across some news in the media that their habitat was under the threat of a real estate development in the area. I felt very sad about the fact they would lose their home. So I decided to compose a piece that would be a protest. I wanted to imitate the flowing lines of their fine legs and long neck have and undulating movement of their necks. I was able to find compositional elements in Turkish music that would allow me to recreate their fragility, flow and strength I observed in them.

Links to Access the Turkish Harp Music Collection:

- <https://80dayspublishing.com/collections/pedal-harp-downloads/products/the-cry-of-the-flamingos-for-pedal-harp-sirin-pancaroglu-download>
- <https://80dayspublishing.com/collections/pedal-harp/the-turkish-harp-music-collection>
- <https://80dayspublishing.com/collections/lever-harp/the-turkish-harp-music-collection>

