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## Q&A with Bridget Kibbey: Harp and altar

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By Olivia Giovetti



As a young girl, Bridget Kibbey heard a harpist in her church and, appropriately enough, had a religious experience. Now the young artist, who has racked up countless awards—including the Avery Fisher Career Grant she used to fund her divine solo CD, *Love Is Come Again*—has become well known for fostering new works, and for catholic tastes that push her angelic instrument into a wider playing field. We caught up with Kibbey as she made her way home from a gig in New Jersey to discuss her upcoming show at the Stone on Tuesday, May 18. Click past the jump for more on her love of bluegrass, how she hauls a harp around New York and what she thinks classical music could learn from salsa club.

### **The Volume: What drew you to the harp?**

Bridget Kibbey: It wasn't until I really started taking lessons, to be honest, that I was just totally compelled by the instrument. Because it's such a physical connection with the harp, just the fact that your fingertips control the type of sound you make. That challenge of mastering those little digits to create a supple attack or a strong attack is something that keeps me consistently in love with the instrument and consistently challenged by it. I was actually playing the oboe and the piano at the same time, and I didn't enjoy practicing those other instruments. And I got away with not practicing the piano or the oboe, but the harp...I could not get away with not practicing the harp. I think it was the challenge of that, of just being comfortable with manipulating the strings with my hands—not a bow, not my air, purely my fingertips—it captivated me and continues to captivate me.

### **It's not exactly an instrument that music teachers send their students home with in sixth grade. Especially since the instrument requires its own moving crew.**

My dad actually suggested [it]—"You want to try the instrument?"—because he saw how I was mesmerized when I saw someone play. And I always make the joke if he had known how much it would cost to buy one, let alone the pain in the butt it would be to move it for the next ten years, he never would have suggested it. [Laughs]

**How do you tote it around the city?**

There are multiple harp movers in the city. It's a very lucrative side career. They're all musicians who own vans, and I just let them know when I'm playing and they pick me up at the curb and drop me off. It's kind of a nice car service as well.... I swear, I always say, "I could always move harps." We need more harp haulers.

**You've been working with some amazing composers on developing new works. In fact, as we're speaking, you're returning from performing a piece by Sebastian Currier in Princeton.**

Sebastian Currier is someone that I just adore, and in fact I'm doing a piece of his on the program [at the Stone]. He has written some phenomenal pieces for harp, and for harp and violin...and he just has an amazing way of hearing and tapping into the color capabilities of the instrument. So Jacqui Kerrod and I will be playing a two-harp piece he's written called *Crossfade*. Quite stunning.

**That may be a first for the Stone, having two harps in that one space.**

I think so! There may be more of us. It's gonna be neat. This piece is very intimate and it's the perfect space. Sebastian really enjoys the quiet timbre of the instrument, so it's a great place to exploit that.

**Your show at the Stone is also going to showcase the harp in a variety of musical styles and genres, right?**

I'm really just starting to experiment with styles and happened upon them. That's what's funny. One of the pieces I'll be doing is by Kati Agócs, titled *Every Lover Is a Warrior*—the first movement is called "John Riley." I've always been drawn to bluegrass because of its visceral qualities. It's so raw. So when she first wrote the first movement of this piece, we really decided to showcase a bluegrass element.

**What do you look for in a new piece?**

I'm looking for a composer who's open to exploring the color of the instrument and creating a variety of different timbres. For instance, Sebastian, I feel like he's really gifted at hearing the vast capabilities of the harp. The resonance of the instrument is so useful and wonderful. Someone who understands how to use that resonance can create the most mesmerizing, captivating sound on that instrument. I'll be playing a movement of *Caja de Música* by David Bruce, and there's this nocturne that's a part of the piece where David uses a lot of enharmonic doubling to create an incredible resonance over this very haunting melody. It's very simple, but he understands the color of the instrument so he's able to make something so simple sound so haunting and stunning.

**You've also mentioned that you like to salsa dance. Where do you go in New York?**

I love to salsa. Latin Quarter, Cache...they all have great bands that rotate and the ladies always get in cheaper than the men. It's kind of neat.

**They should do that for classical concerts.**

Yes. Ladies' night. Why aren't we instituting this in our world?!