

TRAVELS WITH MY HARP

Volume 5



MARY O'HARA

Twelve Popular Mary O'Hara Songs with Harp Accompaniments

(Cover Photo taken from Mary O'Hara's first LP – Decca Records 1956)

Travels With My Harp Vol. 5

In 1996 Mary O'Hara packed in her music, crated her harp and, with her husband Pat, took off for Africa. She felt life had been good to her and that it was now time to do something different with her time. Her African sojourn lasted six years.

This was not the first time Mary O'Hara hung up her harp supposedly for good. She did the same almost 33 years previously after the premature death of her young husband. At that time she entered a strict Benedictine order of nuns and stayed there for 12½ years till eventually ill-health forced her to leave.

When, in 1975, she emerged from the monastery, she had no idea how she would go about earning a living. Before entering Stanbrook Abbey she had been a very successful singer but in life one is seldom given a second chance. Now aged 39, her options were limited and Mary knew that resurrecting her singing career was a longshot.



Nobody was more surprised than Mary herself when her singing career took off again where it left off, adding twelve more long playing albums (and CDs) to the seven she had recorded before embracing monastic silence. In due course she went on to even wider success and acclaim with her own TV series on the BBC and on ITV in the UK. She toured extensively, collecting plaudits wherever she went and giving concerts in places as diverse as the ancient Herod Atticus Theatre in Athens and the major concert halls of the English-speaking world – Carnegie Hall, London's Royal Albert Hall, The Sydney Opera House.... She has had a play, *The Harp on the Willow*, written about her. It played for ten weeks

to packed audiences in Sydney, Australia and, later, for five weeks at the **Comedy Theatre**, Melbourne. She also found time to write three best-selling books, one of them her autobiography.

Mary O'Hara has now retired from the concert platform for good but she still continues to delight her audiences with witty stories and reminiscences from her days of *Travelling With Her Harp*. Her presentation, punctuated with short video clips from the past, traverses the significant events of her life's story. In retrospect she can now identify and comment upon the 'invisible plan' that gave meaning and unity to the different phases of her life and in her own inimitable way she captivates her audiences just as she once did in the concert halls of Europe, Australia and North America. Her story-telling skills are as evident here as they ever were on the concert stage.

In her presentation, Mary O'Hara talks about her upbringing in Ireland in the 1950s – her childhood in Sligo, her schooling, how she took up playing the harp and how she became a successful stage, radio and TV personality not just in her native Ireland but also in the United Kingdom.

She describes her marriage to the young poet Richard Selig, then a Rhodes Scholar at Oxford – their life together in New York and her devastation at his premature death. This decided her to leave the world of music and enter a strict enclosed order of Benedictine nuns for what she believed to be for the rest of her life. She talks about what life in the monastery was like and how eventually she had to leave. Emerging from monastic seclusion to a renewed and even more successful singing career, she reflects on the trappings of show business and discusses the spiritual and commercial forces that shaped her music and her view of life.

She illustrates all this with video excerpts culled from various television appearances. She talks about her books, especially her autobiography and concludes with some thoughts on her six-year sojourn in Africa.

This songbook is volume 5 of five volumes of harp accompaniments entitled *Travels With My Harp* that emerged as a result of a presentation Mary was invited to give at the World Harp Congress held at University College Dublin in the summer of 2005. Each volume is accompanied by a CD (Vol.2 by a DVD). These are also available separately on Mary's web page. For more information see www.maryohara.co.uk or contact: information@maryohara.co.uk

By 1953 the harp as an accompanying instrument was virtually dead in Ireland and harp-making itself, as a skill, had died. Ireland had no tradition of women singing, much less accompanying themselves on the Irish harp. Three pupils, fresh from Sion Hill school in Dublin changed all that. In that year the Irish Tourist Board brought them to London to help promote Irish tourism. They even made Pathe News. They started a trend that continues to this day. The three pupils were Deirdre Flynn, Mary O'Hara and Kathleen Watkins and they are pictured here together again at the *O'Carolan Harp & Cultural Festival* in Nobber, (the birth place of Carolan), October 4th 2008. Deirdre (Kelleher) and Kathleen (Byrne) came to hear Mary's talk entitled *Travels With My Harp*.

"Shows her mastery and understanding of traditional songs". – Daily Telegraph (UK)