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Die Autorin hat das Thema sowohl vom geschichtlich-politischen Hintergrund mit den Zusammenhängen und Folgen bis in die heutige Zeit beleuchtet und dazu gründliche und umfangreiche Recherchen vorgenommen. Durch den selbständigen Bau einer keltischen Harfe hat sie sich auch mit den dazu notwendigen physikalischen Gesetzen auseinandergesetzt und ihr grosses handwerkliches Geschick bewiesen. Das Spielen auf dieser Harfe zeigt den musikalisch-künstlerischen Aspekt. Die in Englisch geschriebene Arbeit zeugt von einem ausserordentlichen Engagement und grosser Eigeninitiative.

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The Celtic Harp – A Symbol Of Power And Revolution

Introduction

The harp is usually perceived as a weak and soft instrument. Surprisingly however, there exist claims that Celtic harpers were persecuted and hanged, and that their instruments were burned during the British rule over Ireland. One of the objectives of this paper is to analyse the reason for the discrepancy between an outsider's perception of the Celtic harp and its supposedly violent history. Another objective was to find out whether or not such claims are true and can be historically proven, or whether they are just empty nationalist claims. Furthermore, the paper looks at the status and role of harpers and the harp in Celtic society and the symbolic value of the Celtic harp today.

Parallel to the theoretical research of this paper, I built my own Celtic harp as a way to fully get to know the instrument which I myself play.

Methods

There seems to be a lack of information in Switzerland concerning the Celtic harp, as it is less common than other instruments. A family holiday in Dublin came at exactly the right point in time and thus the desired information could be collected in the Irish Traditional Music Archive and the National Library Of Ireland. There, an abundance of information could be gathered. This information came in a number of forms and ranged from simple textbooks for harp students, to diaries, to official manuscripts and state papers.

I was inspired by the harps which I saw in and around Dublin and drew my designs based on the string lengths as a reference. I used my father's workshop to build a harp under his supervision, starting from drawing up a construction plan to varnishing the finished instrument and attaching the strings.

Results

The British slowly but surely developed a fear for all things Celtic, especially Celtic harp music, since it was passed on orally and could not be destroyed. Surprisingly enough, the claims about the persecution of Celtic harpers are true and the original edicts can be found in the calendar of state papers. The harp was not feared without reason however. It becomes obvious that the harp holds enormous rebellious potential as it was used throughout history to symbolize an independent Ireland, making use of the mythology surrounding the instrument, such as the legend of the Tara harp. This Tara harp was pictured on the emblem of the rebellious Society of United Irishmen as well as the rebel's flag: the Green Flag. Interestingly enough, some sources insist that the Green

Flag would be the only serious candidate for a flag should North and South Ireland ever be united again. The harp is not only rebelliously and mythologically important for Ireland; it was also a means of survival for those who could not work to make a living. It was customary to teach the blind to play the harp as a way for them to still be useful members of society. These blind harpers were initially underestimated by the British and thus were not persecuted and could play their tunes more or less freely. This is the main reason why some fragments of traditional Celtic harp music could survive at all.

The harp turned out better than what I imagined I would be able to construct with my limited knowledge of woodworking. It is not perfect but it is great to know that it is my own through and through.

Discussion

Even though the laws against harpers can be found, it is unclear how many harpers were hanged, if any at all. There were countless pardons due to lack of evidence, because of the oral tradition of Celtic music. Nonetheless, the simple fact that laws were written against an entire sub group of a culture shows the extreme situation in Ireland at the time of the British occupation and the power which the Celtic harp possessed, despite being a supposedly soft instrument. It also shows the nervousness of the British when it came to the Celtic culture, as anything Celtic was immediately seen as a threat to the British rule, without questioning the contents beforehand.

Conclusions

The Celtic harp was and always will be extremely important in the representation of a free Ireland. Even now in the 21st century, the evidence of its power is still visible. It is the national emblem of Ireland, the representation of Ireland on the Euro coin, and even a marketing strategy used to promote Irishness for big brands such as Guinness and Ryanair.