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## **Celtic Harp Music and Irish Tales – Patrick Ball**

Story and photo by Colleen Kesterson

### *Pathfinder*

“I know what you are thinking,” Celtic harpist Patrick Ball said to the audience at the Nov. 17 Sunday afternoon concert in the Swan Valley Elementary School gymnasium. “You are all thinking that you always wanted to play a harp. Well I didn’t.”

After the laughter quieted, Ball explained he had received a Master's degree in Irish history. Later, when he heard a Celtic harp played in Ireland, Irish history and Celtic harp music came together for him. He knew he had found a way to make a living besides what he was doing, which was painting houses.

Ball explained that the Celtic Harp was a thousand years old but had gone silent for 200 years until an unemployed California aerospace engineer in the 1970s “took some measurements as engineers do” and brought its sound back to life.

Ball intermingled the harp music while telling Irish tales and lore he listened to and then collected in the land of his ancestors.

He spoke with a distinct Irish brogue as he included his audience in his stories. He sometimes tilted his harp away so that he could see the blocked members of the audience as he spoke.

A member of Alpine Artisans said , “I didn’t think I would like this type of entertainment but as I listened to him I was mesmerized by his music and folklore.”

Ball told the story of how an Irish boy came to find a “perfectly tuned harp” at the sea shore and then his mother dealt with a druid (a wizard) so her son could play beautiful music.



*Patrick Ball during intermission tuning his Celtic harp.*

In another story the audience learned how Turlough O’Carolan, a famous blind harpist of the 17th Century, came to learn the harp after being thrown off his family's property by the English..

The performance concluded with Ball reciting a lengthy Irish blessing his mother had recorded for him. Ball explained, “Even the sounds of the words tell their meaning.”

During the encore Ball recited “Oxen” a poem set on Christmas Eve by Thomas Hardy and played a harp rendition of “Auld Lang Syne,” the song reminiscent of New Year’s Eve.

Ball answered questions by some members of the audience after the performance.

Asked how he makes the music, he replied he uses his fingernails to pluck the brass strings. He applies tape to some of his nails to strengthen them)

When asked how he gets the sound to be heard, he answered, “The strings, when plucked, resonate and together they blend to make a sound like voices in a choir.”

For more information on Patrick Ball visit his web site:  
[www.patrickball.com](http://www.patrickball.com)