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Faces of Swallow Hill: Star Edwards

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A longtime Denver harp player, [Star Edwards](#) has taught at Swallow Hill for 23 years. Here's what she had to say about discovering her instrument, teaching online, seizing musical opportunities during the pandemic and examining the role of music in tough times.

How did you fall in love with the Harp?

I saw one at a renaissance fair in 1981 and thought, "I gotta learn how to play that."

I didn't know where I was going to get one, but then one day, I just had this thought – Go to ARC. I didn't think I needed anything there, but I finally went, and there on the wall was a harp. I bought it for \$100.

What's your favorite thing about the instrument?

It's very melodic and textural. You can add lots of chords, or you can just play simple melodies. It has a big range.

What's your approach to teaching?

The only agenda I have is to start students off with good technique. And then it's just, "Whatever you want to play, let's play it." You want to play, On Top of Spaghetti? Let's do it. You want to play Paint it Black by the Rolling Stones? Let's do it. That's the beauty of music. Music is for everybody.



Star Edwards

What has it been like teaching remotely?

Since I can't adjust people's hands, I send lots of videos of my own hands playing. Overall, I think people like learning on Zoom. It's a convenient forum and you can do lessons in your pajamas.

How has your relationship to music changed over the last year?

When all the gigs got cancelled, I didn't know what to do at first. I could still play, but I just felt like, "What for if no one's going to hear it?" I had to get in that mindset of just doing it anyway. I've taken this opportunity to learn harder pieces that take more coordination.

And I'm optimistic, because when creative people are locked in their houses, there's nothing else to do but create. There are going to be so many projects coming out of this time—stories, music, movies, everything. Arduous times lead to great creativity.

Any other insights about the role of music in difficult times?

My whole life has been a panoramic scene of difficult times. Music helped me survive a tough childhood. Playing music has been essential to being able to express things and not keep it all inside. It creates the space to be able to express whatever you're feeling and learn from it.

I think sometimes we underestimate the power of playing music. There are studies that show that our brain lights up way more by playing music than just listening. And that makes sense. The word is play, not work. Having fun is the foundation for creativity.

What are you looking forward to this year?

So many things! I got permission to make an arrangement for harp based on the score for the BBC show [Cranford](#), so I'm going to do that. I'm going to write some music for this double harp that I dreamed about and had made for me. I'd like to do more library presentations about these songs I wrote that are based on the dreams of extraordinary people – John Lennon, Einstein, Harriet Tubman. I also hope to record some more of my original dream songs, because I find dreams so fascinating and love writing music about them.

To see Star's upcoming classes and sign up, [click here](#).



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