



Playing Familiar Music for Senior Centers and Nursing Homes

By Patrice Fisher

Above: New Orleans Celtic Harp Ensemble performs at Forest Manor Nursing Home in 2019. The harpists are Dr. Loretta Rivers, Joyce Buie, Dr. Eyler Coates Jr., and Patrice Fisher.

Opposite Page: Patrice visits with Molly, a former student and patient, at Forest Manor Nursing Home.

Nursing homes and senior centers often have a budget for entertainment. If you are interested in doing this work, contact your local facility and ask to be scheduled as a visiting musician. They usually have music once every week or two, often in the weekday afternoon hours. You can set up a circuit where you play in a different nursing facility every week until you have reached as many senior centers as are interested. After you finish the circuit, you can start over again. I usually play at a number of places, two to four times a year. If they do ask you to volunteer, sometimes this can lead to other performance opportunities at special occasions such as Christmas parties and Thanksgiving dinner or for hospice patients and funerals. If you decide to volunteer, playing at these locations have their own rewards when you hear a group of women smiling and singing “Edelweiss” with enthusiasm.

For seniors you generally want to play familiar music and try to get them to sing along with you. This is helpful for improving brain functions. The music residents remember best is the music that was popular when they were teenagers. Research the tunes in your repertoire to find out when they were written. I try to create a mixture of repertoire from the 20s, 30s, 40s, 50s, and 60s. You should be able to tell quickly what will work best for your audience. Try to choose upbeat songs although not every song needs to be a sing-along. Learning a little bit about the history of each tune is also helpful. You could say, “This song was made popular by Frank Sinatra or Elvis.” Although, I try to add in classical or original pieces for a change of pace, music familiar to the audience is best. A perennial favorite is, “On the Sunny Side of the Street.”

Hospitals also often have performers in their lobby or waiting areas. If not, look into the possibility of starting a concert series. Playing in a lobby area is different than working in the hospital with patients.

On page 65, I have included my personal list of repertoire suggestions. It outlines the eras and titles of my favorite repertoire for playing at senior centers and nursing homes. I developed this repertoire list as part of my

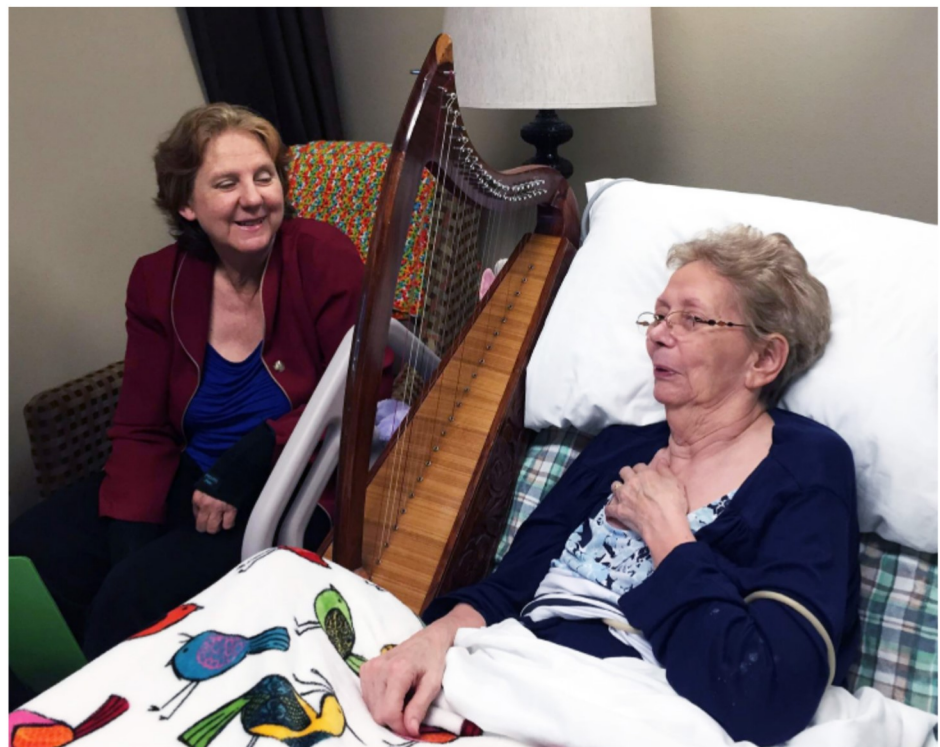
Music for Healing and Transition practicum, but it is my personal compilation of my most popular repertoire.

I often go to the same nursing home several times per year. In this situation, I also organize four separate programs with a variety of songs from each age group. I always include several songs from the sing-along list.

I keep a diary in my music book, notating which program that I played for each nursing home and on which date I played it, e.g., “**Program 1 played at Nursing Home A on April 2, 2020.**”

In these uncertain times of the Covid 19 virus, our seniors are one of our most vulnerable populations. I have started playing my nursing home concerts livestreaming online through the Zoom app. Ask the nursing home to download the Zoom app on their computer and connect it to their smart TV for general viewing.

You can adjust the Zoom audio settings on your laptop to be more music friendly, by following the instructions in this video, [Youtu.be/mEAb4G063sM](https://youtu.be/mEAb4G063sM). You can also record your performance through the Zoom app to share with others. Watch our videos at Youtube.com/ecoslatinos.





New Orleans Celtic Harp Ensemble play in a harp circle at Forest Manor Nursing Home in 2015. The harpists are Dr. Eyley Coates Jr., Joyce Buie, and Patrice Fisher.

Playing Therapeutic Music for ICU or Hospice Patients

Generally playing for very ill patients in an acute health or hospice situation is the opposite of playing in senior centers. Depending on the patient, these situations call for simple, unfamiliar music, at a steady tempo of 50 to 70 beats per minute. This is the rhythm of a normal resting heartbeat. You can often stabilize a heartbeat rate, breathing, and blood pressure simply by playing music at a steady tempo of about 60 beats per minute. If there is a clock in the room, I play in time to the second hand of the clock. If there are monitors, I can watch the numbers go down and see them stabilize while I am playing. I improvise a lot to make the music flow from one piece to the next without stopping. For patients in a lot of pain or late-stage hospice, I try to play more free flowing music, not in a steady tempo. With good improvisational skills, you can take one composition and play the piece in several different ways.

Keeping your harp and equipment set-up to a minimum is essential for playing in health care settings so you can easily move from room to room.

To play in a health care setting you will have to go through each facility's vetting process. This allows them to verify you don't have tuberculosis and have had your annual flu shot. They usually do a full background and credit history check as well.

Patrice Fisher

Latin jazz harpist, Patrice Fisher, favors the music of Brazil and Cuba, saying that not only is the harp comfortable harmonically with the music, but she is drawn to its rhythmic complexities and syncopation, "That's what makes you want to dance." Patrice is a graduate of Tulane and Wolf Trap and lives in New Orleans where she has been composing and performing since the 1980s. She has appeared at many international music festivals with her group, Arpa, in Brazil, Mexico and Guatemala. Patrice has 15 CDs of original music, including her new release, *Happy Socks*. She has performed for more than 30 years at the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival. She is the founder of the New Orleans Jazz Pop Harp Weekend and directs the New Orleans Celtic Harp Ensemble. Patrice performs regularly as a guest artist with international jazz musicians. For information, go to her Facebook page or website at ReverbNation.com/patricefisherandarpa.

Patrice Fisher Pop & Jazz Repertoire for Lever Harp

1920s, Appropriate for audience in their 90s

Ain't Misbehavin', 1929
St. James Infirmary, anonymous American folk song,
made famous by Louis Armstrong, 1928
Blue Skies, Irving Berlin, 1926
Big Butter & Egg Man, Percy Venable, 1926
Copenhagen, Charlie Davis, 1924
Dinah, Harry Akst, 1925
Ice Cream, 1927
My Honey's Loving Arms, 1922
Oh Baby, Walter Donaldson, 1924
Everybody Loves My Baby, Spencer Williams, 1924
It Had to Be You, Isham Jones, 1924

1930s, Appropriate for audience in their 90s

Over the Rainbow (*Wizard of Oz*), Arlen & Harburg, 1939
Summertime, George Gershwin & Heyward, 1935
Blue Moon, 1934
Easy To Love, Cole Porter, 1936
Exactly Like You, Jimmy McHugh, 1930
Friendless Blues, 1930
Embraceable You, Gershwin, 1930
I Can't Get Started, Vernon Duke, 1937
I Got Rhythm, Gershwin, 1930
On the Sunny Side of the Street, Jimmy McHugh, 1930
Stormy Weather, Harold Arlen, 1933
Night and Day, Cole Porter, 1932

1940s, Appropriate for audience in their 80s & 90s

Autumn Leaves, Johnny Mercer 1946
God Bless the Child, 1941
La Vie En Rose, Edith Piaf, David & Louiguy, 1945
East Side, West Side, Jimmy Ruffin, 1949
My Bucket has a Hole In It, Hank Williams, 1949
My Own True Love (*Gone with the Wind*), 1940
Softly, As in a Morning Sunrise, 1941
Laura, Johnny Mercer, 1945

1950s, Appropriate for audience in their 70s & 80s

All I have to do is Dream, 1956
Edelweiss (*The Sound of Music*), 1959
Fly Me to the Moon, 1954
Motherless Child, 1870s blues, Louis Armstrong, 1958
Unchained Melody, Alex North, 1955
Careless Love, traditional jazz, made famous by Fats
Domino, 1956
Jambalaya, Hank Williams, 1952
My Blue Heaven, Donaldson, 1928, Fats Domino, 1958
My One and Only Love, Wood & Mellin, 1952
Three Coins in the Fountain, 1954

1960s, Appropriate for audience in their 60s & 70s

Can't Help Falling in Love, Elvis, 1961
Charade, 1963
Days of Wine and Roses, 1962
Eleanor Rigby, The Beatles, 1966
Hey Jude, The Beatles, 1968
If I were a Rich Man (*Fiddler On The Roof*), 1964
It's a Small World, Disney, 1964
Let It Be Me, Everly Brothers, 1960
Moon River, Henry Mancini, 1961
Spanish Eyes, Bert Kaempfert & Charles Singleton, 1966
Stand By Me, Ben E. King, Stoller & Lieber, 1961
A Time For Us (*Romeo & Juliet*), Nino Rota, 1968
The Twelfth of Never, Livingston & Webster, 1957
What a Wonderful World, Louis Armstrong, 1967

1970s, Appropriate for audience in their 50s & 60s

The Greatest Love of All, Michael Masser, 1977
Through the Eyes of Love (*Ice Castles*), C. Sager &
M. Hamlich, 1978
Imagine, The Beatles, 1971
Let It Be, The Beatles, 1970
Love Story, Francis Lai, 1970
Morning has Broken, 1931 hymn, Cat Stevens, 1972

1980s, Appropriate for audience in their 40s & 50s

All I Ask of You (*Phantom of the Opera*), Webber, 1986
Lady, Lionel Ritchie, 1980
Memory (*Cats*), Andrew Lloyd Webber & Nunn, 1981
One Moment in Time, Albert Hammond, 1988
Part of Your World, (*The Little Mermaid*), Disney, 1989
The Rose (*Beaches*), Bette Midler, 1980
Love Theme (*St. Elmo's Fire*), David Foster, 1985

1990s, Appropriate for audience in their 30s & 40s

Beauty and the Beast, Disney, 1990
Colors of the Wind (Pocahontas), Disney, 1995
Fields of Gold, Sting, 1993
From This Moment On, Shania Twain, 1998
My Heart Will Go On (*Titanic*), 1997

SING-ALONGS

This Little Light of Mine
When the Saints Go Marchin In
Yellow Submarine
Happy Birthday
Edelweiss
Can't Help Falling in Love
Jambalaya
All I Have to Do Is Dream
Blue Moon