



Scottish Harp Society of America

Competitor's Handbook

Handbook for SHSA sanctioned harp competitions

Current as of January 2020

A. ELIGIBILITY

1. Any current **member** of the Scottish Harp Society of America may enter the harp competitions. Competitors must use a non-pedal harp for solo categories. Other instrumentalists or singers entered in the Ensemble Special Category need not be SHSA members. **Memberships** are available from the Games organizer at pre-registration or on site at the competition. Membership in the Society shall be open to harpists/harpers and all other persons.
2. Competitors are responsible for obtaining and following the instructions in the competitor's handbook, which can be printed from this site free of charge or obtained by contacting the competition organizer. All competitors planning to enter the national competition are especially advised to consult the handbook for new procedures and rules.

B. CATEGORIES BY AGE

1. Youth (17 and under)
2. Open to all

C. SOLO HARP CATEGORIES AND REQUIREMENTS BY SKILL LEVEL.

1. General Rules

a. **Playing time.** Playing time for all competitors includes time spent introducing music and playing tunes. Playing time does not include time for audience applause, time for the judge to complete writing comments or scoring, or any adjustments the judge may ask the competitor to make (e.g., moving the harp to improve the judge's view, etc.). The Steward will keep the official time.

b. **Introduction.** All solo and special category competitors will introduce their music. Introductions may include such things as the name of the tune, the source, the composer and the arranger, and the tune type. Additional amplifying information is also encouraged and may include information about the subject of the tune, the history or cultural underpinnings or other interesting facts or trivia concerning the tune.

c. Repertoire lists. All solo competitors except Beginners will be required to provide the judge with a repertoire list appropriate to their level of achievement as a Scottish Harper. Novice repertoire must include five (5) tunes of varying types. Apprentice repertoire must include (10) tunes of varying types. Journeyman repertoire must include at least twenty (20) tunes of varying types. Master repertoire must include no fewer than forty (40) tunes of varying types. Harpers should be prepared to share these tunes as an additional part of their performance competition if the judge so chooses. Tunes lists may be used for playoffs. Tunes do not need to be performance ready but must use both hands and be recognizable.

d. All solo categories, except Beginner, will play from memory. Competitors who rely on sheet music may play for comments but will not receive a score.

e. While technical elements of play are important, the style and sound of the performance are paramount.

1. Categories

a. BEGINNER (has just begun learning to play harp). Plays one Scottish tune, with or without sheet music, so that the melody is recognizable. Beginner programs are limited to six minutes.

b. NOVICE: Plays two Scottish tunes from two different tune categories (as defined in Section E), with some degree of musicality. Novices receiving scores of 80% or more in two competition years must compete at the Apprentice level their next competition year. Novice programs are limited to six minutes. Novices should have a repertoire list of at least five (5) Scottish tunes for competition which they present to the judge with their adjudication sheet at competition.

c. APPRENTICE (received 80% at the Novice level in two competition years; OR is able to adequately perform in public): Plays an air and one tune of contrasting style (as defined in Section E, but not another air or song), not necessarily at speed but with rudimentary Scottish ornamentation, rhythm, and expression. Apprentices receiving scores of 80% or more in two competition years must compete at the Journeyman level their next competition year. Apprentice programs are limited to eight minutes. Apprentices should have a repertoire list of at least ten (10) Scottish tunes for competition which they present to the judge with their adjudication sheet at competition.

d. JOURNEYMAN (received 80% at the Apprentice level in a prior year; OR is able to give an enjoyable performance in public, demonstrates a solid understanding of the Scottish idiom, uses technique, ornamentation, rhythm and appropriate style):
Journeyman perform 10 – 15 minute program of three selections in any order: an air, a strathspey, and a third contrasting piece (as defined in Section E). Any medley should be identified and introduced as such. Journeyman receiving scores of 80% or more in two competition years must compete at the Master level in subsequent competition years. Journeyman should have a repertoire list of at least twenty (20) Scottish tunes in at least three tune types for competition which they present to the judge with their adjudication sheet at competition.

e. MASTER (received 80% as a Journeyman in two competition years; OR is a Scottish harper of the highest caliber with advanced harp technique and a thorough grasp of the traditional Scottish idiom, including phrasing, ornamentation, and dance rhythms): Masters perform up to 20 minutes in a varied program of Scottish music which demonstrates their mastery of the harp and Scottish music. The program might range from an air to a march/strathspey/reel set (MSR) to a Theme and Variation (T&V). Any medley should be identified and introduced as such. Time includes playing time as well as introduction and other remarks. Master Harpers are seasoned performers of Scottish music, using their own arrangements and possessing a large and varied repertoire. Masters should have a repertoire list of at least forty (40) Scottish tunes for competition which they present to the judge with their adjudication sheet at competition.

D. SPECIAL CATEGORIES. A harper may compete as a soloist and in Special Categories, and in just one ensemble. Competitors may plan any appropriate triangular frame harp. *Special Category times include playing time as well as introduction and other remarks.*

1. Early Scottish Music: Scottish music of early origins may be played in other categories, but here the focus is on historical performance practice. Competitors consciously use techniques and styles which reflect those of the music's period, as well as its geo-social-political position. The use of wire, gut, and bray harps is encouraged, and vocals are allowed. Introductions should include a brief explanation of the approach to technique, style, and instrumentation. Performance time for this category is limited to 6 – 15 minutes.

2. Harp & Vocal: Traditional Scottish singing, self-accompanied on harp. The song to be sung in English, Scots, or Scottish Gaelic. The harp arrangement and performing style should reflect the song genre. Judging emphasis is on the use of the harp, the musical arrangement, and the musicality of the performer. Performance time for this category is limited to 6 – 10 minutes.

3. Harp & Spoken Word: Scottish poetry or story self-accompanied by harp. Performance must be in English; dialect is allowed. Performance time for this category is limited to 6 – 10 minutes.

4. Harp in Ensemble: Instrumentation will feature at least one harp. Ensemble will perform a varied program of music in the Scottish idiom. Judging emphasis is on the use of the harp, the musical arrangement, and the musicality of the performers. Traditional and historical instrumentation is encouraged; original tunes and songs are allowed. Performance time for this category is limited to 6 – 10 minutes.

5. Emerging Forms: harp soloist performing Scottish music in a style that is outside the traditional skills categories. Influences include, but are not limited to, jazz, new age, and fusion. Judging emphasis is on musicality, creativity, and skill. Performance time for this category is limited to 6 – 10 minutes.

6. Non-Graded: Solo harp or ensemble with harp, performing Scottish or other Celtic music in any style. Original compositions are welcome. For those who wish a Judge's

evaluation and scoring but no placings or awards. Performance time for this category is limited to 6 – 10 minutes.

E. STYLE LIST AND DESCRIPTIONS OF TUNE CATEGORIES

1. **STYLES:** Air, march, strathspey, reel, jig, hornpipe, Highland Schottische, and Theme/ Variations (T/V). Contrasting style refers to a difference in tempo and rhythm; a key change is not necessary.

2. **DEFINITIONS AND DESCRIPTIONS OF STYLES:** These descriptions are intended as guides only and should not restrict the player from pursuing his or his own scholarly discovery and interpretation of Scottish harp music.

AIR – Song or simple melody; any slow or fast air, pastoral, slow strathspey, lament, ballad, Gaelic song, or other tune played as an air. Examples: “Roslin Castle” (4/4; traditional), “Skye Boat Song” (6/8; traditional), “The Massacre of Glencoe” 1691 (3/4; traditional), “Lady Cunninghame of Livingstone” (4/4; Niel Gow).

HORNPIPE – A 4/4 time dance tune, reminiscent of a slow reel, with accents on the first and third beat. The apparent slowness of the music allows for many intricate dance elements in a short amount of time. The hornpipe has more varied rhythmic figures than a reel, such as more dotted eighth-sixteenth note pairs and triplet eighth notes. Hornpipes may be played as reels, that is, faster and with notes of equal value instead of dotted rhythms. Examples: “South Uist Hornpipe” (pipe collection of the Queen’s Own Highlander’s “Caber Feidh”) and “Steamboat Hornpipe” (Keith N. MacDonald *Skye* collection).

JIG – Fast dance in 6/8 or 9/8 (slip jig), with emphasis on the first and fourth beats. The 6/8 jig gives the effect of two beats in a measure, with each beat subdivided into three pulses. Examples: “The Campbells are Coming” (6/8; traditional), “The Old Woman of the Dust Mill” (6/8; traditional), “Brose and Butter” (9/8; traditional).

HIGHLAND SCHOTTISCHE is best considered a type of Strathspey. Schottisches are characterized by a bouncy feel (as opposed to the surge and power that characterize some other styles of strathspey playing). They often have more dotted eighth-sixteenth note pairs than other strathspeys, which may employ more snaps. Schottisches are usually fairly brisk. The rhythm and the feel of the schottische go with the dance, which became popular in Scotland in the late 19th century. The dance, still done in Scotland at ceilidhs and country dances, is a couple dance. It arrived in Scotland as an import from Germany and Scandinavian countries, which had developed this dance (as the name implies) in imitation of Scottish dancing sometime earlier. Although many types of tunes can be played for the dance Schottische, in Scottish context the tune is always a schottische-type strathspey. Certain tunes in the Scottish repertoire are best suited for this dance, and some of them are rarely, if ever, played for any other type of strathspey dance. These include “Keel Rows,” “Katie Bairdie” (aka “Sherrifmuir” and “Kafoozalum”), “Jenny’s Bawbee” and “Laddie with the Plaidie.” Some strathspeys can be played in schottische style, although they are also played in other styles. These include “Orange and Blue” (aka “Brochan Lom”), “Captain Horne,” and other tunes from the Highland piping repertoire;

and occasionally “Iron Man” and other strathspeys composed in the late 19th century. [See **STRATHSPEY** and **SCOTTISH SNAP**]

MARCH – Music with a strong steady pulse that is good for cadence with two or four beats in a measure; common time signatures are 2/4, 4/4, or 6/8. Marches can be played as quick two-steps, such as Duke of Fife’s Welcome to Deeside, or as slower pipe marches. Swing and lilt may be produced by dotting the rhythm. Examples: “Kenmure’s up an’ Away” (6/8; traditional pipe march), “The Earl of Dalhousie” (4/4; Niel Gow).

ORNAMENT – An ornament decorates a melody by adding extra notes, commonly referred to as grace notes. Ornaments are often short and add melodic and rhythmic interest.

PIOBAIREACHD or **PIBROCH** – The classical music of the highland bagpipe, always in Theme and Variation form. [see **THEME AND VARIATIONS**]

PORT – A uniquely Scottish type of instrumental music developed for harp and probably lute from the mid-1500’s to the mid 1600’s. Distinct musical motifs include irregular phrasing, asymmetrical construction, a wide tonal range across octaves, an introductory run of single notes, and a concluding phrase that is a repetitive pattern of descending notes. Some ports consist of a theme and variations on the theme. Example: “Port Ballangowne” (*Skene Manuscript*) and “Rory Dall’s Port” (*Caledonian Pocket Companion*). [see **THEME AND VARIATION**]

RANT – A frolicking type of reel with two pulses per measure in 2/2 or 4/4 time. A rant often has eight eighth notes per measure and may have two sixteenth notes and an eighth note on the first beat. [see **REEL**]

REEL – An ancient Scottish dance which is played quite fast and is written in 2/2, 2/4 (very rarely) or 4/4 time with two or four beats in a measure. Each beat divides equally into groups of two. Thus, many reels can be written out as a series of quarter and eighth notes (in 4/4 or 2/2) or eighth and sixteenth notes (in 2/4). Most reels have two parts, part A consisting of eight measures, and part B also consisting of eight measures. A dance usually calls for 32 measures, so the tune is played either AABB or ABAB. A large proportion of Scottish reels are rants, which are very fast reels. Other reels are more leisurely, such as a Scots measure. Hornpipes may also be played as reels. Examples: “The De’il amangh the Tailors” (2/2; *Atholl Collection*), “Drummond’s Rant” (4/4; *Atholl Collection*). [see **RANT**, **SCOTS MEASURE**, and **HORNPIPE**]

SCOTS MEASURE – A 4/4 dance tune of which the basic characteristic is three emphasized quarter notes in the first three beats of a measures. Example: “Dumbarton’s Drums” (Gow’s *Repository*). [see **REEL**]

SCOTTISH SNAP – The rhythmic figure of a very short accented note on the beat followed by a longer note to complete the beat, for example, in 4/4 time, a sixteenth note-dotted eighth note pair. The figure may be played or sung (particularly in Gaelic song) more like a 32nd note-double dotted eighth note. The Scottish snap is the staple rhythm of a strathspey, but may also be found in every form of traditional Scottish music. [See **STRATHSPEY**]

STRATHSPEY – A Scottish dance with a strong 4/4 rhythm, whose signature component is the Scottish snap. Like the reel, a strathspey has an A and B part. A typical structure is for the A part of the tune to consist of four measures, which are repeated. The tune then moves to the B part of eight measures. The rhythm of the notes sets a strathspey apart from the reel, its historical predecessor, and produces a stateliness and lilt that distinguishes it from the reel. Typically, a strathspey measure contains a combination of paired dotted eighth and sixteenth notes. Sometimes the dotted eighth is the first note in the pair while at other times the sixteenth note falls first. This latter notation is the “Scottish snap.” Strathspeys may be quick and dance-like or more lyrical, and the later may be played as slow airs. In general, a strathspey is slower and more stately than a reel. Example: “The Marchioness of Huntley” (William Marshall). [See **SCOTTISH SNAP**]

THEME – A clearly recognizable melody which is the main idea for a composition or section of a composition. It can be the basis of a longer piece of music, e.g., theme and variations. [see **VARIATION, THEME AND VARIATIONS**].

THEME AND VARIATIONS (T/V): Examples of some types of Scottish music with this form are as follows:

a. *Ceol Mor* – This form has ancient roots in Scottish harp music that have been lost until recent times. *Ceol mor* is currently played as the piobaireachd or pibroch of the great Highland bagpipes. Variations may be added to any of the more formal harp airs. Variations may be constructed by simplifying the notes of a slow air to a basic structure, which is altered rhythmically and made more complicated by decorating these basic notes. The decorating motifs grow more elaborate with each variation. Examples: “The Lament for the Earl of Wigtown” (Daniel Dow), “Cumha Easbuig Earraghaidheal” (Lament for the Bishop of Argyll; Daniel Dow; arranged for harp by Alison Kinnaird).

b. Ports and other early forms of the T/V – These are some (not all) ports and other tunes of the following form: a series of short four or eight measure parts which form a repetitive progression, one to the next. Each part usually ends with the same, or similar, sequence of notes. An example is “Rory Dall’s Port.”

c. 19th century fiddle T/Vs – These are tunes of 16 or 32 measures which are repeated with alterations to the theme, such as eighth note or triplet runs based on major notes of the theme. Many examples may be found in 18th and 19th century fiddle tunes.

Historical Scottish T/Vs do not include those of the Classical or Baroque style. Also, playing a melody over again with different harmonization would not fit this T/V category, but would be highly appropriate for the air, march, or dance tune categories.

VARIATION – Development of the main theme or tune. The theme may be changed by adding extra notes, changing from major to minor or vice versa, changing harmony, rhythm, time signature, moving the theme to the bass, etc. [see **THEME, THEME AND VARIATIONS**].

F. NOTES

1. Harpers will be judged on their performance of Scottish music. Scoring is based on Scottish style, harp technique, musicality and performing skills – and criteria specific to each category. Special Categories divisions have their own requirements.
2. Chairs will be provided, but harpers particular about height are welcome to bring their own seating.
3. Written music or text is not allowed – except for Beginner and Novice solo harp and Non-Graded categories – but even here harpers are encouraged to perform from memory. Any contestant using written materials must supply their own music stand.
4. Though they should be brief, harpers are expected to introduce their pieces as part of the performance. The name and type of tune is sufficient, but a little background or history with a personal connection often adds interest. Sources and arrangers (and composers if applicable) should be acknowledged. Pronunciation and a clear delivery are part of the scoring.
5. Short tunes should be played twice through. A tune is considered short if it is around 16 measures long or if it takes only 30 – 45 seconds to perform. Musical development is preferable to mere repetition. It is the Judge's prerogative to deduct points for any performance not achieving or exceeding the time requirements for the given category and skill level.
6. A Judge occasionally may ask a competitor to stop (for example to retune). If a selection is interrupted, the Judge will usually ask the harper to start again from the beginning of a section or perhaps from where the harper feels most comfortable.
7. In the event of a tie, a Judge may opt for a play-off, or may decide to break the tie using the score for Style; and following that, the Criteria & General Impressions scores. First Place will not be awarded if the highest score in a category is below 50%.
8. The competition will begin with the Solo Harp categories, from Beginner to Master, with Youth/Under 17 preceding the Open division in each skill level. Special Categories will follow, in the following order: Early Scottish Music, Harp & Vocal, Harp & Spoken Word, Harp in Ensemble, Emerging Forms, and Non-Graded. The order of competitors within each category will be in inverse order of registration (i.e., last to register is first to compete).
9. The Organizer and Judge will do their best to accommodate competitors facing unforeseen circumstances, such as a broken string, passing pipe band, etc. However, harpers who do not show up for their competition category will normally forfeit that class and its entry fee.
10. Though not compulsory, harpers are asked to stay for the presentation of the awards, usually held after a short deliberation following the Solo Harp entries and again after Special Categories. Score sheets may be picked up following the presentation of awards, or competitors may supply a self-addressed, stamped envelope.

11. Categories are offered at the discretion of the Competition Organizer. The Organizer or Judge may also opt to combine comparable categories. In the regrettable event of cancellation due to weather or otherwise, policies regarding the return of entry fees are at the discretion of the Competition Organizer.

12. A harper may elect to compete at a higher, but not a lower, skill level in the Solo Harp categories. Beginners, Novices, Apprentices and Journeymen achieving the stated percentage requirements must move to a higher level the next competition year (January 1 through December 31). Special Category offerings are open to any harper.

13. If the Judge determines a harper is not competing at an appropriate skill level, the competitor will receive scores and an evaluation but possibly no award. In any event the Judge will suggest the appropriate skill level for future SHSA competitions.

14. Should special circumstances apply, harpers may ask to have their designated skill level reviewed; requests should be made to the SHSA Competition Committee prior the competition, or to the Judge on the competition day at least one hour prior to the competition.

15. The Judge's decision is final.

G. NATIONAL COMPETITION:

1. **TITLE:** The title of US National Scottish Harp Champion will be awarded to the first-place winner in the Master category at the annual US National Scottish Harp Championship™ Competition, providing there are at least two qualified entrants.

2. **TRAVEL SCHOLARSHIP:** A scholarship will be awarded to the Journeyman ***OR*** Master whose performance and scholarship application – in the eyes of the judges – show achievement and serious interest in further study of Scottish harp. Competitors wishing to compete for the trip must write a cover letter, complete the application form, and write a short essay on the proposed use of the scholarship. Scholarship applications and the handbook may be obtained on-line or through the Competition Chair. This scholarship is to be used toward a study trip to Scotland or to a recognized Scottish harp course in the United States or Canada. Final plans for the trip must be approved by the SHSA Board of Directors prior to departure. The scholarship must be executed within 18 months of award. If the first-place winner is unable to make use of the scholarship, it will be awarded to the runner-up. The scholarship may not be awarded to an individual more than once. The scholarship recipient will be required to write a blog preparing for, during and upon return of the trip, submit an article with photos about their experience, and publish a harp arrangement of at least one tune in the Kilt & Harp.

Please note: All competitors planning to compete for the travel scholarship must submit a completed application and travel proposal 4 weeks in advance of the in the US National Scottish Harp Championship™ competition. The application will be received by the [Competition Committee Chair](#) who reviews it along with the competition committee prior to the competition. All applicants for the travel scholarship are responsible for obtaining and following the instructions for application,

which can be printed from the SHSA website free of charge, or obtained by contacting the competition organizer, as well as complying with the rules for competition.

HANDBOOK CHANGES – Any changes to the rules will be posted to the website to obtain the most current version of the handbook for the latest information on competitions and for any changes.