

Review of Lithuanian Harp (*Kanklės*) Recital by Emilija Karaliute in St Mary's Church
Streatley on Thames, May 17th 2026 at 4pm

This concert was the first time that most of us in the audience had ever seen or heard a concert 29 string Lithuanian Harp or *Kanklės* (pronounced Kank-lays) played live. Even having heard Emilija playing online and expecting something excellent, I was unprepared for how very beautiful the music that is produced by the instrument when live. As one of the audience said 'it sounds like heavenly angelic music'.

Emilija spoke in-between each piece to tell us some of the history, legends and facts about the *Kanklės*. It is only made by a few craftsmen in Lithuania and takes six months to make, each *Kanklės* has its own 'personality' and the craftsman builds them with that precise player in mind. Originally, in pre-Christian times they were made in memory of people and it was believed that the soul of the deceased spoke when the instrument was played. The tree for the wood is selected first with care and even when the *Kanklės* is finished it is sometimes discarded as a failed instrument. They have existed for many centuries and the first Bibles translated into Lithuanian translate one of the Biblical instruments to the *Kanklės*.

Kanklės can be used to play any sort of music with similar versatility and range as a piano. Emilija began Classical Music pieces by Mikulsius, Naujalis and Svedas who were or are Lithuanian composers. The pieces were all based on folk music but composed in a classical style, telling us of the beauty of the forests and of Lithuania, an excellent introduction to the delight of Lithuanian music. This was followed by wonderful renditions of more traditional Classical pieces by Mendelssohn (On Wings of Song), Puccini (Waltz from La Boheme), Couperin (Les Barricades Mysterieuses) and Debussy (La Fille aux Cheveux de Lin) and a modern classical Japanese composition, Land by Makamatsu. All of these were rendered with great skill and sounded wonderful. The recital ended with a new piece composed especially for Emilija by Caroline Elizabeth Harding, an Irish composer, called Rebmaer. This used modern composition techniques like tapping on the instrument case but it was also one of the most enchanting pieces of classical music I have heard, telling a Lithuanian legend about the Sea God and how Amber Came to Exist.

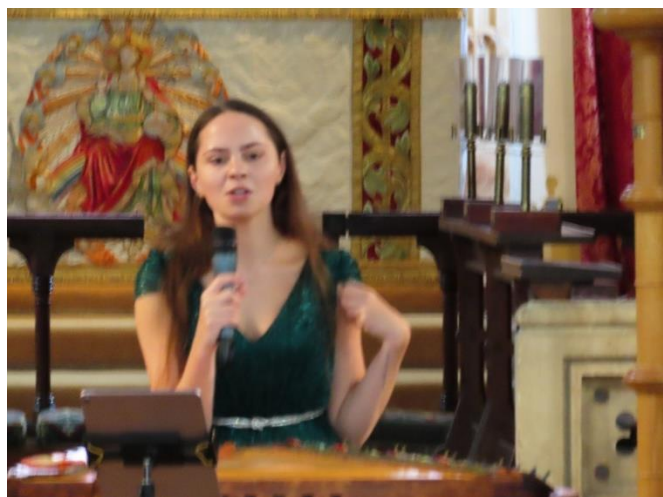
Emilija sent a message of thanks to say that she very much enjoyed her trip to St Mary's too and as for the audience, we are now all *Kanklės* fans! This instrument deserves to be very much more widely known and played for its beautiful notes and depths of tone and its versatility.

The tea and cakes and social time that followed the concert was the usual much appreciated finish to our very enjoyable program of music. Thank you to all the wonderful helpers who make these concerts possible and operational and to those

who provide and run the tea and cakes and do the washing up! Special thanks to John Rogers, Elaine Cox, Rosemary Mitchell and Linda Ogle. Any profits from the teas go to the Friends of St Mary's.

Finally, as always, thank you to our audience for being there, we could not run without you! Our next St Mary's Concert is on Sunday September 13th at 4pm with Ikuko Inoguchi, Sally Goodworth, both virtuoso pianists, and Hayley Tull who plays both flute and piano. This concert will include Six Handed Piano Trios which are rarely seen in performance. Unmissable!

Stella Robinson



Emilija talking to us

From rehearsal but this photo shows the Kankles clearly



Emilija is doing a lightning fast key change here using the levers at the side.