

# McKennitt brilliantly harps away

by Andrew Smith

Historically motivated and musically innovative, Loreena McKennitt, harpist extraordinaire, entertained a sold-out crowd for over two hours last Monday night at the Cohn.

**Loreena McKennitt**  
Rebecca Cohn Auditorium  
November 21, 1994

McKennitt, who hails from Morden, Manitoba, visited Halifax while touring her latest album *The Mask and the Mirror*. Always mystical in sound and appearance, she invited the audience into a twilight festival of anecdotes and music before a backdrop of candelabra and medieval wall tapestries.

Accompanying McKennitt were Brian Hughes on guitar, Rick Lazar with various percussion, Steve Lucas on acoustic bass, Donald Quan playing keyboards and viola, and the astoundingly talented Hugh Marsh on the fiddle. Though known foremost as a harpist, McKennitt also demonstrated her mastery of the accordion, piano and keyboards.

Seeing fit to keep on the move, Loreena switched between instruments effortlessly, from the harp for "She Moved Through the Fair," to the accordion for "Marrakesh Night Market," and to the grand piano for "Greensleeves."

Overall, the performance was fresh and alive with new interpretations of every song. In particular was "Dickens' Dublin" which included an original recording from Dublin, Ireland of a little girl telling the nativity story in her own words. In it, the girl's sad story told in common dialect amplified the message of homelessness conveyed in the song.

The audience only grew more appreciative as Loreena explained her motivations for her latest album. She explained that she had become fascinated with the cross-culture that has existed in Spain, between Jewish, Muslim and Christian influences.

The product of the three realized for her a new and vast array of sources. This was even more pronounced in her later trips to Morocco where, undaunted by driving blind through the desert, she searched for other musicians.

Much of her new album and the tour reflects these new searches. From the rhythmically powerful "Marrakesh Night Market" and the reflective "Full Circle" she demonstrated a very new sound and direction for her talents.

McKennitt explained that some songs were a combination of experiences from the past years. From the "passionate devotion to the mysteries of God" at a Benedictine monastery to standing on the dunes

near the Algerian boarder and realizing the significance of the sky, sand and silence to early morning chants of men at a mosque, McKennitt developed and wrote the very alluring "Full Circle."

As not to disappoint her audience, a strong showing of older work from *Elemental*, *Parallel Dreams* and *The Visit* were also played. Of particular interest to me was the "Beltane' Fire Dance," although the audience's favourite had to be "The Lady of Shallott." This song, whose lyrics are actually a poem by Alfred Lord Tennyson, is set in the time of King Arthur and the Knights of Camelot.

Throughout the show, McKennitt paused to talk with the audience, relating to them the background of the songs which she had written or adapted. She illustrated travels in both time and distance, from ancient Celtic to adapted electric guitar solos thanks to Hughes. Japan, England and Ireland, Spain, and Morocco all show influence in her music.

Throughout the show, one realized visions of nature itself — both beautiful and benign, or at times terrible and powerful. Every song held a setting for each person in the audience, as well as for Loreena, herself.

Fields, castles, tempests, mountains, festivals and deserts all were expressed through her music.

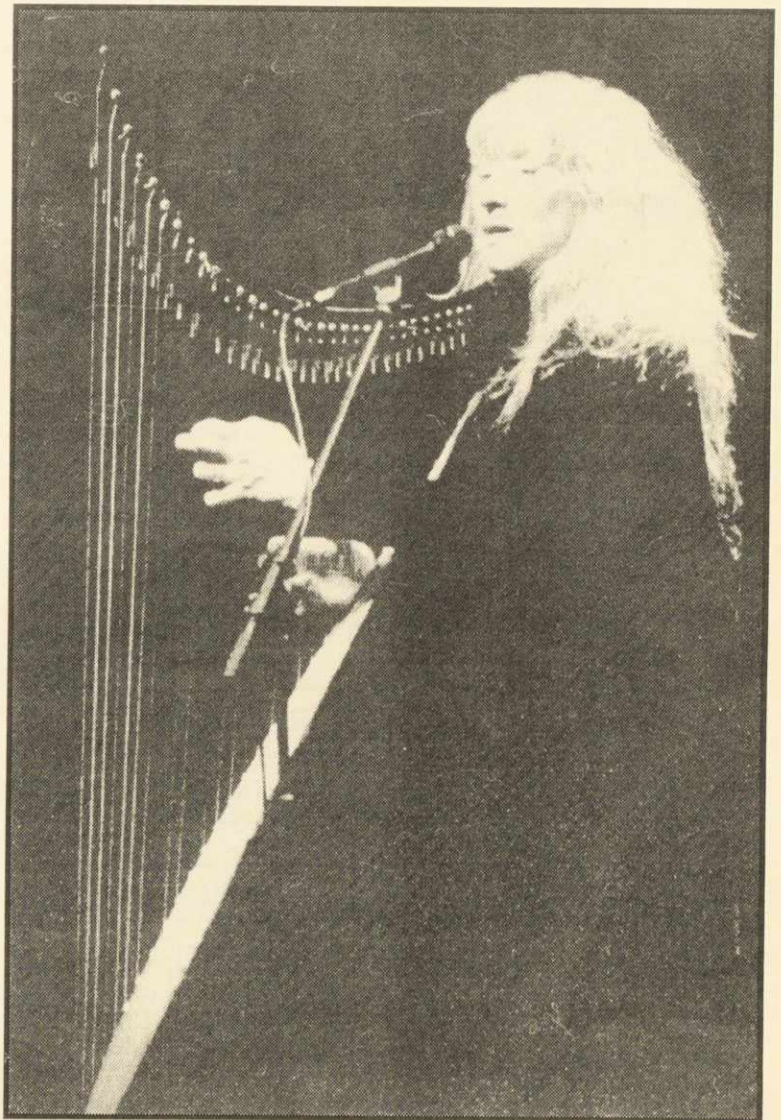


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