

One-woman harp festival comes to the Fringe

It's a festival within a festival. This Sunday, 6 August, harp player Karen Marshalsay takes part in the celebration of Scottish music organised by Soundhouse at the Rose Theatre in Rose Street.

Karen will be giving her three Scottish Harps presentation, which involves the gut-strung clarsach that's familiar to trad and folk music audiences, the wire-strung harp from the Gaelic tradition, and the bray harp, whose sitar-like sound often takes audiences by surprise.

There's a fourth harp involved, a smaller version of the wire-strung Gaelic harp, whose arrival onstage caused one reviewer to describe Karen as a "one-woman harp festival."

"It's a lot of harps to be confronted with, I suppose," said Karen, whose previous Fringe appearances have included playing the classical bagpipe music, pibroch, on the harp and performing her own compositions with the Russian String Orchestra.

With three Scottish Harps, Karen shares stories of where the various instruments and the tunes she plays come from and keeps the mood light.

"The tunes of my own that I play are often written for people or places and while some of the people are no longer with us, the tunes invariably came from happy events or celebrations," she says. "I wrote a tune for a colleague who retired when I was teaching at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland and a few

years later she got in touch and said, You'll have to write another tune because I've taken up so many other interests since I stopped work."

Sunday's concert is one of two appearances that Karen will be making on the Fringe this year. On Wednesday 16 August she'll be playing at St Mark's Church on Castle Terrace with the long-established Scottish folk band the Whistlebinkies, having joined the joined them just under a year ago.

"It's been great fun getting to know the guys and hearing about some of the adventures they've had over the years," said Karen. "They were one of the first Western groups to visit China and although there haven't been any trips to exotic places like that since I joined, we did a tour of Argyll earlier this year that was quite eventful in its own way."

Tunes have yet to be written to commemorate unscheduled stops on the west coast of Scotland due faulty senses of direction, or more happily, the views encountered as a result, but the ideas are stored for future use.

