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## **Suggested Albums: "Four Clover" - Four Celtic Voices (2009) - Interview with Celeste Howard Ray**



I have recently had the chance and honour to meet Celeste Howard Ray, founding member of the singular acoustic band "Four Celtic Voices", lined up along with the renowned harpist Erin Hill, Carol Crittenden, and Maria Johnson.

Four Celtic Voices' 2009 album "Four Clover" debuted at #1 on the Billboard World Music Chart, in the Top Ten on multiple Heatseekers charts (check [here](#)), and in the Top 40 on the Independent chart (May 2009). With vocals, harp, flute, bowed psaltery, harmonium, bass and drums, Four Celtic Voices performs a mix of Celtic traditionals and contemporary Celtic originals, from "Danny Boy" and "Molly Malone" to original psaltery dances and the dream-like Celtic pop of "Angels."

"Four Celtic Voices" focus on the historical Land of the Celts, the Four Celtic Voices show is a spellbinding journey of large ensemble numbers and solo performances. This singular band features traditional Celtic instruments: bowed psaltery, harmonium, flute and Celtic harp. The outstanding and subtle vocals of this lassies convey a perfect evocative experience into the magic of our ancient celtic melodies and misty regions and groves.

Celeste is a singer and composer who plays piano, bowed psaltery and harmonium. Her artistry has been widely acclaimed receiving very good critics such as the one of "One of Celeste's distinctive calling cards is her skill with the bowed psaltery...the sound is at once fresh and other-

*worldly.” -by Los Angeles Times.*

**She has performed at Carnegie Hall under the direction of famed composer John Rutter; at WESAK festivals in California; at Government House in Brisbane, Australia; live on ABC (Australian Broadcast Radio) and recently as a guest artist for Pete Seeger in New York City.**

**She focuses on the performance and history of the ancient Bowed Psaltery and Harmonium. Her journeys throughout the UK and Ireland provided a wellspring of sacred sources for her as a composer.**

**She has also issued two previous solo albums "[Strings of Gold](#)" and "[Celtic Blessings](#)"**

**Find out further information and samples of these and "Four Clover" on the [Four Celtic Voices](#) official site.**

### **Interview's Summary**



**On a short interview for my "Celtic Sprite" blog, Celeste Howard Ray tell us about her musical aims, career, and of course, about this outstanding surviving folk instrument, The Bowed Psaltery :**

***"Psalteries are among the oldest of stringed instruments. It is generally accepted that the psaltery mentioned in the Bible was a tenstringed rectangular zither. The fretted dulcimer, the hammered dulcimer, and the autoharp are also in the zither family of stringed instruments. During the Renaissance, the psaltery's simple design made it an ideal instrument for teaching music and musical theory to children. The bowed psaltery dates back to Ireland about 300-400 years ago."***

***"I started performing the Bowed Psaltery back in 1997 -when I first heard the instrument on an eclectic folk recording and became enchanted with the sound and simplicity of the instrument."***

*"I traveled all over Celtic Lands playing the instrument and wrote songs like: Cliffs of Tintagel at the birthplace of King Arthur and Psaltery Dances No. 1, 2, 3 and 4."*

*"I visited Glastonbury, Stonehenge, St. Finnagen's Sacred Well (Ireland) and Castlerig in northern England. Also several other sacred standing stone areas in Scotland and Ireland. When I returned from my travels I composed 14 songs in only 2 months - so inspired by the landscape and cosmology..."*



### The Bowed Psaltery In Brief

In 1925 a German patent was issued to the Clemens Neuber Company for a bowed psaltery which also included a set of strings arranged in chords, so that one could play the melody on the bowed psaltery strings, and strum accompaniment with the other hand. These are usually called violin zithers.

Today, the conventional bowed psaltery is most often produced without chord accompaniment strings (though some modern players retune the chromatic side to produce chords, and play it in the manner of the violin zither).

After the Second World War, Walter Mittman, a primary school teacher in Westphalia, popularized the conventional triangular bowed psaltery, which had earlier been advocated for use in education by Edgar Stahmer (1911-1996).

It is a psaltery in the traditional sense of a wooden soundbox with unstopped strings over the soundboard. It significantly differs from the Mediæval plucked psaltery only in that its strings are arranged to permit bowing. The soundboard has a soundhole or rose in the center. It is normally played with a small bow, often made in the earlier semicircular style, rather than a modern concave violin bow.

The construction style is often influenced by the looks of Mediæval psalteries, as well as Gothic architecture.

Performance styles vary, but the instrument may be played either one note at a time, with the instrument held with one hand and bowed with

the other, as in instruments of the violin family, or it may be laid down and played with a bow in each hand, in a style reminiscent of the closely-related hammered dulcimer. Besides bowing, the instrument may also be strummed or struck for additional tone colors. The strings are often too closely spaced for conventional finger picking, but may be plucked at the bowing end. Some players will also hold two bows in one hand to facilitate double-stopping. You should hold the Bowed Psaltery with your hand across the back supporting it, the point directed away from your body. It's good to start out sitting down, then you can rest the bottom edge of the Psaltery against your leg. When you're standing you can rest the bottom edge against your hip or stomach. An full detailed technique on playing and tuning can be found [here](#).

You can find soprano to baritone models , ranging from 24 to 30 strings. It has the beautiful sound of a violin without any of the difficult fingering. It is played with a bow, and the strings are set up similar to a piano keyboard. All of the natural notes (white piano keys) are on the right side while all of the sharps and flats (black piano keys) are on the left side. It is very easy to play any piece of music on this instrument.

Hereby a cute video featuring Celeste Ray on Bowed Psaltery... the tune: is an Appalachian reel known as "Old Molly Hare"... there is a similar nice welsh version called "The Fairy's Reel" ...Enjoy!