

# Philip Boulding

## BIOGRAPHY

When Philip Boulding began his musical journey on the violin at age six, he had already come to know Bach from the sounds of the piano and cello, played late at night by his parents. He began writing his own music as a young boy, expressing his individuality in the midst of a large family steeped in academia. Philip's father, Kenneth, was already a world renowned economist and author, his mother Elise soon to be equally famous as a sociologist. They were highly influential peace activists as well, both credited with nominations for the Nobel Peace Prize. Philip's family often traveled and he began his lifelong love for islands during a childhood which included long intervals in Jamaica and Japan. They always encouraged their son to follow his own direction.

Philip left the violin at age 12, and taking a hiatus from classical training, took up finger-style guitar. Although he was influenced by Doc Watson, Leo Kotke, Joseph Spence and the old blues artists, he was looking for a sound uniquely his own. This eventually led him to the art of lutherie and creating his own guitars during his late teen years. Hearing the sounds of the hammered dulcimer on a recording around that time, Philip immediately put aside an unfinished guitar and began designing and building dulcimers. When he moved to the Northwest in 1974 he fell in love with the Celtic harp at a folk gathering, leading him inevitably to begin creating his own harps. He submerged himself in Celtic music and traveled to Ireland and Scotland to research both ancient and current music and instruments. It was there that he began composing music for the harp. The unique sound of Philip's instruments were complemented by his expressive style and rhythmic left hand, along with some unusual techniques he had developed including a stunning vibrato effect on the steel-strung harp.

A professional musician since 1971, Philip's musical training included work at the Boston Conservatory and the University of Washington's ethno-musicology department, as well as private study with classical and jazz harpists, a gypsy cymbalom player from Rumania, an elderly African kora master from Gambia, and various valiha virtuosos from Madagascar.

In 1978 Philip founded the School of Magical Strings in Seattle, where he still teaches classes on harps and dulcimers of his own making. It was there in the early days that he met his life-partner, Pam (who was to inspire more than just his music), and together they combined the harp and hammered dulcimer to form the distinctive sound of Magical Strings.

# Pam Boulding

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Pam Boulding began playing the piano at age four and was classically trained until she turned her attention to painting and sculpture at Pitzer College where she received her B.A. Her paintings have been widely exhibited and have received several awards. Pam has taught painting and music courses at various West Coast colleges and Waldorf schools. She founded a summer art school for children in Maine, where she spent her childhood summers sailing amongst islands with her family. Her father often inspired her with music he brought back from his world travels.

Pam has devoted much of her time to playing piano, and more recently the concertina, but her principal instrument is the hammered dulcimer. She met Philip by taking one of his hammered dulcimer classes in 1978 and has since developed her own style, turning her creative energies to painting pictures with music. She is a passionate and intense player. Her energy captivates the audience as her swift yet graceful hammers seem to expand the dulcimer beyond one's usual concept of it. Her unique compositional style has inspired many people, with such pieces as *Dance of the Twilight on the Burren*, (title track from their 1987 release) and *Song for My Mother* (from *Crossing to Skellig*) which is still one of the most requested cuts on Minnesota Public Radio's Morning Show. The Seattle Times described her *Balloon Odyssey* (from *Above the Tower*) as "...highly evocative .... with a fairy-tale, suspended-time quality that paints rich, floating images."

Much of Pam's attention has been directed toward community-building and education. She continues to share her musical and artistic ideas with children in schools throughout the country when Magical Strings goes on tour, and presently teaches lyre classes in local Waldorf schools.

With a joyous spirit and flaming red hair, Pam tells exciting stories and interesting bits of personal background, which adds much warmth and liveliness to the Magical Strings performance.

Pam Boulding, as mother and musician, manages to compose, arrange and teach music to her own five children who perform with her same enthusiasm. The culmination is their Celtic Yuletide Concert, an annual tradition since 1979 -- "A message and song about peace, goodwill, love from a good example to us all .... an enchanted Christmas memory." (Dan Murphy, KIRO TV, Seattle)