

Deborah Henson-Conant

Deborah Henson-Conant (“DHC”) is an ambassador to the world of music and imagination. A kid who refused to take music lessons, she was writing musicals at 12, and became a prolific singer-songwriter in her teens. When her college band needed a harpist, she volunteered – and the harp has never been the same.

DHC is known as the woman who liberated the concert harp: shrunk it down, strapped it on and plugged it in. Her TEDx talk chronicles her decades of collaboration with the French harp company, CAMAC that resulted in the “DHC Harp,” now played by harpists worldwide.

Her music is inspired by Jazz, Blues, Latin, musical theater and spoken word – and she’s equally at home performing one-woman shows, leading a trio, or performing her original work with chamber ensemble or orchestra. It was after an orchestral performance that philanthropist Peter Wege approached her and said, “What I saw out there on that stage, I want the whole world to see.”

With Wege’s support, she created the work that won her a Grammy Nomination: a long-form symphonic concert video of her original music in collaboration with the Grand Rapids Symphony – which also received an International Songwriting Award, and appeared on PBS stations throughout the U.S.

But it wasn’t until 2020 that Wege’s dream of bringing this work to the whole world became possible when streaming restrictions were lifted on the project when DHC asked if it could be used as a fundraiser for the orchestra during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Titled “Invention & Alchemy” this concert-length video brings the audience onto the stage and into the stories, music, humor and theater that reveal the world of DHC’s imagination. The title celebrates the alchemy of transformation when an individual creative voice expands through collaboration – epitomized by the harp-wielding composer/performer as a solo voice with the magic of the massive symphony orchestra.

DHC has been called the “Jimi Hendrix of the harp” by legendary rock guitarist Steve Vai, and “a cross between Leonard Bernstein and Xena, Warrior Princess” by the Boston Globe.

She’s performed her one-woman shows at the Kennedy Center, premiered her works for orchestra and harp with symphonies in the U.S. and Europe – and has created an international online academy to coach harp players worldwide in the art of reinvention through improvisation.