

Kevin
Raftery

MAGPIE

Solo & Chamber works



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Magpie

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1.	Meditation in Brown	6:08
2.	Harpsichord Quintet	9:13
Two Offerings		
3.	Neither Here nor There	3:37
4.	Beyond	3:32
5.	Naked Before God	8:54
6.	Fourth Companion	9:56
7.	Meditation in Gold	7:20
8.	Two for Mirth	3:27
Atlantis Dances		
9.	Festive	2:24
10.	Pastoral	4:01
11.	Sabre-rattling	2:24
12.	Exorcism	3:01
13.	Festive	3:14
14.	Meditation in Silver	1:51

Total Playing Time 69:11

Magpie

*One for sorrow
Two for mirth
Three for a funeral
Four for a birth*

- from an old saying about magpies

The compositions in this album date from a dark, difficult period, yet most of them attempt to escape from the darkness. Some are meditative; some are playful or dancing; one refers to the in-between state of being neither here nor there. One of the most joyous was my response to the terrible loss of a dear, talented composer friend who, I hoped, might have been amused by it.

Sorrow, mirth, funeral, birth: life consists of these extremes, mixed, and we have little choice but to take the blows and stagger forward, looking for opportunities to enjoy whatever there is to enjoy.

The Eurasian magpie is a creature arousing mixed feelings. Its attempts to sing are like the rattling of a machine gun. Its habit of killing songbirds and eating their eggs appalls us. Yet it's beautiful when seen up close, and may be the most intelligent of all birds. It's famed for seizing odd things, especially shiny ones, to decorate its nest.

So the magpie is like us: intelligent, opportunist, rapacious.

Meditation in Brown (2020)

Richard Benjafield, marimba

The inspiration for a marimba piece came from an illustrated lecture on the works of Leonardo da Vinci. I was impressed that he created such beauty sometimes using only shades of brown: Brown Ochre, Manganese Brown, Burnt Umber and Burnt Sienna. At the same time I was impressed by the gentle meditative quality of many of the works. I wondered whether such a quality could be incorporated into a piece of music. This seemed a nice challenge, since most of my music is restless.

In the end, the meditative sections formed about half of the resulting composition. It's built upon an ABCBA form.

B consists mostly of quiet chords. One of the beauties of a marimba is that chords, sustained by rapidly striking the bars, have a shimmering quality.

C is also quiet and meditative, but with a regular pulse. The second half of C is a repetition of the first half, but upside down.

A is not at all regular. It's a series of attempts to take apart and re-think the complicated figure that appears in the short introduction to the piece.

The name of the piece had to be *Meditation in Brown* because it had been inspired by Leonardo's brown pigments and — a happy coincidence — the wooden bars of a marimba are brown.

Harpichord Quintet (2020)

Berkeley Ensemble:
Aleksander Szram, harpichord
Sophie Mather, violin
Francesca Barritt, violin
Matthew Maguire, viola
Gemma Wareham, cello

Written during a pandemic that practically shut down live music, and during a time of decreased global cooperation, the Harpsichord Quintet reflects my desire to focus on those abstract qualities of music that transcend earthly concerns.

The harpsichord is by nature constant, in that it cannot play louder or softer. In my piece its constancy is emphasized by its habit of playing groups of five notes — holding firmly to the idea of a “quintet”.

By contrast, the only thing constant about the strings is that each instrument draws its repertoire from a three-note pattern. At regular intervals the patterns are changed. Each player changes at a different time, so the repertoire of the ensemble evolves bit by bit, like the patterns seen in a kaleidoscope as it turns.

The first example of this occurs toward the end of the first minute. Each instrument is cued to change its repertoire by a bell-like chord in the harpsichord. This can be heard four times, once for each string player. Later changes are signalled not by bells but by other obvious markers such as tremolo, trills or plucked notes.

In broad overview it’s a piece about things that happen periodically — like the ticking of a clock — and things that change. What’s periodic undergoes change, while changes happen periodically.

Toward the end, the very existence of the music becomes periodic, with the strings fading out and in several times.

Two Offerings (2021)

Anneke Hodnett, harp
Elizabeth Green, harp

Neither Here nor There toys with an ambivalent-sounding harmony, and with rhythms that sometimes allow the two harps to align but sometimes not. It was a time of indecision for me and this came out in the music. Yet the music is lively until nearing its end.

Beyond moves on to a decidedly sad place. It commemorates several people dear to me who were lost around that time. One harp maintains an unchanging pattern, fateful, and the other rails against it in irregular outbursts.

Naked Before God (2022)

Neil Heyde, cello

My personal nadir came in 2022. I had the idea of standing before God and feeling quite unworthy.

Perfection, the desired state, is sought by means of palindromes. The entire piece consists of palindromes. Some are very long, some are very short, and they overlap each other. To emphasize my imperfection a deliberate flaw is left in the palindromes, as Persian weavers do when leaving one stitch out of a carpet. As they would say, only Allah is perfect.

Fourth Companion (2021)

Berkeley Ensemble:
Andrew Watson, bassoon
Sophie Mather, violin
Dan Shilladay, viola
Gemma Wareham, cello

In the first minutes of this piece, the strings exhibit a sense of urgency which is not shared by the bassoon. Maybe it wants to play peacemaker, or just to tell everyone to relax; it refuses to be riled and finally persuades the strings to join a central *calmo* section. After the strings have settled down, though, the bassoon launches into a playful *scherzo* in which everyone participates.

This piece follows *Atlantis Dances* and *Elegy Upon Elegy* in my series of works intended as potential concert companions to Stravinsky's *Septet*, Beethoven's *Septet*, and Schubert's *Octet*.

Meditation in Gold (2020)

Richard Benjafield, vibraphone

To the eye, the vibraphone looks like a metal marimba, and one might think that the two instruments are played in the same way with similar results. But in a sense they are opposites. A note struck on the marimba will quickly die, so to produce a sustained sound it's necessary to keep re-striking the note. A note on the vibraphone will last a long time and the challenge is to damp each note so that a melody can be clarified.

The form of *Meditation in Gold* is simple. There are five meditations, demarcated by short rituals of three chords. The final note of each meditation is repeated several times, and returns as the first note of the subsequent meditation.

Critics might point out that not all vibraphones have gold bars. But those of Gary Burton's vibrate as gold, and that's good enough for me to appropriate the color for my title.

Two for Mirth (2022)

Berkeley Ensemble:
Andrew Watson, bassoon
Gemma Wareham, cello

It would have been natural to write sad music upon the passing of my friend the excellent composer Alastair Putt. But to be true to his spirit, it seemed best to recall his wry humor and his clever constructions. Maybe he would have been amused by this circular canon; the bassoon's opening notes aren't echoed by the cello until thirty seconds later, and the cello's opening notes aren't taken up by the bassoon until near the end.

Atlantis Dances (2018)

Berkeley Ensemble:
Fiona Mitchell, bass clarinet
Paul Cott, horn
Dan Shilladay, viola
Gemma Wareham, cello
Lachlan Radford, bass

Atlantis was a lost civilization. Perhaps it was lost because its people allowed a sociopath to lead them.

I imagined their dances. Each had its characteristic rhythm. Over time, these became so well-known that musicians could embellish them in ways similar to Indian raga or Western jazz. My dances use only low, dark instruments. These are best heard in thin textures. Like jazz, my dances give prominence to one or two players at a time, with the sequence of solos and duos known in advance. Their material is planned to give a symmetry to each movement. The material and instrumentation create a clear pattern that spans the whole suite:

•Festive dance •Pastoral dance •Sabre-rattling dance •Exorcism dance •Festive dance

Meditation in Silver (2020)

Richard Benjafield, glockenspiel

It takes longer to read this note than to hear the piece.

The set for marimba and vibraphone being complete, I turned my attention to a very different sort of piece. But just as I completed that, news came that I had been granted Irish citizenship. I felt so happy that I wanted to celebrate, and what better way than to learn the Irish national anthem? Lo and behold, the Republic has two anthems. One is rather old and says unpleasant things about Saxons. This is not a popular anthem in Northern Ireland and a solution had to be found for those occasions when both parts

of Ireland joined forces for international rugby. A less divisive anthem, *Ireland's Call*, was commissioned by the Irish Rugby Football Union for the 1995 World Cup. Slowly overcoming opposition, it has now been adopted by the hockey and cricket leagues. I hope that its all-inclusive spirit will win more converts. And I hope that no one will mind me using it as the basis for a humorous glockenspiel piece.

Not wanting to tax the listener's tolerance for extremely high bright notes, I kept the piece to a minute and a half. Into that short time it squeezes several quotations from the anthem, including a four-part canon on the phrase "four proud provinces" (in which the northernmost voice is in contrary motion). Throughout, the anthem is running simultaneously in fast and slow speeds, and in different keys, a happy welter of viewpoints.

Filling in the spaces between very long notes there is an almost constant filigree of tiny decorations, inspired by the Book of Kells. Ireland, your new citizen salutes you.

Kevin Raftery, 2024

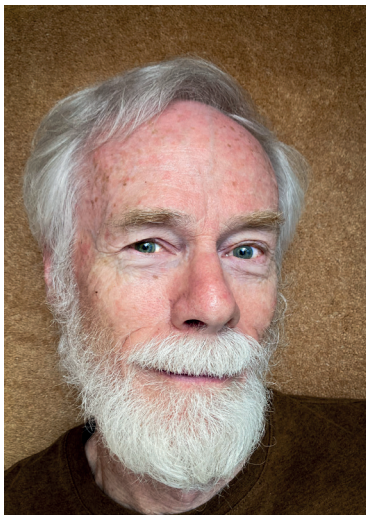
About the composer

Kevin Raftery's paternal grandfather heard "No Irish Need Apply" when he arrived in 1905 America. Two of his sons, including Kevin's father, slept in the coal cellar. All of them fought for America, and the G.I. Bill then allowed Kevin's father to learn electronics, becoming one of the early computer analysts. Kevin's maternal grandparents came from families that had been in America since 1848 but could still speak to each other in German. Theirs was a life of craftsmanship, enterprise and respect for learning.

Kevin's parents had a small collection of classical records including Beethoven, Tchaikovsky, and Gershwin. A piano was bought, and painted yellow. There were no lessons. Kevin's wish for a guitar was granted on his 16th birthday. Learning music by ear and from books, he was soon composing, well enough to be accepted into the College of Creative Studies at UCSB. Teachers included Peter Racine Fricker, Peter Mark, and Stanley D. Krebs.

Kevin never attempted to earn a living by composing, choosing instead to follow the example of Charles Ives who remained free to compose exactly what he wanted while feeding his family through non-musical work.

Reversing his grandparents' course, Kevin is now a citizen of the EU and the UK. It's because of the wonderful musicians on this album that his compositional voice can be heard. *Maggie* is dedicated to them with great thanks. Charles Ives should have been so lucky.



Kevin Raftery

Performers

Berkeley Ensemble

The Berkeley Ensemble was formed by friends in a spirit of adventure, to make music in new ways, reach new audiences and, most importantly, explore new repertoire. Since its founding in 2008 the ensemble has premiered over 40 works commissioned by or written for the group.

The ensemble's own Little Venice Music Festival provides a unique platform to collaborate and explore while engaging and entertaining neighbours of the group's London base. Since taking on the festival's curatorship in 2016, the ensemble has brought world-class chamber music right into the community, with guest artists including Imogen Cooper, Adrian Brendel and Laura Snowden.

Away from the concert platform, the Berkeley Ensemble works tirelessly to foster the creation, appreciation and performance of chamber music at every age, level and ability. Residencies and associations with schools allow the ensemble to help create and develop musical communities of lasting and ever-deepening value. The ensemble is particularly proud of its longstanding links with Ibstock Place School in Barnes, Queen Elizabeth School in Kirkby Lonsdale and Meath Primary School near Woking.

Richard Benjafield

A professor at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama since 1995, Richard took up the position of Head of Wind, Brass and Percussion in 2009, and in 2013 he was honoured to be made a Fellow of the school.

Richard is a founder member of Ensemble Bash, the first established percussion quartet in the UK. Since 1992 the group has commissioned and performed over 40 new works.

Richard is also a member of the Colin Currie Group, and has performed with the Nash Ensemble, London Sinfonietta, BBC Symphony Orchestra, Almeida Opera and

Glyndebourne Touring Opera. He has collaborated with musicians including Steve Reich, Harrison Birtwistle, Thomas Adès, Melinda Maxwell and Graham Fitkin.

As a conductor Richard has directed BBC Total Immersion concerts in the Barbican and in Milton Court, including the percussion music of John Cage, Xenakis's *Persephassa*, and *Glassworks* by Philip Glass.

Neil Heyde

Neil performs internationally as a soloist and has been cellist of the Kreutzer Quartet since the 1990s. He has made more than 40 commercial recordings and films of music ranging from the 17th to the 21st centuries, expanding the repertoire for both quartet and cello through exploratory collaborations with composers, and by championing music from outside the mainstream. He spent several years as an improviser working with Indian instruments and performing across Europe.

Neil is Head of Postgraduate Programmes at the Royal Academy of Music and Professor of Music of the University of London. He is a Visiting Professor at the Sibelius Academy (Helsinki) and the Bartlett School of Architecture, UCL. His research and writing stem directly from his life as a practicing musician.

He is currently completing a critical edition of Debussy's three late sonatas for the *Œuvres complètes de Claude Debussy* in Paris and working on a series of interconnected projects that explore some of the ways in which instruments are 'not just tools'.

Aleksander Szram

Aleksander has released several albums of contemporary repertoire including works by Daryl Runswick, Douglas Finch, Kenneth Hesketh, Frederic Rzewski, Dai Fujikura, Haris Kittos, Nicola LeFanu, Edward Gregson and David Bedford. He has recorded with flautist Wissam Boustany and recorder player Jill Kemp, and is pianist with the ensemble Gemini. He has established a reputation for performing from memory, both with Boustany and when accompanying masterclasses.

Born in Southampton to Polish parents, he won the 2004 Vlado Perlemuter Award, and

enjoys a varied schedule of solo, concerto and chamber music performances across the world, having played in more than 35 countries over six continents.

He is now Director of Music at Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance, London, where he supervises creative practice PhDs. He has also guest-lectured at the Royal Academy of Music, the Australian National Academy of Music, the Juilliard School, and the Manhattan School of Music.

Anneke Hodnett and Elizabeth Green

Anneke Hodnett came to London to study at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, where she was generously supported by the Arts Council of Ireland. She plays regularly with the London Symphony Orchestra, the BBC Symphony Orchestra, the Philharmonia, and Royal Ballet Sinfonia. Her chamber group, Trio Anima, are Kirckman Concert Society Artists, previous winners of the Elias Fawcett Award for Outstanding Chamber Ensemble in the Royal Overseas League Chamber music competition; they released their debut album in 2022. A keen advocate for contemporary music, Anneke has performed and recorded with Riot Ensemble, Octandre Ensemble and Suoni Ensemble and has previously recorded Raftery's "*Friedhof*" Quintet with the Animare Ensemble.

Elizabeth Green (née Scorch) attended the Purcell School of Music as a scholar before gaining her Bachelor and Master's degrees at The Royal Academy of Music. She enjoys a career as an orchestral harpist, performing with ensembles such as the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, BBC Concert Orchestra, National Symphony Orchestra, English National Ballet, and Birmingham Royal Ballet, and the London Mozart Players. As a chamber musician, Elizabeth was a member of 4Girls4Harps for a number of years. During this time they commissioned many new works for the ensemble, recorded several CDs which received critical acclaim and performed live on 'In Tune' and 'Women's Hour'.



The Berkeley Ensemble



Neil Heyde recording *Naked Before God*



Anneke Hodnett (left) and Elizabeth Green (right) recording *Two Offerings*



Richard Benjafield



Aleksander Szram, harpsichord, and the Berkeley Ensemble recording the Harpsichord Quintet.

Explore more releases from Kevin Raftery



Preview & Order here

Kevin Raftery: Chamber Music

Animare Ensemble, Berkeley Ensemble, Heath Quartet

Raftery's work is thoroughly modern, without classical limitations, but is also in turn lyrical, tuneful, dramatic and serene, giving appeal to more than just fans of modernist music. This is top-class post-modern work. While the Quartet and Quintet are formal works, the Pleasantries suite is full of wit, based on 'figure of speech' expressions.

MSV 28569

Gramophone

"This is a most worthwhile disc of fine, well-made chamber music by a composer largely unknown to the wider world. Nicely clear, warm sound as usual from this label. "

—Guy Rickards



Preview & Order here

Kevin Raftery: *Second Child*

Berkeley Ensemble, Clare Hammond, EXAUDI, Marmen Quartet

This 'Second Child' album follows Raftery's first portrait recording for Métier, which included his First String Quartet and other chamber works. Here his Second Quartet is partnered with choral works (both sacred and secular), and works for solo piano, violin duo and ensemble. Raftery's music may be mildly dissonant at times and harmonically adventurous, but is always brilliantly constructed: new music which is a joy to hear.

MSV 28600

Fanfare

"This is a very carefully planned program, and beautifully executed on all fronts. Constellations of sound, performed with such beauty, make this one of the most memorable of recent contemporary recordings."

—Colin Clarke

Production notes

Matthew Bennett was the producer and Dave Rowell the engineer for all tracks.

Atlantis Dances was recorded 9 January 2019 at All Saints, East Finchley, London.

The Meditations were recorded 29 September 2021 at St. Silas the Martyr, Kentish Town, London.

Two Offerings and *Fourth Companion* were recorded 4 May 2022 at Stapleford Granary, Cambridge.

Two for Mirth was recorded 6 December 2022 at All Saints, East Finchley, London.

Naked Before God and *Harpichord Quintet* were recorded 25 September 2023 at St. John the Evangelist, Upper Norwood, London.

Photography credits:

Kevin Raftery, Anneke Hodnett and Elizabeth Green by Janet Bishop

Richard Benjafield by Sam Benjafield

The Berkeley Ensemble by Liz Isles

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