

Songs, Chimes & Dances

Melinda Maxwell oboe • Richard Watkins horn
Andrew Sparling clarinet • Tim Holmes saxophone
Darragh Morgan violin • Robin Michael cello
Mary Dullea piano • Jonathan Leahwood guitar
Rob Keeley piano

Rob Keeley

1	Music for Art and Tom	11'21		Songs, Chimes & Dances	10'45
	Tim Holmes <i>saxophone</i> • Rob Keeley <i>piano</i>			9 I Slow and somewhat exploratory	1'52
2	Bells of Halkis	7'57		10 II Andantino	1'15
	Rob Keeley <i>piano</i>			11 III crotchet = 56	1'53
3	Little Trio	5'20		12 IV Allegretto	1'36
	Andrew Sparling <i>clarinet</i>			13 V Warm and moderately flowing	2'22
	Robin Michael <i>cello</i> • Rob Keeley <i>piano</i>			14 VI Ben marcato, meccanico	1'47
				Melinda Maxwell <i>oboe</i>	
				Rob Keeley <i>piano</i>	
	Two Ways of Looking at a Spider	10'30		Oregon Moods	12'01
4	I The Spider Dances	4'32		15 I Vernal	2'29
5	II The Spider Laments at Night	5'58		16 II Insistent	2'18
	Jonathan Leathwood <i>guitar</i>			17 III Gallic	3'23
				18 IV Exuberant	3'51
	Trio for Horn, Violin and Piano	13'49		Tim Holmes <i>saxophone</i>	
6	I Andante, largamente	4'29		Andrew Sparling <i>clarinet</i>	
7	II Scherzo: Allegro molto vivace, con brio	5'16		Rob Keeley <i>piano</i>	
8	III Andante: Piccola Scena Amorosa	4'04			
	Richard Watkins <i>horn</i>			Total timing	71'55
	Darragh Morgan <i>violin</i> • Mary Dullea <i>piano</i>				

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 Darragh Morgan *violin* • Robin Michael *cello* • Mary Dullea *piano*

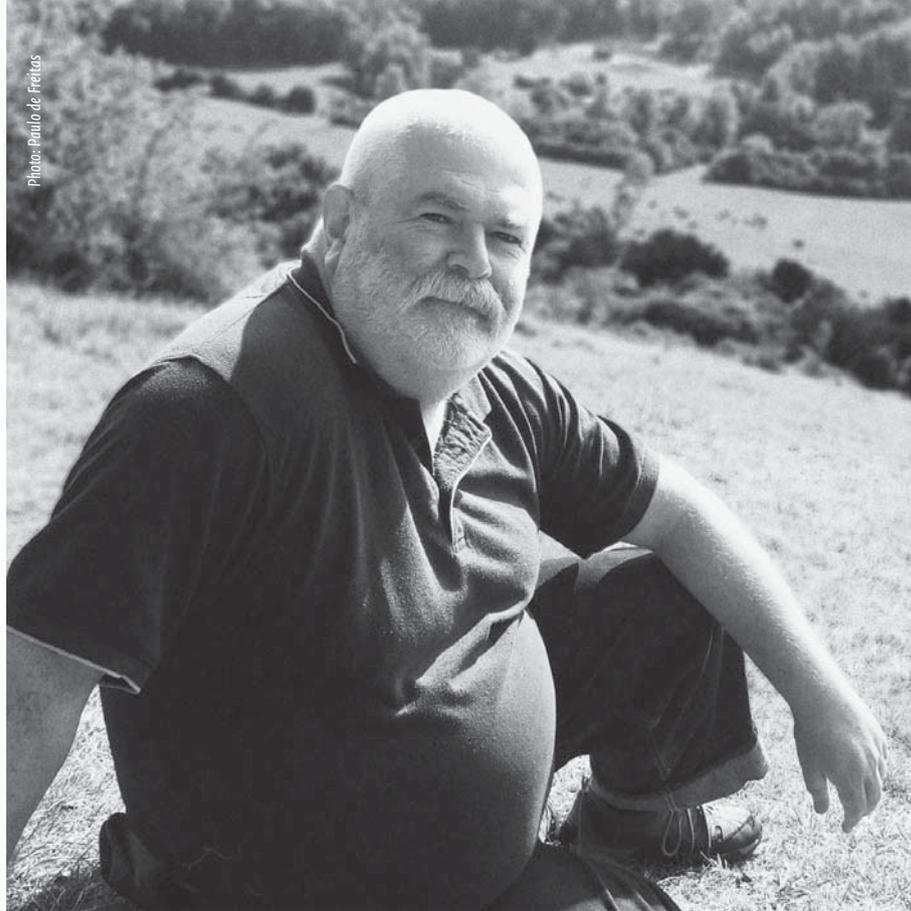


Photo: Paulo de Freitas

Robert Keeley

The Music Plays On

Bayan Northcott

Robert Keeley is both a 'natural' as a composer, and a bit of an enigma. While his music always unfolds lucidly, often engagingly, it resists easy categorization – at least accordingly to current critical notions. Apparently untouched by avant-garderie, minimalism or post-modern poly-stylistics, it might seem to fall into a traditionalist slot or even be mistaken as academic. Yet his music sounds singularly undriven by theory or the findings of analysis; nor will one so easily discover textbook sonata or fugal procedures in his works. More frequently he generates his forms by flexible refrain-and-chorus procedures, and sometimes, the illusion of traditional thematicism from variable ostinato or change-ringing permutations – suggesting his omnivorous ear has absorbed more 'advanced' techniques, from Ligeti, perhaps, or Birtwistle, but in his own way. Evidently his adventurous

choice of repertoire that is such an attraction of his periodic piano recitals at King's College, London, feeds into his composing.

Though his literary culture and his interest in the visual arts are quite as wide-ranging, Keeley gives the impression of a man immersed in music – from whom music flows. Fluency can seem an equivocal thing, to be sure, implying work too easily and superficially achieved. While Keeley is enviably able to concentrate and compose rapidly even during the snatched half-hours in his teaching schedule, he is also self-critical: periodically weeding handfuls of pieces out of his catalogue that he feels no longer pass muster, and revising those he retains. Yet there remains, beneath the surface of his many contrasting pieces, the sense of a continuum: an

absorption in the way musical ideas form, flow, transform and interact. In a letter, Gabriel Fauré once wrote of how an idea emerged at the back of his mind. 'But the strange thing was that while I was thinking of a thousand other things, this theme developed of itself, became harmonized in many different ways, changed and underwent modulations... obviously, it drew upon the store of my memories – on all those musical textures which have become part of myself. But how odd is this subconscious functioning of the mind, this precise working out of an idea in this way!' As with Fauré one senses behind the ever-inventive surfaces of Keeley's music, a sureness, composure even – a distinctly positive quality in these disquieting times.

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Notes by Robert Keeley

Music for Art and Tom (1998)

I wrote this piece for the saxophonist Tom Bergeron and the pianist/composer (and long-time associate of John Cage and Lou Harrison) Art Maddox, after the first of two sabbaticals spent in the USA, specifically Oregon. It is a continuous span in five contrasting sections. The first is introductory and rather rhetorical, the second fast, lithe and rhythmic. Then comes the heart of the piece, a slow, rather forlorn lullaby, which leads, after a reminder of the opening, to more fast, athletic music once more. Finally, there is a blues in E flat major, built out of the rising and falling major thirds from the opening. Though I was not to know this at the time, *Music for Art and Tom* proved the first of many pieces to feature wind instruments in small combinations. I came to realize that my personal preference was more for intimate instrumental line-ups (and relatively modest durations) rather than large, expensive forces – as the works on this recording demonstrate.

Bells of Halkis (2007)

This short tone poem for piano was written for a concert featuring the music of Nikos Skalkottas and so, in homage to him, I based it on a little folksong that he used for a wonderful set of variations for piano trio. This tune, with its characteristic 'turn' figure, is usually presented in three parts simultaneously, at different speeds, rather like a mediaeval motet, a technique I found fascinating to explore. Halkis was the island where Skalkottas was born, so I imagined hot bright sunlight, dazzling white Orthodox chapels, and the pleasantly discordant clanging of many bells. Out of this ambience the little tune tentatively emerges, then becomes more prominent, only to die away exhausted, towards the end, where the bells are now but a distant memory. Dominic Saunders gave the first performance in the Hellenic Centre, London in February 2008.

Little Trio (2004)

This was composed for the Swiss-based Ensemble Spektrum, although the single movement recorded here is all that survives of a much longer work: the cream, as it were, skimmed from the whey. It is, in a broad sense, a sonata allegro, with a very free approach to the order and developmental possibilities of the main 'topics' presented in the opening 'exposition'. I have tried to create a rich and varied, self-sufficient movement – but having said that, I might one day pair it with a more expansive set of variations...

Two Ways of Looking at a Spider (1994)

In 1994 I was approached by Jonathan Leathwood to write something for his newly-acquired 10-string guitar, an exotic beast whose extra four low strings below the normal range, with their, at first, mysterious tuning (generally F sharp, G sharp, B flat, then down a 7th to a low C), made me think very hard about the possibilities it might present. I make use of the extra strings to create very full resonant chords with close-spaced bass notes, also to exploit unusual harmonics and heterophonies, pitch-bends, flourishes and tremolandi unobtainable on a 6-string instrument.

Think Goya, via the extraordinary *Si el jour parait* by Maurice Ohana – the acknowledged 10-string masterpiece – crossed with a long-time fascination for insects, spiders and the beautiful webs they weave. The movements are 'The Spider Dances', and 'The Spider Laments at Night'.

Trio for horn, violin and piano (2000)

Though I originally wrote this piece in 2000, I revised it considerably for this recording. And while both the Brahms and Ligeti trios are inescapable models for anyone writing for this line-up, I hope I have given it a personal twist. My three-movement scheme is more modest than theirs: a substantial central scherzo and trio, flanked by shorter, slower movements. The first contrasts broad, flowing, lyrical music in 9/8 with cold, distant chiming and a hint of the dance. The last, subtitled 'Piccola Scena Amorosa', presents the violin and horn consummating their passion, as it were, discreetly supported by harmonies in the piano.

Songs, Chimes and Dances (2004)

As the title suggests, this set of character pieces is, by turn, lyrical, dance-like and suggestive of bell sounds. No 1 explores different ways of harmonizing the note F sharp, while the oboe keeps wanting to go its own way. In the gently bucolic no. 2, oboe and piano explore their own mutually exclusive hexachords (this is also a feature of no. 4). No. 3 contrasts sustained and staccato sounds interleaved with increasingly elaborate ornamentation, while no. 4 is another bucolic, this time an earthy dance. I allowed my lyrical impulse free rein in no. 5, while no. 6, marked 'Ben marcato, meccanico' is another bell piece, based around my explorations of change ringing techniques. As this disc suggests, I am very attracted to the combination of wind(s) and piano, of which Poulenc was undoubtedly the master. His durability, precision of harmony and gesture, and clarity of thought I have tried to emulate in my own work. The piece was first performed by Christopher Redgate and myself in 2005.

Oregon Moods (1999)

Written for the Oregon-based trio SoundMoves – whose sax player Tom Bergeron gave the premiere of *Music for Art and Tom* – this set of four character, or 'mood' pieces, was also taken up by the Dutch-based Thelema Trio. While there are no specific links with Oregon, I feel it perhaps reflects the springtime during which I was visiting in 1999: beautiful green forests and a pristine coastline that seemed to go on for ever.

The four movements are: 1 'Vernal': a relatively peaceful introduction, alternating gentle question-and-answer phrases, 2 'Insistent': much harsher, featuring heterophonic descending gestures and 'almost-unisons', 3 'Gallic': an explicit *hommage* to Erik Satie but more overtly expressive (and more contrapuntal!) than its *Gymnopédie* model, and finally, 4 'Exuberant', in two sections: the first dance-like, with the clarinet and sax constantly exchanging ideas; the second starting as a peaceful 'shared' monody, which then heats up and boils over before a deliberately inconclusive ending.

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Rob Keeley

Rob Keeley was born in Bridgend in 1960. He studied with Oliver Knussen at the Royal College of Music, Magdalen College Oxford under Bernard Rose, and later with Robert Saxton.

In 1988 he studied at the Accademia Santa Cecilia in Rome with Franco Donatoni, and at the Tanglewood Summer Music School, where he was the Benjamin Britten Fellow in Composition, working with Oliver Knussen and Hans Werner Henze.

Before joining King's College, London in 1993, where he is currently Senior Lecturer in Composition, Rob worked as a freelance music copyist, pianist and répétiteur, working with Opera Factory, Almeida Opera and Garsington Opera. He has also played with the London Sinfonietta and Music Projects/London, and now gives frequent solo recitals covering a wide range of repertoire.

As a pianist, Rob has premiered works by, among others, Harrison Birtwistle, Michael Finnissy, Jonathan Cole, Richard Emsley and Nicola Moro. He has given lecture recitals in 20th-century piano music at the University of California, Santa Barbara, and seminars on his own music at UC Berkeley, University of Oregon, Eugene, and more recently at the University of Denver.

His works have been performed by, among others: BBC Symphony Orchestra, BBC National Orchestra of Wales, Lontano, OPUS 20, Premiere Ensemble, Ensemble Bash, Ensemble *dal niente*; pianists Martin Roscoe, Colin Stone, Mary Dullea and Ian Pace; guitarists Jonathan Leathwood and Fabio Zanon; harpsichordist Jane Chapman, bassist Corrado Canonici (recorded on NMC D079), oboists Andrew Nogal and Chris Redgate; the Bingham Quartet, Chinook Quartet, and Fretwork.

For information about the artists on this recording please visit NMC's website at www.nmcrec.co.uk

The Bells of Halkis, Horn Trio, Little Trio, *Music for Art and Tom* and *Oregon Moods* were recorded at Highgate School, London on 18-20 July 2011.

Recording Producer
& Engineer **ALEXANDER VAN INGEN**
Assistant **CLAIRE HAY**
Editors **ALEXANDER VAN INGEN**
DAVE ROWELL

All for Six Music Productions (www.sixmp.net)

Songs, Chimes & Dances was recorded on 15 September 2011 at Coombehurst Studio, Kingston University.

Recording Producer
& Engineer **NICOLA MORO**
Studio Manager **TARIK ECHCHARIF**
Editor **NICOLA MORO**

Two Ways of Looking at a Spider was recorded on 27 November 2011 at the University of Denver, Colorado.

Recording Producer
& Engineer **MICHAEL SCHULZE**
Digital Editing **MICHAEL SCHULZE**

Mastering **DAVID ROWELL**

Executive Producer **COLIN MATTHEWS**

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