

# Kathleen Ryan

*pianist & composer*

What can you say about a pianist whose first favorite sound was made by marbles rolling in an aluminum dishpan?

In addition to practicing scales and classical repertory on her way to earning undergraduate and graduate degrees in music, Kathleen Ryan played snare drum in a marching band; wrote and performed singing telegrams; improvised music for avant garde dancers; composed a folk rock opera based on the Tristan and Isolde legend; and sang and danced in a hippie liturgical drama presented at the Ohio State Fair.

After a brief (very brief!) fling as a folk singer, and a somewhat longer interlude as a classical pianist, Kathleen began searching for ways to “sing the piano”—that is, transform the piano into a medium as intimately expressive as the human voice.

“When I am composing,” she says, “I don't necessarily hear music inside. Instead, I experience a subtle dissatisfaction until the sounds my hands create match the deeper emotion I feel within.”

These deeper emotions Kathleen strives to express in her music can be anything from rollicking to serene. Although listeners might have trouble categorizing Kathleen's style, her performances and albums demonstrate that she has perfected the artistry of making the piano sing. Strong musical structure combines with beautiful melody and powerful rhythm, resulting in piano music that is direct, appealing, and unusual.

Kathleen's compositions *Spare Change* and *Outlooks* (a sonatina for piano duet) took first place in the 2001 and 2003 Composers Today contests sponsored by the Music Teachers Association of California. In 2008 Kathleen was the Professional Music Teachers of New Mexico Commissioned Composer. For the commission Kathleen composed a set of 12 preludes for piano left hand alone. The preludes, titled **Verbs**, were premiered by pianist Keith Snell in Los Alamos, New Mexico, in November 2008, and released on CD in 2014.

Kathleen has published five recordings of her piano compositions. ***A Handfull of Quietness*** was featured in the Emmy-winning Iowa Public Television special **The Four Seasons**. ***The Rebirth of Light*** has garnered glowing reviews for Kathleen's deep probing of traditional Christmas carols. ***Under the Greenwood Tree*** was released in August 2009 and quickly became a fan favorite for its deeply settling music. ***Drivin'!*** is unusual in that Kathleen gave free rein to her rambunctious, energetic side: several pieces are 12-bar blues and more are blues-inspired. Mixed in among the high-spirited solos are some mellow numbers as well, such as her haunting arrangement of George Gershwin's ***Summertime***. Kathleen's newest release, ***Passages***, is a celebration of birth, death, transformation, forgiveness, love and joy.

The unique mix of ingredients influencing Kathleen's compositions includes folk songs of the British Isles; blues masters Robert Johnson and John Lee Hooker; American composers Gershwin, Hammerstein, and Copland; American shape note hymnody; Mozart and Schubert, of course; and the polyrhythmic coin boxes on the Providence, Rhode Island buses.

Kathleen now maintains a teaching and recording studio near Mountainair, New Mexico, where she lives with her husband and two extraordinary orange cats.