

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 & performed singing telegrams; improvised music for modern dancers; & composed a folk rock opera based on the Tristan & Isolde legend.

After a very brief fling as a folk singer, & a longer interlude as a classical pianist, Kathleen began searching for ways to “sing the piano” — to 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.”

Ryan has released five recordings of her piano compositions. The first, ***A Handfull of Quietness*** (1993) was featured in the Emmy-winning Iowa Public Television special ***The Four Seasons. The Rebirth of Light*** (2007) garnered glowing reviews for her deep probing of traditional Christmas carols. ***Under the Greenwood Tree*** (2009) is featured on the Internet radio program *Whisperings*. ***Drivin’!*** (2011) showcases a more upbeat, jazz- and blues-influenced style in Ryan’s playing and composing. Her newest recording, ***Passages***, is a collection of 13 piano solos celebrating birth, death, transformation, forgiveness, love and joy. It was released in October 2018.

Her recordings have been featured on *Whisperings Solo Piano Radio*, and can be heard on Pandora, Spotify, and through the Amazon and Apple music services.

In 2007-2008, Ryan composed a set of 24 preludes for piano left hand alone, which was requested by and dedicated to her friend, the concert pianist and music educator Keith Porter-Snell. The set, titled ***Verbs***, was supported by a commission from the Professional Music Teachers of New Mexico and the Music Teachers National Association, and premiered by Porter-Snell at the PMTNM conference in November 2008. Porter-Snell’s recording of ***Verbs***, recorded in Bath, England in 2013, was released in 2014.

Ryan won first place in the MTAC Composers Today contests in 2002 and in 2004, and composed the winning hymn melody for the Duke University Waldo Beach Hymnody Competition in 2003.

The unique mix of ingredients influencing Kathleen Ryan’s compositions includes folk songs of Ireland and Britain; 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 Ryan is currently composing music for a CD of arrangements of hymns and spirituals. She indulges her love of Irish music by practicing bodhrán and harp. She also maintains a teaching and recording studio at her home near Mountainair, New Mexico, where she lives with her husband and two magnificent orange cats.