



Indigo Road

Original Lute Music
by Ronn McFarlane



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DSL-90701

Lute - Ronn McFarlane

Bass - James Blachly

Flute and Harp - Mindy Rosenfeld

Percussion - Danny Mallon

Cittern - Mark Cudek

Harmonium - Bela Nachtigall

First Violin - Rowell Jao

Second Violin - Erin Freund

Viola - Jason Diggs

Cello - April Angilletta

Produced by: Brian Peters, Ronn McFarlane,
Daniel Shores and Mindy Rosenfeld

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1. Cathedral Cave	3:57
2. Indigo Road	3:14
3. Denali	4:18
4. Overland	3:48
5. Pinetops	2:43
6. Blue Norther	4:31
7. Chocolate Factory	3:43
8. Rosa	3:23
9. Uncharted Waters	4:05
10. Sycamore	4:25
11. Dowland's Goodnight	2:12
12. Early Christmas Morning	1:59
13. Gigue	1:50
14. Thistleheart	3:36
15. Over the Green Earth	2:53
16. Augusta	3:17

Total Run Time 54:05



The King of Instruments

Renaissance artists, wishing to evoke the magic power of music, placed a lute in the hands of Apollo and Orpheus. Also at times the choice of King David, the lute appeared on the scene in late Medieval Europe as one of many cultural treasures brought back to the continent by the Crusaders (to whom it had been known in Arabic as al 'ud). Its association with royalty and divinity, both Pagan and Christian, and with the idea of celestial harmony in the measuring of notes on its strings, was well deserved, for by the time its long reign ended in the late 18th century, it had inspired a written repertory of 40,000 pieces. Depicted in art for three centuries before the first preserved lute tablatures appeared around 1500, it must have been the medium for many thousands of instrumental improvisations.

Over the past century, the lute has come to be heard once again. Musicians, especially guitar players, have found their way to the lute because of the beauty of its historic repertory and the ineffable charm of the instrument itself. Indeed, after several years as a guitarist, I was led to play the works of Dowland, Francesco da Milano and others on the instrument of these great composers.

My own first two decades of playing the lute were spent exclusively performing music of the past. As my own love and respect for the lute deepened over the years, I realized that the lute is an instrument capable of communicating in a variety of musical languages. Its natural ability to express emotional nuance, and its fine palette of tone colors make it an ideal vehicle for musical expression in our own time.

Historically, the lute player and the composer of lute music were one and the same—there was no gulf between performer and composer. For the past several years I have devoted myself to reviving the old tradition of the lutenist-composer. As in lute music of the Renaissance, many of these new pieces tread the line between popular, folk and classical music. Some of my works draw heavily on Renaissance and Baroque styles, while others are expressed in a completely modern musical idiom.

The Tunes

All of my compositions were originally conceived as lute solos without accompaniment. After recording them as solos, however, I added parts for bass, flute, harp, percussion, cittern, harmonium and string quartet to several of the tunes, in order to heighten individual mood and character. In the Renaissance, some lute solos later became lute duets when a second lute part was added, perhaps years after the original solo. Other pieces were published in alternate versions for lute solo or for instrumental ensemble. This kind of flexibility and borrowing was common in the music making of the 16th century. It is in this spirit that I offer these new tunes for the lute.

1. Cathedral Cave (lute, bass, percussion & flute) Off the Australian coast in an underwater cave beneath the Tasman Sea, colorful and other-worldly sea creatures swirl in the brilliant blue-green water. This tone poem was inspired by a remarkable series of photographs in National Geographic (January 1997).

2. Indigo Road (solo lute) The title signifies a spiritual path or the road we take through life. Yet the music seems to be careening down the road at a reckless pace! The opening riff bounces from one register of the lute to another, breaking itself into smaller pieces and building until it unfolds into the heart of the piece at 2:04. Here, the frenetic pace continues in the treble and bass, but a lyrical middle voice now contemplates and questions its meaning. Yet even that voice is absorbed into the propulsive rhythmic energy as it is drawn into a “rock-out” conclusion.

3. Denali (solo lute) Also known as Mt. McKinley, Denali is the highest mountain in North America. Its icy peak juts into the sky with harsh, uncompromising majesty, while the surrounding land is surprisingly gentle, green and lush. These opposites inspired Denali, which seeks to capture the icy hardness, the majesty and the gentleness in a single musical vision.

4. Overland (lute, bass, percussion, harp, string quartet) The tune for Overland came unexpectedly during a tour with the Baltimore Consort. Driving in a wide valley between two mountain ranges in Montana, I noticed that, although our car was speeding along at quite a clip, the mountains seemed to pass with glacial slowness. The melody—sometimes expansive and arching, and combined with a more rapid, driving accompaniment—felt inextricably linked with the scene passing before my eyes.

5. Pinetops (lute, bass, cittern) was written on a hot July afternoon in Houston. I was thinking of the pinetops of Maine, swaying in a cool breeze while noodling an open-string warm-up exercise on the lute. The Muse was truly hovering over me as my fingers seemed to find a real piece of music. The bluegrass flavor came as a surprise: the music refused to develop in any other way!

6. Blue Norther (lute solo), another tone poem, describes a weather system that first glowers over a distant horizon. After rapidly approaching, it finally bursts upon the listener with furious winds before the storm diminishes and vanishes as quickly as it arrived. This piece owes much to the style and originality of guitarist & composer Michael Hedges, whose work I have loved and admired since first hearing him in 1980. His influence weaves its way through many of the compositions on this disc, but nowhere more apparently than the opening and closing sections of Blue Norther.

7. Chocolate Factory (lute, percussion) is a playful cartoon-like fantasy. The colorful percussion adds to the factory feel, conjuring up a scene where worker-elves merrily labor at old-fashioned machines of clattering wood and hissing steam.

8. Rosa (lute, bass, percussion, harmonium) reflects the vibrant Hispanic atmosphere of Austin, Texas, where I lived for a few years. Rosa was a family friend who was especially kind to my son, Gabriel, when he was a toddler. Unfortunately, we have lost touch with her, and she might never know of this tune which is dedicated to her.

9. Uncharted Waters (lute, bass) begins as an attempt to write a Leo Kottke-style fingerpicking piece, but rapidly morphs into a different animal altogether. Inspired by a photo of Daedalus Reef, the prickly tune rushes along, changing meter, and concludes with an exuberant, freewheeling section in 6/8.

10. Sycamore (lute, flute, bass) appeared to me one section at a time. The faster duple-meter part (beginning at 1:34) came first. Then, I realized that if the same tune were set in a slow 6/8 time, it would create a lyrical melody reminiscent of old Elizabethan English ballad tunes.

11. Dowland's Goodnight (lute solo) In Elizabethan times, a "Goodnight" was written upon the death of a famous or beloved person. While it is unusual to dedicate a Goodnight to someone who died nearly 400 years ago, Dowland is a compelling subject for such a composition. The preeminent lutenist-composer of the Elizabethan era, John Dowland (1563-1626) was preoccupied with musical images of tears, darkness and death. Even those Renaissance dances which are usually vigorous and spritely are imbued with a tinge of sadness in his oeuvre. My tribute to him takes the form of a galliard, turning the galliard's usually optimistic character into a mood of brooding and nostalgia. Melodic fragments of Dowland's own Melancholy Galliard are transformed and woven into Dowland's Goodnight to evoke his spirit.

12. Early Christmas Morning (lute solo) is a Renaissance-style almain describing a child's delight on Christmas morning. At 0:56 we "see" a traditional girl's toy with delicate grace and gentleness, and at 1:08 a boy's tin soldier enters with characteristic abruptness.

13. Gigue (lute solo) is a Baroque dance, written somewhat in the style of lutenist/composer Silvius Leopold Weiss (1687-1750). However, a certain Scottish flavor crept into the piece. So, if Weiss had lived in Scotland instead of Germany, it might have sounded a bit like this!

14. Thistleheart (lute, flutes, bass) A thistle is hard and sharp, and the heart is loving and soft in this image. When I was writing this tune, I had just watched a PBS documentary on Andrew Carnegie, the 19th-century steel baron. He was Scottish, as were many of his workers, and so the piece has a touch of Scottish flavor, but the thematic elements are related to the contrasting virtues

of a man like Carnegie, who could be at the same time generous and paternal as well as hard and exploitative. Thinking of his workers themselves, I was struck by another contrast: the reality of their hard-laboring life versus the optimistic dreams they must have harbored in emigrating to America. Like all the other tunes in this CD, Thistleheart began as a lute solo, but it now seems inseparable from the bowed bass and the choir of three flutes, expanding to five flutes in the closing section.

15. Over the Green Earth (solo lute) I was looking through an 18th century Scottish fiddle manuscript called The McFarlane Manuscript (I'm not sure whether there is any relation here or not!), and found a tune called A Wife of my Ain. I was enchanted by its spirit, and evolved my own tune through its example.

16. Augusta (lute, harp, bass, percussion) was written one December afternoon in Augusta, Georgia, during the hours before a concert with the Baltimore Consort. Without a specific reference, it is about the feeling of nostalgia itself— wistful, and reflective, as if remembering the distant past.

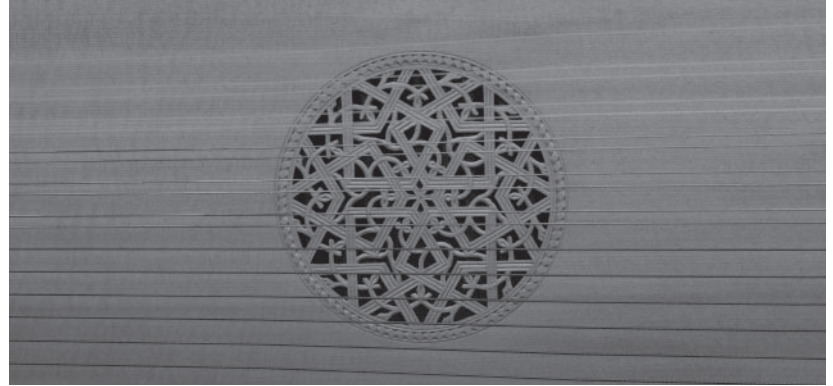
- Ronn McFarlane

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Ronn McFarlane





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Brandie Lane (left) Ronn McFarlane (right)



Danny Mallon



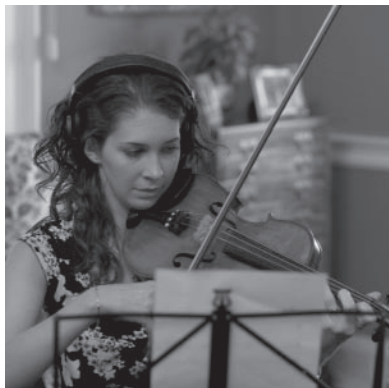
Mindy Rosenfeld



James Blachly



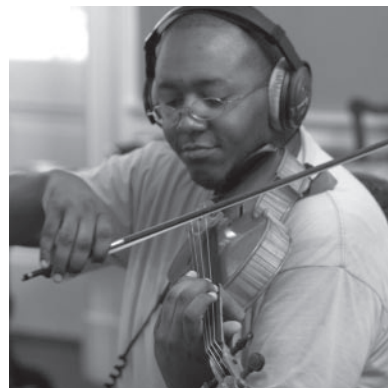
Mark Cudek



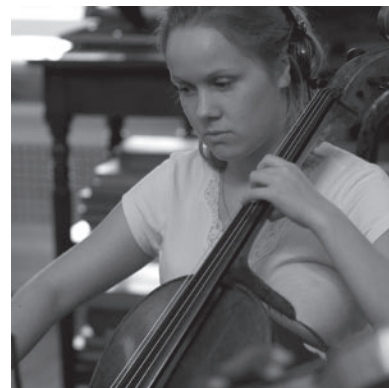
Erin Freund



Rowell Jao



Jason Diggs



April Angilletta



Other Lute Music by Ronn McFarlane

- DOR-90129 The Scottish Lute
- DOR-90148 Lute Music of John Dowland
- DOR-90186 The Renaissance Lute
- DOR-90225 Between Two Hearts
- DOR-90242 A Distant Shore
- DOR-90257 Highland King
- DOR-90022 The Art of the Lute