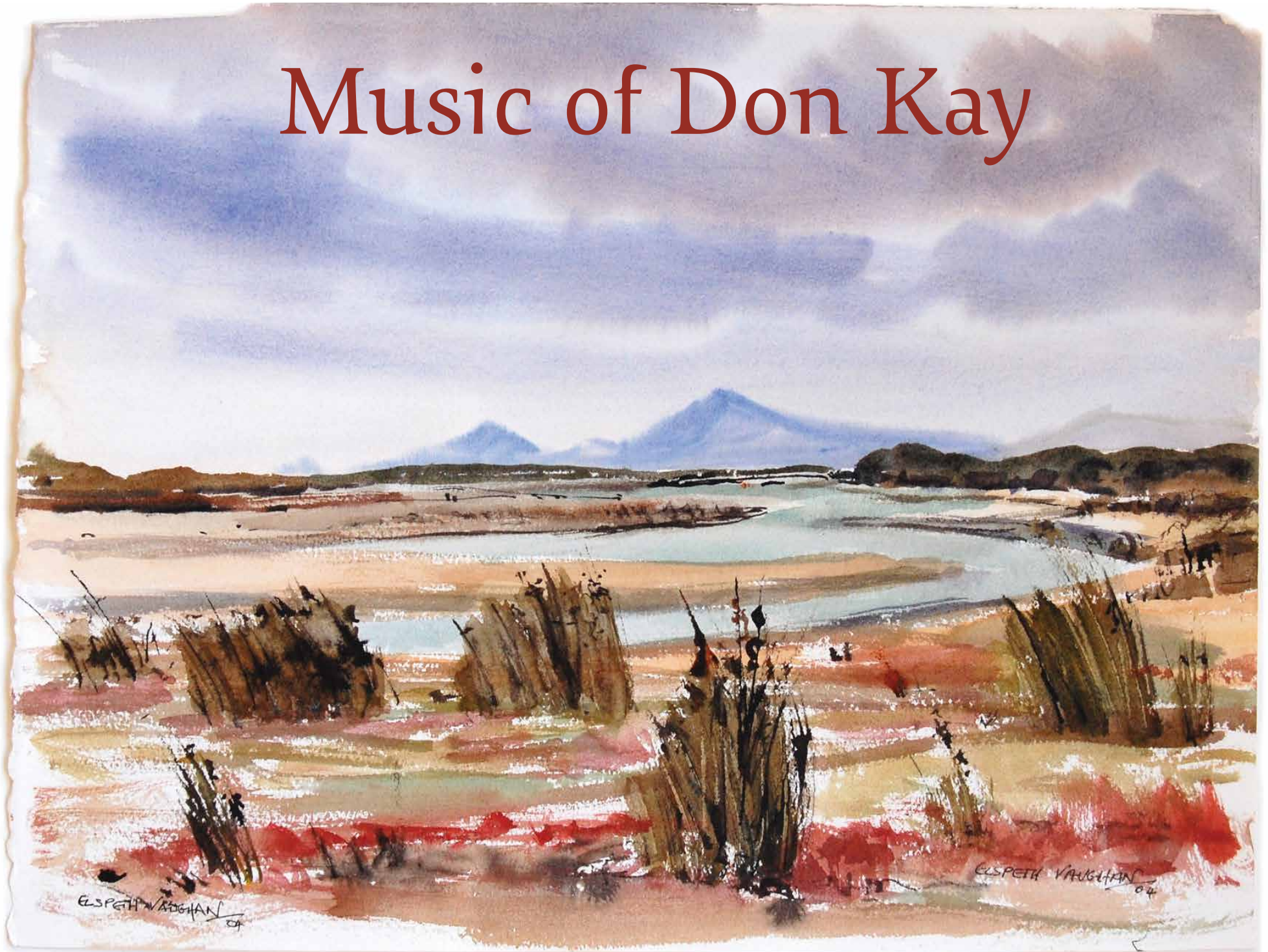


# Music of Don Kay



WORKS FOR PIANO(S), FLUTE, CELLO

# Don Kay

For too long Kay has been under-rated and rather marginalised as 'a Tasmanian composer', as if being associated with the island state somehow automatically conveys a sense of second-class citizenship. To be sure, he was born there and has spent all but 15 of his 77 years living and working there; yet not only has he produced an enviable output of works encompassing all the principal media – three symphonies, four concertos, two one-act operas, six string quartets, choral works, song cycles, chamber music, solo piano works, music for theatre and film – but also it is precisely because of his constant exposure and profound response to the Tasmanian environment that he has been able to achieve a sonic and emotional distinctiveness in his music.

After primary and secondary education in northern Tasmania, Kay completed a Bachelor of Music degree at the University of Melbourne, subsequently teaching in country Victoria and England. During his years in London (1959-64), he studied privately with Malcolm Williamson, returning to a position as an inaugural lecturer at Hobart Teachers' College. Transferring in 1967 to the new Conservatorium of Music (later brought under the aegis of the University of Tasmania), he taught composition and music education, eventually becoming Senior Lecturer, Dean of the Faculty of Music and Head of School. He retired from the Conservatorium in early 1998, and has since been appointed Adjunct Professor in Composition. In 1991 he was made a Member of the Order of Australia for services to music and music education, and twelve years later received the Centenary Medal for his outstanding, long-term musical achievements.

Before discussing the music on this disc, it will be instructive to consider Kay's compositional philosophy. There are five dominant areas of motivation which he has identified in his creative process, that is, a quintet of qualities most likely to provide a wellspring of inspiration for his compositions. They are: the natural environment; the man-made environment; a sense of fantasy; history; and individual experience (including a specific event). Whatever the motivation involved in finding, establishing and expressing a musical idea, the composer then sets out to utilise a range of sounds which Kay sees as falling into four main types: pure (that is, sounds made for their own sake); literal (sounds which imitate already existing ones); metaphoric (sounds that allude to, or can suggest, extra-musical things or events); and finally abstract (sounds which possess their own internal patterns and logic). The composer feels that these different classes of sounds can freely interchange and overlap, so that a musical idea initially expressed in one way can develop – almost of its own will – in unexpected and more complex fashions.

In much of Kay's work, the literal and metaphoric sound-types often provide the starting-points of pieces, or at least are decidedly important to the musical argument. For example, sounds from the natural environment are employed to varying effect: bird-calls, the sound of wind in trees, leaves rustling, waves lapping, insect noises. And metaphoric sounds might conjure up broader, less 'vocal' aspects of nature: star-groupings, different times of day (especially night), contrasting seasons of the year, vistas of disparate land-formations such as valleys, hills or plains. These sound-expressions are almost always, though not exclusively, found in those works bearing place-names or titles

evocative of the natural world. To mention some of these: *Quiet Waters* (high voice and string quartet, 1977-80); *At Night* (female voices and assorted instruments, 1982); *Hastings Triptych* (flute and piano, 1986); *Night Spaces* (flute, string trio and piano, 1989); *Moonlight Ridge* (string quartet and double bass, 1994); *River Views* (trombone and string orchestra, 1995); *The Edge of Remoteness* (piano trio, 1996); *Southern People and Places* (voice and piano with optional cello, 1998); and *Bird Chants I and II* (solo piano, 1998 and 1999). Of course *Hastings Triptych* on the present disc is of this type; even Kay's first composition – a short piano piece written when he was a primary school pupil – is entitled *A Green Meadow*.

A few reflections on Kay's harmonic language and stylistic characteristics. His favoured intervals seem to be the tritone, the semitone (and its variants, the major seventh and the minor ninth), the perfect fourth and the perfect fifth. These preferences often lend the music a transparent, desolate quality which relates to aspects of the Tasmanian bush (for example, *The Edge of Remoteness*). Sometimes there is a deliberate alternation between purely tonal procedures and dissonant harmonies (the one-movement First String Quartet), and a powerful sense of stillness allied to an intriguing use of suggested or actual silence (*Night Spaces*). Williamson had attempted to wean Kay away from the modal and other folksong elements of Vaughan Williams and his followers, instead fostering the adoption of dodecaphonic techniques, which Kay explored for some years before realising that his true path lay elsewhere.

The ritualistic sense pervading certain works is characterised to some extent by repetitive gestures, but even more by the idea of the dance in all its

variety. Indeed, many titles contain the term (*Dance Rituals, Dance Concertante, Dance Movement, Dance Cameos, Dance Rondo*), and one can detect a vitality and buoyancy in quick movements and passages reminiscent of Stravinsky's neo-Classical rhythms and Copland's raw energy. And the frequently-occurring rapid, nervous repeated figurations built on static harmonies – described by the composer as mere “filigrees” – can be viewed as unidentified forms which pass fleetingly across the landscape and then disappear mysteriously (Piano Trio No. 2). Overall, the listener is often left with a sense of ambivalence, whether expressed by Schubertian major/minor alternations, mournful tritones, bare fourths and fifths, or contrasting diatonic and dissonant writing.

A colleague once remarked to me that he had always seen Kay as “a kind of modern Tasmanian primitive,” an apt description when we consider the artistic traits of past composers who have historically acquired such a title: Charles Ives in America; Leos Janáček in the former Czechoslovakia; perhaps to a lesser extent, Béla Bartók in Hungary; and nearer these shores, Douglas Lilburn in New Zealand. All these figures followed their own destinies largely free of fads, fashions and passing trends. Their love of nature and instinctive ties to their respective environments undeniably enhanced their musical expressivity in important ways. As with any other composer, we can discern various compositional influences in Kay's music – Vaughan Williams and English Pastoralism, Bartók, Stravinsky, Copland, even Sibelius and Grainger – yet this Tasmanian primitive has gradually managed to forge his personal voice by demonstrating a strong spiritual affinity to his natural environment with integrity, flexibility and gentle perseverance. The composer's

own words – from an interview with Simon Barber and Simon Reade in March 1999 – supply a clear statement of his musical intentions: “I believe that whatever I do is the heart and mind... trying to work in balance.” Such equilibrium between technique and ideas, between craft and substance, can serve as an admirable paradigm for young musicians everywhere, whether they are composers or not.

DAVID BOLLARD © 2010

## Program notes

Of the six works, four have been composed for the performers on this CD, including the three piano sonatas, which receive their premiere performances.

The Sonata for Cello and Piano (2000) was composed for Christian Wojtowicz, and first performed by him and David Bollard in 2001 during the first Ten Days on the Island Festival in Hobart. That year they also played it in a direct ABC Classic-FM broadcast concert in Hobart, and at an all-day seminar at the University of Tasmania School of Art. It comprises four movements, and although employing the language developed, in part, through responses to Tasmania's natural environment, it is essentially an ‘abstract’ piece. As such, it points to a change of direction for me, as I'd been involved for some years with a series of ‘Tasmanian’ pieces, mostly connected with the Hastings area in southern Tasmania.

*Hastings Triptych* (1986) was composed at the request of David Cubbin (Foundation Professor of Music at the Tasmanian Conservatorium) for performance by him and Geoffrey Lancaster at Government House, Hobart, on the occasion of a dinner held for The Australian Academy of the Humanities Conference, 12 July 1986. This work is the first to which I gave actual Tasmanian place

names. The work's three pieces – *Hastings Bay, The Caves* and *Lune River* – express responses to this area, on the edge of remoteness, characterised by water in its many forms of mists and rain, rivers and bays, interacting with the landscape of hills and forests, creating an overriding sense of tranquillity and mystery.

The Piano Sonatas Nos. 2, 3 and 4 were composed in quick succession in 2007 over a couple of months beginning in July. I wrote No. 2 really as a gift of gratitude to David Bollard for his greatly-appreciated promotion of my music since he moved to Hobart. It is sub-titled *From My Inner Nature*. Like its successors, it is in one movement only. It is a very personal and special piece for me, and involved much difficulty in its composition, trying to meet the challenges of expressing various states of mind in a satisfactory form.

Straight after completion, Michael Kieran Harvey, unaware of the Bollard sonata, asked me for a piece – to my great surprise and delight! He spoke of a possible sonata, and in my excitement I immediately began work. I sub-titled the resultant sonata *Capsules*, as it comprises a series of short, self-contained ideas, somehow linked but also ‘breaking out,’ as it were, analogous to pods of ripe seeds bursting. As the piece grew, the numerous ideas juxtaposed and recurred, sometimes identically and sometimes developed or transformed in some way. The overall form complied, I felt, with certain traditional principles, hence the title. When Michael received the score, he asked me if that was all there was – thinking more movements were to come. Although I saw the single movement as a complete work, I quickly decided that I would add another single-movement, scherzo-like, autonomous piece and call it Sonata No. 4.

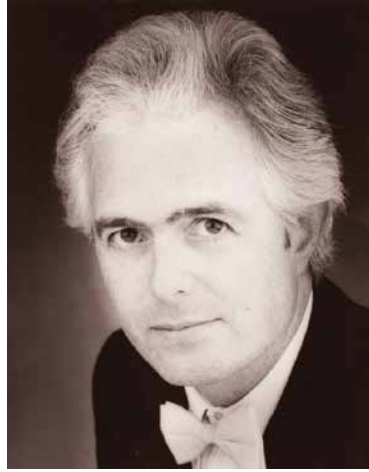
Because the sonatas were evolving so rapidly, it occurred to me to unite all three as a kind of trilogy, in spite of their autonomies. I sub-titled No. 4 *End Notes*: it freely refers to ideas in Nos. 2 and 3, the intention being retrospectively to provide a uniting element. The premiere performances on this concert recording provide an opportunity to hear the three pieces as a trilogy.

The program concludes with a short Scherzando for two pianos, four hands. This was composed in 1979 for Lyall McDermott and Valerie Potter, who performed it at a State Library lunch-time concert that year.

May I extend my heart-felt thanks to the four very fine artists, all friends as well as colleagues. A composition is nothing without performance – and performances require the third dimension of audiences, so thank you all for listening.

DON KAY, October 2007

## David Bollard



David Bollard is one of Australia's best-known and versatile musicians, working for many years as performer, teacher, musicologist, lecturer, adjudicator, examiner, broadcaster and editor. He has

been a staff member at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music, the Universities of Western Australia, Tasmania and Monash, and held residencies at various other institutions. In varying capacities he has appeared in over thirty countries worldwide.

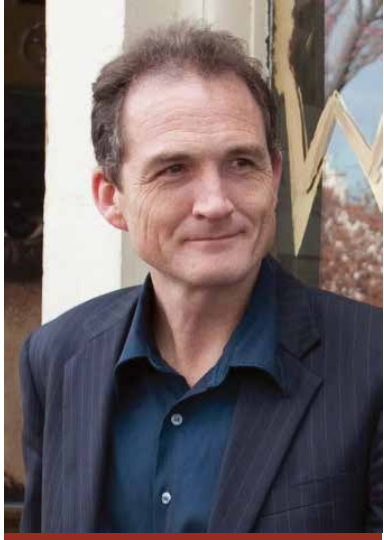
There have been numerous recordings for the ABC, and tours for that organisation and Musica Viva Australia with such artists as violinists Wanda Wilkomirska, Edith Peinemann and Dylana Jenson, and singers Rotraud Hansmann, Robert Gard, Beverley Bergen, Jane Edwards and David Hamilton. He was closely involved with the Artist-in-Residence scheme at the University of Western Australia, where he collaborated with distinguished visiting musicians like Alfredo Campoli, André Tchaikovsky, Jane Manning, Rohan de Saram and the Alburni String Quartet.

Born in New Zealand, he undertook advanced studies for six years in London with artist-teachers Ilona Kabos, Louis Kentner, Julius Katchen and Béla

Siki. After a successful Wigmore Hall debut, BBC broadcasts and concerts in Europe, he moved to Australia in 1970. He was a founding member of the Australia Ensemble, resident at the University of New South Wales, and performed and recorded with them for 19 years (1980-1998).

Mr Bollard holds degrees in arts and music, and was appointed to an Adjunct Professorship at the University of Tasmania in 2006. His recordings are on the Festival, Vox Australis, Entracte and Tall Poppies labels. In recent years he has toured and recorded as a member of chamber groups *Ménage à Trois* and the *Esperance Trio*, resident at the University of Tasmania, and writes regular CD reviews and articles for *Music Forum* magazine and other publications.

## Michael Kieran Harvey



Michael Kieran Harvey was born in Sydney and studied piano with Alan Jenkins, Gordon Watson, and at the Liszt Academy, Budapest, under Sándor Falvai. Based in Tasmania, his career has been notable for its diversity and wide

repertoire. He has especially promoted the works of Australian and contemporary composers and recorded well over 30 solo CDs on various labels. Harvey's awards include the Grand Prix in the Ivo Pogorelich Competition, USA (1993), the Debussy Medal, Paris (1986), the Australian government's Centenary Medal (2002) and the 2009 APRA award for Distinguished Services to Australian Music. The Michael Kieran Harvey Scholarship was established in 2006 to encourage future directions in Australian keyboard art music. He is currently on staff at the Australian National Academy of Music.

## Fiona Perrin



Flautist Fiona Perrin began her career as an orchestral musician at 17 years of age, playing with the (then) Western Australia Arts Orchestra in Perth, and later won a scholarship offered by the ABC Sinfonia in Sydney. In 1983 she attended the National Flute Convention

in Sydney, taking tuition from Paul Curtis (then Principal Flute of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra) and Roger Garrod, and four years later represented New South Wales at the National Flute Competition. She completed a Bachelor of Music degree in Performance at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music in 1991. Other studies were also undertaken with Amelia Skinner, James Kortum, Nicholas Negerovic and Rosamund Plummer.

Since settling in Tasmania, Ms Perrin has studied with the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra's Principal Flute, Douglas Mackie, and gained a Postgraduate Performance Diploma at the University of Tasmania Conservatorium of Music in 1996, thereby earning a listing on the Dean's Roll of Excellence. During the same year she was featured as soloist with the Conservatorium Orchestra, and travelled to the USA to attend the American National Flute Convention in New York City. In 2000 she was awarded her

Master of Music degree in Performance, only days before the birth of her second child.

Ms Perrin has performed in a wide variety of musical genres and ensembles, notably the classical flute and harp duo Syrx and the contemporary folk band Bandécoute. Currently she works as a casual player with the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra and teaches flute at the Tasmanian Conservatorium of Music.

# Christian Wojtowicz



Christian Wojtowicz has long been recognised as one of Australia's most outstanding cellists and pedagogues. Since his early studies with André Navarra (at the Paris

Conservatoire) and Pierre Fournier on a Winston Churchill Fellowship, he has held the position of Principal Cello and performed the major concerto repertoire with all of the country's main symphony orchestras. In demand as a recitalist and chamber music player, he has worked with the new music ensembles Flederman, the Australian Contemporary Music Ensemble and Pipeline as well as associations with more traditional groups such as Ensemble I, the Australian String Quartet, the Australia Ensemble and, most recently, the Esperance Trio resident at the Tasmanian Conservatorium of Music.

Mr Wojtowicz has toured, recorded and broadcast regularly here for many years, as well as in the United Kingdom, different parts of Europe and south-east Asia, including appearances at many national and international festivals. Leading Australian composers have also written works especially for him, notably Keith Humble, Larry Sitsky and Don Kay.

In addition to his performing activities, Mr Wojtowicz has held teaching posts at the Canberra School of Music, the Queensland Conservatorium,

the Universities of Queensland and Melbourne, and the Victorian College of the Arts, with lecture-recitals and masterclasses undertaken at various overseas institutions. Among his former students are members of all the major Australian orchestras as well as chamber ensembles such as the Flinders and Tinalley String Quartets. He was Lecturer in Cello at the Tasmanian Conservatorium from 1981, and was Acting Director there in 1998/99, and Head of Strings and Classical Music until 2007.



Recorded in concert, 19 October 2007,  
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# Music of Don Kay

**1 Piano Sonata 2** (2007) 15'42"  
DAVID BOLLARD (PIANO)

**Hastings Triptych** (1986) (15'37")

2 Hastings Bay 5'57"

3 The Caves 5'50"

4 Lune River 3'49"

FIONA PERRIN (FLUTE)  
DAVID BOLLARD (PIANO)

**5 Piano Sonata 3** (2007) 12'45"  
MICHAEL KIERAN HARVEY (PIANO)

**Sonata for Cello and Piano** (2000) (21'24")

6 Con energia 7'27"

7 Con vivezza 3'10"

8 Con sensibilità 6'31"

9 Con agilità 4'14"

CHRISTIAN WOJTOWICZ (CELLO)  
DAVID BOLLARD (PIANO)

**10 Piano Sonata 4** (2007) 6'09"  
MICHAEL KIERAN HARVEY (PIANO)

**11 Scherzando for 2 pianos** (1979) 4'46"

DAVID BOLLARD (PIANO)  
MICHAEL KIERAN HARVEY (PIANO)

TOTAL PLAYING TIME 77 MINUTES