

# The Four Arts of Music

A Concert by Kevin Helppie and Forrest Kinney

July 3, 2017

## The Art of Improvisation

### Improvising on a “Standard” Song

*My Funny Valentine* by Rogers and Hart

### Improvising on an Early *Basso Continuo* Piece

*Amarilli* by Giulio Caccini (1551-1618)

### Improvising New Songs Based on Suggestions from Audience Members

## The Art of Composition

### Original Compositions That are Basically Transcribed Improvisations

Three or four of the following songs from the *World Songs* collections composed by the performers:

*Although I Come to You*    *I Lie at Ease*    *My Heart, Longing for You*    *Moon Alone Tonight*  
*Clear River*    *It Thundered*    *Weary, Wild Geese*    *Like the Dew*    *Cricket*

### Original Compositions That were Composed without Improvisation

The first four songs in the *Drops of Silver* song cycle composed by the performers and based on the poetry of Charles d'Orléans.

*Tambourine*    *In Her Pavillion*    *Beware the Arrow!*    *Farewell to Love (Gentle Valentine)*

## The Art of Interpretation

*Is My Team Plowing?* by George Butterworth, a song based on a war-time poem by A.E. Housman.

## The Art of Arranging

### Arrangements of a Familiar Tune

Two selections from the *88 Birthday Variations* by Forrest.

### A Composition that is Actually an Arrangement

*Colorado Trails*, a cowboy folksong arranged by Forrest.

### Arrangements of Folk and Classical Themes in Modern Styles

*Oh When the Saints* and *Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child* arranged by Kevin.

*Distant Lands*, a theme by Robert Schumann turned into a song by Kevin.

See the detailed program notes on the following pages for more information.

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## Program Notes

### Something Old, Something New

Prior to the mid 19th Century, musical concerts (particularly those of pianists) were quite different from the classical music concerts of today. They were much more like today's "popular" concerts. Performers played their own compositions, their own arrangements of popular themes, and each concert included improvisations. This always involved playing with other musicians—the first solo concert wasn't given until 1839 by Franz Liszt. After printed music became widely available for the first time, concerts in our "classical" tradition have been focused almost exclusively on the art of interpreting masterworks. Performers recite the works of master composers, usually by memory.

This concert blends both traditions, though it mostly has the flavor of the earlier kind of concert. We, the performers, believe that this sort of concert—this integration of old and modern notions of what it means to be a performer—can be a viable concert format for the future as well as the present. It can allow for the greatest range of expressive possibilities for the performers.

### Part One: The Art of Improvisation

#### Improvising on a Standard Song

We begin by improvising on a lead sheet of a "standard," *My Funny Valentine*. Lead sheets are the modern incarnation of the old figured bass system. This is an excerpt from the "score" we are using for this performance. The accompaniment is mostly improvised and so is much of the vocal part.

308.  
(BALLAD)

## MY FUNNY VALENTINE

- RODGERS/HART

The image shows a handwritten musical score for the song "My Funny Valentine" by Rodgers and Hart. It consists of four staves of music. Above the first staff, the title "MY FUNNY VALENTINE" is written in large, bold, black letters, with "- RODGERS/HART" written to its right. To the left of the first staff, the number "308." and the word "(BALLAD)" are written in a circle. Below the first staff, the chords C-, C-(maj7), C-7, and C-6 are written. Below the second staff, the chords Ab(maj7), F-7, D-7 b5, and G7 b9 are written. Below the third staff, the chords C-, C-(maj7), C-7, and C-6 are written. Below the fourth staff, the chords Ab(maj7), F-7, Ab-6, and Bb7 (b9) are written. The musical notation includes a treble clef, a key signature of one flat (B-flat major), and a 4/4 time signature. The notes are mostly quarter and eighth notes, with some rests and ties.

## Improvising on an Early *Basso Continuo* Piece

*Amarilli* is a piece written around 1600 by Giulio Caccini. The original “score” below is much like the modern lead sheet—there is a line of melody and a line of “figured bass” which suggests the harmony to be played. The accompaniment is largely improvised, and the singer is expected to improvise on the melody as well, especially on repeated phrases.

Here’s the same piece in print in another key.

And here is the same piece written out in standard, modern notation. The key has been changed.

This is the first line of the lead sheet Forrest made to use in this performance.

## Improvising New Songs Based on Audience Members’ Lyrics

In the 19th century, performers such as Franz Liszt would solicit themes and ideas from the audience for improvisations. We ask audience members to give us snippets of lyrics and musical parameters from which we will improvise new songs.

## Part Two: The Art of Composition

### Original Compositions That are Basically Transcribed Improvisations

We will perform three or four songs from our two published collections of *World Songs*. To compose this music, we began with short ancient poems that we both loved, then we improvised together (sometimes a number of times) and made recordings. Then we transcribed the songs that we both liked and did some editing. So, though these are compositions, there are essentially improvisations that have been captured in print. Much printed music is actually captured improvisations.

### Original Compositions That were Composed without Improvisation

We will perform the first four pieces in our song cycle *Drops of Silver*. These were composed in an entirely different manner. Kevin began with the poems and created melodies that brought the lyrics to life. He then emailed Forrest the melodies, and Forrest added accompaniments to the melodies. This was a very controlled, conscious process compared to the intuitive, spontaneous process used to create the *World Songs*. As a result, the music is more “literary,” less “aural.”

#### From the Introduction to Drops of Silver

The genesis of this song cycle was fragments of poems by Charles d'Orléans (1394-1465) translated from both French and early English sources. These have, in turn, been freely adapted and set to music.

Charles was born on the “cusp” of an era between the Medieval and Renaissance periods in European History. The circumstances of his life seem taken from a romantic fairy tale, though one lacking a “happy ending.”

Duke Charles, was born into the family of French aristocrat Louis I. As a teenager, he was captured by the British following *The Battle of Agincourt* (1415). Given his lineage, he could not be put to death. Instead, he was put under “house arrest” for the next twenty-five years in different castles throughout England, including *The Tower of London*. He was considered to be in the line of succession for the French throne, and by virtue of this lineage was allowed most of the amenities of aristocrats, but not the freedom to travel where he wished.

During captivity, he married his second wife, Bonne of Armagnac. Naturally, he had hoped to be freed and then return to her in France. Unfortunately, she died while he was waiting to join her. As a tribute, he wrote *My Very Gentle Valentine*. The text is also known as *Farewell to Love*, the title we used for the fourth song in this cycle. The Duke's poem is thought to be the first Valentine ever written. Certainly, it is not the light-hearted verses that many sweethearts receive on February 14th! The words allude to missed opportunities for togetherness. In the next breath, Charles makes an entreaty to God, questioning why his captors could go unpunished after keeping he and his beloved apart.

But take heart, for not all is bleak in these poems! Personal and even humorous sentiments resonate through these words and across the centuries, giving these texts a timeless shine. For example, *When I Heard the Tambourine* finds an elderly lodger in a castle being disturbed by May Day revelers. Initially irritated by being awakened by thoughtless neighbors in pre-dawn hours, the protagonist decides not be an old grouch and let the “young folks” just have their fun. *Beware the Arrow* is a cautionary poem that issues an over-the-top warning to all who might be struck by Cupid's Arrow. Be sure to have a doctor and a priest nearby!

It is our hope that modern-day *Minstrels* or *Bards* will take their listeners back to the days of serenades being sung outside the proverbial “castle window.”

## Part Three: The Art of Interpretation

We will play the notes as written in a standard music score, but explore the music that lies “beyond the notes.” The great cellist Pablo Casals once wrote, “The art of interpreting is not playing what is written.” We might say, “...playing the music that lies beyond what is written.”

The piece we have chosen to interpret in a few different ways is *Is My Team Plowing?* by George Butterworth, a song based on a war-time poem by A.E. Housman.

## Part Four: The Art of Arranging

### Two Contrasting Arrangements of a Familiar Tune

Forrest will introduce the art of arranging by playing two contrasting arrangements of an everyday tune that everyone knows.

### A Composition That is Actually an Arrangement

Many “compositions” (such as those by Bartok) are actually arrangements of folk songs and other popular melodies. We will play an arrangement of *Colorado Trails*, an old cowboy folk song. Forrest has composed an accompaniment that he will play as written. No improvisation here!

### Arranging Folk and Classical Themes in Modern Styles

We come full circle by playing from lead sheets, but this time we are playing from lead sheets of Kevin’s arrangements of some timeless melodies.

The first piece is an arrangement and mixture of two of the most familiar and loved American spirituals: *Oh, When the Saints* and *Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child*.

In the second piece, *Distant Lands*, Kevin begin with the familiar, pure theme from Robert Schumann’s piano piece which is often translated as *Strange Lands and People*. Then he added lyrics inspired by Robert Stevenson’s poem *Distant Lands*. He and an arranger added chords which Forrest modified and keeps varying each time he plays. We see again how the art of improvisation often “rides upon” the art of arranging.



*Colorado Trails* can be found in the RCM *Resonance Series, Voice Repertoire*, Level 2 published by Frederick Harris Music.

Both collections of *World Songs*, the *Drops of Silver* song cycle, and the *88 Birthday Variations* can be found at [www.forrestkinney.com](http://www.forrestkinney.com).