

PRIMA
CLASSIC

GERARD
COUSINS
STAY BY
MY SIDE



STAY BY MY SIDE

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STAY BY MY SIDE

The underlying themes of this album include peace, stillness and calm. My focus, as always, with my music is to aim to produce something that is beautiful. The pieces are a mix of originals by guitarist-composers and my own improvisations and compositions. There are also some new transcriptions of piano pieces which I have been working on for the past few years.

Other works on the album came to me through serendipitous meetings or the tangled fortunes of internet explorations. The inspiration starts close to my home with the Welsh composer David John Roche, then perhaps unexpectedly, we head not south (toward Spain) but northwards towards places that one does not naturally associate with the guitar. These contemporary composers of Sweden, Iceland and Estonia have provided a rich source of contemplative art.

The transcriptions present musical problems that are often solved by changing the tunings of the guitar strings. And with each new tuning I find novel combinations that inspire me to create new pieces. Many of these are improvised on the spot, or grow spontaneously and are later edited or expanded upon to create more structured pieces.

Now I have my own studio, the pressures of time constraints and expense have largely disappeared. This has created a certain artistic freedom which has enabled me to feel free enough to improvise and experiment with my interpretations. I hope you find the result as enjoyable and intriguing as I did whilst making it.

SOME NOTES ON THE PIECES:

Stay By My Side & One Step Away

I don't know where these two pieces came from, they seem to be in a style that I don't recognise as my own, yet they feel like true expressions. Maybe I have changed?

Prayer for Peace Sitting helplessly in my studio in October 2023, thinking about the conflict in Israel and Gaza, what could I do? This small offering came from my guitar.

Gyan's Song Another piece born out of improvising - When I first played it I thought it was a melody I had already heard played by the guitarist Gyan Riley, but after listening to his albums searching for the tune I soon realised that it was original after all. I thought it would be appropriate to dedicate it to him for his imaginary inspiration!

Tomorrow's Song

Is from the album "Living Room Songs" - a recording in which the listener feels and hears every click and squeak of Ólafur's upright piano as if you were inside the instrument itself! This recording approach encouraged me to seek out an equally intimate performance - one for which the solo guitar is truly apt.

Saman

Means "together" in Icelandic. This is a piece that truly represents what I was looking for with this album - music with a beautiful simplicity.

Haiku (1, 2, 3 & 4)

Loosely inspired by the brief poetic form, these improvised pieces embraced the idea of a restricted form.

For Alex

The tremolo is a technique held dear by classical guitarists and in this short piece we hear a beautiful mellifluous melody unfold. Written by the young Welsh composer David John Roche - a man who is equally at home writing for symphony orchestra or solo ukelele.

Once this was Now

Ange Turrell is a guitarist and composer from Sweden. I saw him perform this piece on YouTube and was immediately struck by the opening melody which reminded me of a tune by the Mahavishnu Orchestra. Ange sent the sheet music to me with this message - "consider this just as a sketch or a skeleton for further development..." It was intended to be a kind of jazz tune, meaning there is a fixed theme, but then also a lot of open space for improvisation to happen. I hope you find it inspiring.

mRNAissance (after Marco dall'Aquila)

Marco dall'Aquila was an Italian lutenist from renaissance times. I fell in love with a short Ricercar of his, but was always frustrated by its brevity.



Inspired by the development of the Covid vaccine and mRNA vaccines in general, I imagined treating the music in a similar way to how a cell's nucleus creates proteins from the RNA code. The original tune is expanded and developed to create a longer work which blurs what is old with what is new.

Night in the Village from Six Studies

Stefan Levin is a Swedish composer, guitarist and music producer who often writes for film and stage productions. "Night in the Village" was inspired by Levin's "greatest inspiration for the modern classical guitar" - the Cuban composer Leo Brouwer.

Für Alina and Spiegel im Spiegel

Arvo Pärt is a composer whose music I have held dear for most of my life. I made a guitar version of "Für Alina" many years ago - it is a relatively simple piece and is not difficult to fit onto the guitar's limited voice. A solo guitar version of "Spiegel im Spiegel" however is a different ball game altogether and I have my friend and fellow guitarist Derek Gripper to thank for challenging me to make this transcription. (He also made a guitar version which is an essential listen and demonstrates the contrast of possible successful approaches when translating the composer's wishes into a new medium.) "Spiegel im Spiegel" was originally written for piano and violin - a perfect choice of instrumentation for a solo melody and accompaniment and it was the challenge of creating the illusion of both these characteristics which fascinated me when making my version.

In the Sky and on the Ground

Was first released on Nils Frahm's album "The Bells" 2009. Nils chose it as his opening track but I think it also makes for a beautiful conclusion.

GERARD COUSINS

Gerard Cousins is a true innovator in the world of classical guitar, pushing the boundaries of his instrument to create mesmerising music that appeals to a wide audience. From his unique interpretations of Philip Glass' piano music to his transcriptions of choral composer Eric Whitacre, Gerard's recordings have garnered millions of streams and landed on the front page of Apple Music.

But Gerard's music is not just confined to the studio. His live performances are a true experience, featuring a repertoire that combines imaginative guitar arrangements with his own compositions. Gerard's improvisational skills and interaction with the audience make every concert a one-of-a-kind event.

Gerard's passion for music began early in life, absorbing the recordings of his guitar heroes John Williams and Julian Bream, as well as exploring the worlds of jazz, rock, electronic, Indian classical, flamenco and minimalist music. It was a concert by the legendary Joe Pass that convinced him of the power of a single guitar to captivate an audience.

Gerard's journey to create the music he wanted to hear was not easy, but his perseverance paid off. His albums show an artist who started with traditional Spanish repertoire and evolved to incorporate his diverse influences. With his 2014 album, "The First Beat is the Last Sound," Gerard found his unique voice, blending his past influences with his own original compositions.

Gerard's recordings are broadcast all over the world and he has had special radio programmes dedicated to his guitar playing and compositions on BBC Radio Wales and France Musique. In 2015 he appeared on UK television as a finalist on Sky Arts 'Guitar Star'.

A graduate of the University of Leeds and Enschede Conservatorium (Netherlands), he has performed in many festivals and concert halls around the world, from the Purcell Room on London's South Bank to concert halls all over Europe, South America and the Middle East. He has released eight albums, each one focusing on a different area of music from traditional Spanish repertoire to his original compositions and his unique re-imaginings of traditional Welsh music.

"Stay by my Side" is Gerard's second album with Prima Classic, following "The Poet Acts".



CREDITS

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