

NOTES ON *EARLY FROST*

This is a remix of music I composed over a period of some forty years after 1958. Yet until 2009, when I released an album called *Jeff's Sunny Day*, the pieces had never been recorded. As the basic mood of the remixed album is relaxed or joyful, I chose the title of one of the pieces – *Early Frost*. Though the original cover painting by the late Moira Jarvis is unnamed, its mood seemed to me to reflect such a title.

I created the original album in the early days of my experience of using the new digital technology, so that I came to feel that I had not done them justice. But since I have always been concerned with being at the edge of a wave, I did not feel that I could afford the time to return to them, not least because I am very wary of becoming entrapped by nostalgia and the closing down of explorative energy it so often brings.

Then in 2018, after a long period of development, culminating in *Guthlac*, I decided, rather than lying fallow, to revisit earlier work and see if my more developed digital knowledge could improve them. The most recent result of this was the remix of *Bonny Street*. (edwardlee.bandcamp.com/album/bonny-street-remix-2019).

But my fears were not entirely groundless! Beware of opening the Pandora's box of the past! My wife, Frances, always a great fan of my earlier music, pressed me to listen to it again, so we would listen to these themes from long ago, over an early evening glass.

I made a start with *Jeff's Sunny Day*, since in terms of compositional development, these were the earliest pieces I felt were suitable for remixing. I took out some recordings for later treatment, making a more coherent grouping. The remainder are arrangements of the original themes, but I hope in the not too distant future to include on the album the original purely acoustic versions of the pieces.

Perhaps inevitably, in using many of the original tracks, there are some technical limitations, which would not now appear. But this suggested that some tracks could have a "retro" feel which is appropriate to their original conception. I have used a similar approach, I believe successfully on, for example. Russell Square (edwardlee.bandcamp.com/album/tr626dx9-pieces-for-nice-day).

I find that the original notes still largely convey what I wish to say about these works, so they are now given below.

This album started out as a set of short guitar pieces, typically lasting a minute or so. Often they had been written as teaching pieces for students. It became clear when I began to record them that they had the potential for greater development; the album is therefore a set of compositions of differing characters.

In common to all is my abiding attraction to all types of fusion. It seems to me that we live in a fortunate time, for musicians, as for people in general, we really do now have access to the whole world, and to all that different individuals and cultures have to offer us. So you will find all sorts of mixture, some of which may seem strange, though I hope exciting.

As I have worked on the album I have become more aware of two elements in my work. One is the attempt to create structures, analogous to, but not necessarily imitative of classical music. The other is an interest in exploring all types of rhythm and its impact.

As I worked on the items, it became clear that I was following a route which has long appealed to me – to create music which tells a story – known in classical circles as “programme music”. For many years such music was considered (and may still be by some) as inferior to “absolute” music, which only concerned itself with more generalised emotion and formal issues. I console myself that I am in good company – Vivaldi’s “Seasons”, Mendelssohn’s “Hebrides Overture, and so on. If only one was as successful at it!

All the pieces were created entirely on guitars and fretted instruments (twelve string guitar, banjo, bouzouki).

Early Frost

This was written in the early 1990s to develop a basic fingerstyle pattern for student John Kader. Having made money in Mrs Thatcher’s financial revolution and lost a lot of it in her financial recession, he decided to develop himself, in this case by learning the guitar. It is an atmospheric piece reflecting the title.

Debbie’s Overtime Blues

Debbie was a nurse in one of the guitar evening classes I taught in the early 90s. They were beginning to learn finger picking. The title was suggested by the fact that Debbie told us one evening that she was fed up because she had been working a lot of overtime. A finger style folk player is joined by various other local guitarists who join in with enthusiasm, each contributing in their own style.

Jeff’s Sunny Day

This was written for another student, Jeff Haynes. Jeff was a guitar student for many years and one Thursday in summer he arrived in an especially buoyant mood, because of the weather. So I wrote a piece for our next lesson, with that name. He also created the photo which is on the Home Page of my website, Elm Village Arts. It is typical of a range of my earlier work in combining modern folk and earlier jazz elements

Philomena

The oldest piece in this collection, it was written in the late 50s when I and a set of friends hoped in our innocence to win over a group of Northern Irish Catholic girls. Again a folk tune influenced line is supported by some very un-folk chords more typical of artists such as Pat Metheny (except that he became famous later !)

Ta Varelia

Ta Varelia (meaning “the barrels” – of wine) was a very small, but very atmospheric restaurant in Camden Town, managed by Sam, who was the most wonderful cook. Sadly, like so many small traders in the area, he moved out when they made him an offer for his place which was too good to miss – or when they raised the rent to new and ridiculous heights. He

went before this piece could be made a reality – but if anyone ever meets him, perhaps they can pass this on.

I had been interested in Greek culture and music for a very long time. Camden Town was for many years known as “Little Athens”, because of the high number of Greek (Cypriot) immigrants who settled there, who enriched our lives and gastronomy. It is also a little tribute to my brother-in-law, Tevkros “Taff” Anthias, who encouraged my elementary bouzouki playing and even more elementary Greek.

Musically, my interest was (and remains) partly the insistent rhythm of some Greek music, and secondly its unusual scales. My usage here does not claim authenticity, but tries to catch the spirit of the Greek modal approach with sometimes surprising and always effective “strange” notes – strange to us, that is.

Maire’s Lazy Day

Maire (pronounced “Moira”) was an Irish nurse in another evening guitar class I taught at Westminster College, London. One time she came in very quietly happy and relaxed. She told us that she had been working a lot of nights but that today had been a day off and “a lazy day”. It was originally aimed at students who had only been playing for a small number of weeks. Here it is developed into a longer piece which would probably be called a “free fantasia” by classical musicians.

Elegy

This piece was also written to illustrate a finger pattern to students. But it was also written (in the early 70s) after the death of my mother. Again it mixes elements of folk and rock into a freely developed structure.

Mountain Girl

Back to the world of energy and light. The original image was of a young woman dancing with the exuberance of youth.

This was another piece written for students, in this case to demonstrate the Open G tuning of the guitar. Like all my pieces, it is another type of fusion, in this case between banjo influences, folk-type lines and a light rock beat. It also reflects my interest in moving between different types of rhythmic concept.

At the end there is just a short indication that the young woman has certainly been enjoying her night out!

Afternoon Train

This is a train piece. It was written in the early 70s catch the mood of the times when Frances and I used regularly to take the train from Cambridge to King’s Cross. We still remember with affection the buffet car, run by a lively gay man, which served excellent tea with toasted teacakes – those were the days !

The piece was created in the modern folk finger style of which guitarists such as Bert Jansch, John Renbourne and Davey Graham were the great exponents. But there are some contemporary dissonances which might not have been to their taste !