



RACHEL YONAN

# KISS ON WOOD

Kwan Yi, Piano

SCHUMANN • PÄRT • MACMILLAN

# KISS ON WOOD

Revolving around the first recording of Sir James MacMillan's *Kiss on Wood* for viola and piano arranged and performed by Rachel Yonan, this album explores the polarity of light and darkness. Minimalist composer Arvo Pärt's beloved *Fratres* and *Spiegel im Spiegel* bookend the program. The concept of light infuses these pieces with their intense clarity and search for transcendent meaning. *Fratres* (Brotherhood) evokes the struggle between good and evil with its contrasting voices. *Spiegel im Spiegel* (Mirror in Mirror) is pure and stable as it sonically imagines the infinite reflection between two mirrors. Pärt's deeply spiritual music links to MacMillan's devotional *Kiss on Wood* which invites the listener into a place of stillness and silence as it reaches for an essence of meaning beyond words. MacMillan sounds out the darkness of loss, yet finds delicate rays of hope to fill the long spaces. Paired with these intense yet static twenty-first century works are Schumann's miniature character pieces *Märchenbilder* (Fairytale Pictures) that use an emotional palette ranging from bright and playful to deeply melancholic. The programmatic title of each work—*Fratres*, *Kiss on Wood*, *Märchenbilder*, *Spiegel im Spiegel*—hints at meaning that cannot be expressed by words alone, but must be illuminated by the music.

Arvo Pärt (b. 1935)

- |    |  |       |
|----|--|-------|
| 1. | <b>Fratres (1977)</b>                        | 10:38 |
|    | <i>Arranged by Lars Anders Tomter (2003)</i> |       |

James MacMillan (b. 1959)

- |    |  |      |
|----|--|------|
| 2. | <b>Kiss on Wood (1993)</b>             | 7:04 |
|    | <i>Arranged by Rachel Yonan (2022)</i> |      |

Robert Schumann (1810-1856)

**Märchenbilder, Opus 113 for viola and piano (1851)**

- |    |  |      |
|----|--|------|
| 3. | <b>Nicht Schnell</b>                         | 3:09 |
| 4. | <b>Rasch</b>                                 | 4:02 |
| 5. | <b>Lebhaft</b>                               | 2:36 |
| 6. | <b>Langsam, mit melancholischem Ausdruck</b> | 4:28 |

Arvo Pärt

- |    |                                  |      |
|----|----------------------------------|------|
| 7. | <b>Spiegel im Spiegel (1978)</b> | 8:51 |
|----|----------------------------------|------|

<b>Total Time:</b>	<b>40:53</b>
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## **Fratres** (Arvo Pärt, 1977)

“Tintinnabulation is an area I sometimes wander into when I am searching for answers – in my life, my music, my work. In my dark hours, I have the certain feeling that everything outside this one thing has no meaning. The complex and many-faceted only confuses me, and I must search for unity. What is it, this one thing, and how do I find my way to it? Traces of this perfect thing appear in many guises – and everything that is unimportant falls away.”  
(Arvo Pärt)

The Estonian composer Arvo Pärt (b. 1935) is widely known for the radical simplicity of his musical language. After writing serialist and avant-garde music in the 1960s, Pärt went silent for nearly a decade during which time he immersed himself in Medieval and Renaissance church music. Pärt describes himself as “in search of a place in my innermost being where—shall we say—a dialogue with God might take place.” He reemerged with a new minimalist style, *tintinnabuli* (inspired by the strike and overtones of ringing bells). This new style strips down the musical elements to essentials, and unites two voices— one that continually arpeggiates a triad and another that moves more freely but diatonically. Pärt’s music is creatively expansive while playing out the self-imposed mathematical formulas of his technique.

This order and logic gives his music a transcendent quality that penetrates life’s chaos and creates a place of repose somewhere between stillness and motion.

If Pärt were searching for a place of dialogue with God when he invented his distinctive *tintinnabuli* style, *Fratres* seems to be this place. Composed in 1977, *Fratres* (literally ‘Brotherhood’ or more broadly, ‘Community’) is a pillar of the style and one of Arvo Pärt’s best known works. He wrote *Fratres* without specific instrumentation, believing that its essence could be achieved without being linked to a particular timbre. In this version for viola and piano, the polarity of voices is clear: the piano is dependable and steady, while the viola wanders, exploring characters with huge emotional range. It is as if Pärt acknowledges the complexities of life, yet suggests that peace and beauty are still possible.

*Fratres* opens with the solo viola playing arpeggiated triads that expand from ethereal gesture into frenetic agitation. Carefully structured as a series of nine rotations each punctuated by a recurring percussive figure, the work unfolds slowly as a dialogue between contrasting voices. The piano motif descends by a major or minor third with each rotation, creating a subtly shifting color while the viola goes from ghostly harmonics to simple melodies to

defiant and gritty chords. Amidst all the change, there is a constant: the drone of a fifth is always present. *Fratres* reaches its dynamic climax in the sixth rotation, and releases over the last part of the piece to a final percussive rattle. The low open fifth on the piano is all that remains.

### **Kiss on Wood** (*Sir James MacMillan, 1993*)

"*Kiss on Wood* is a short, static and serene meditation for violin and piano. Lasting about eight minutes it is an ornamental and highly elongated paraphrase on the Good Friday versicle, Ecce lignum crucis in quo salus mundi pependit: Venite adoremus (Behold the wood of the cross on which the saviour of the world was hung: come let us adore him). This is sung as the crucifix is slowly unveiled and before the people are invited forward to kiss the wood of the cross. The music and title are devotional in intent but can equally represent a gesture of love on the wooden instruments making this music."

-James MacMillan

Sir James MacMillan (born 1959) is a Scottish composer and conductor who is internationally recognized as one of today's leading composers. A prolific writer, his works are inventive and penetrating, whether as large-scale orchestral works or intimate choral pieces. MacMillan's astute awareness of structure enhances rather than overshadows the affective nature of his compositions which are heavily influenced by his Scottish heritage and Roman Catholic faith. This is certainly true of *Kiss on Wood*, a piece based on a liturgical text that is simultaneously a concert piece and a contemplative religious expression.

While originally for violin and piano, *Kiss on Wood* lends itself to the plaintive timbre of the viola. It is raw, yet devotional; full of stillness and waiting. The viola pierces the opening silence with two anguished cries each reenforced by sprawling and sustained chords in the piano. This gives way to a more tender lament that integrates the tradition of Scottish *keening*, a vocal form used as a funeral ritual where women would gather around the deceased to improvise something between a cry and a chant as a final farewell. In *Kiss*, the viola and piano sound out this *keening* both in unison and duet before transitioning to the intensely intimate final section. Here, there is stillness and reverence as the instruments hold on to long, sustained notes. MacMillan asks the listener to inhabit this space with him— and not let go.

**Märchenbilder, Op. 113 for viola and piano** (Robert Schumann, 1851)

Written in Düsseldorf over just three or four days in February 1851, Robert Schumann's *Märchenbilder* (Fairytale Pictures) is a collection of miniature character pieces for viola and piano. It follows a series of fantasy-inspired miniatures for solo instrument and piano written between 1849 and 1851 that could be performed in intimate salon concerts with his wife Clara at the piano. While the title *Märchenbilder* evokes an imaginary world of fairytales, Schumann gives no other clues about the content of these highly contrasting, self-contained vignettes.

Like tiny musical gems, each of the four short movements expresses its own distinctive character. *Nicht Schnell* (Not Fast) is wistful with a delicate interplay between the instruments. Its reflective character contrasts with the buoyancy of the second movement *Lebhaft* (Lively) which rushes along at a galloping pace with an insistent dotted rhythm. The chase is interrupted by two short interludes, the first is frolicking and the second, cheeky and playful. It would be easy to imagine children romping through meadows. The third movement *Rasch* (Hastily) changes character again, this time to a brooding quality. Split into three sections, the first and last require virtuosic playing in both viola and piano as

they play an ominous flurry of triplets over punctuated chords. The middle section is surprisingly delicate, and offers a charming respite before the movement races to a finish. The final movement is marked *Langsam, mit melancholischem Ausdruck* (Slowly, with melancholy expression). With a low resonant tone, the viola and piano move in parallel throughout as if singing together and longing for what is past.







## Spiegel im Spiegel (Arvo Pärt, 1978)

"This one note, or a moment of silence, comforts me. I work with very few elements - with one voice, with two voices. I build with the most primitive materials - with the triad, with one specific tonality. The three notes of a triad are like bells. And that is why I call it tintinnabulation." (Arvo Pärt)

*Spiegel im Spiegel* (Mirror in Mirror) was composed by Arvo Pärt in his distinctive *tintinnabuli* style just prior to leaving Estonia in 1978. As its title suggests, *Spiegel* sounds out the idea of an image being infinitely reflected between two mirrors. The piano continually plays triads punctuated by crystalline 'bells' alternating between high and low registers. Seemingly timeless yet moving in time, the melody is built on a series of ascending and descending step-wise notes that mirror each other in length. These melodic lines expand by one tone with each iteration but always return 'home' (to an A pitch). In *Spiegel*, there is a constancy of motion created by the piano rhythm and predictability of the melodic line that generates a restful and contemplative space.

Pärt has likened his music to white light, saying that it is in an encounter with the prism of the listener's soul that all colors become visible. In this way, *Spiegel* is the white light. Although almost ascetic in structure, it is luminous and penetrates the complexity of life with pure resonance.



Recognized for her expressive playing and elegant style, violist **Rachel Yonan** enjoys a rich and varied career as recitalist, artistic director, commentator and champion of chamber music. She has appeared as a soloist and chamber musician in concert halls across the United States, England, Switzerland, Italy, Austria and China; and on National Public Radio and Canadian Public Radio.

A lover of chamber music, Rachel co-founded the Marinus Ensemble with her brother, cellist Joseph Kuipers. Praised by the *Philadelphia Inquirer* as “perfectly balanced”, Marinus is a passionate group of artists, dedicated to engaging audiences through interactive performance of great music. They have performed for such series as the Philadelphia Chamber Music Society, Curtis Presents, and WRTI *Performance Studio*. Integrating her interest in music and philosophy, Rachel is a Visiting Scholar at Jesus College, University of Cambridge where her scholarship focuses on the role of music in personal formation and flourishing. She received funding for this project through Duke University as the inaugural *McDonald Agape Fellow in Theology and Music*. Beyond her own innovative work with Marinus, Rachel has been invited to perform at prestigious festivals such as the Marlboro Music Festival, Open Chamber Music Prussia Cove, Festival Mozaic and Taos Music Festival. Ms. Yonan has collaborated with Itzhak Perlman, Roberto Díaz, Joseph Silverstein, James Dunham and Robert Levin; joined

the Dover and Escher Quartets for chamber concerts; and worked extensively with Pamela Frank, Peter Wiley and Edgar Meyer.

While Ms. Yonan has had the honor of performing around the world in major concert venues such as Carnegie Hall, Verizon Hall and King’s College Chapel Cambridge, she is equally at home engaging audiences in more intimate venues through her work with Marinus. She successfully launched a new series—Marinus in the Vineyard—that offers immersive and inviting concert experiences in scenic Virginia wineries. Rachel is Artistic Director of Marinus, and has taught viola performance and chamber music at Duke University. She is a graduate of the Curtis Institute of Music and Rice University. Rachel plays a Gabrielle Kundert viola modeled on a Camillo Camilli viola from 1739.






Pianist **Kwan Yi** has performed throughout the United States, Europe, and Asia in such venues as Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, Kimmel Center, Kennedy Center, Chicago Symphony Center, Mann Performing Arts Center, Wolf Trap National Park for the Performing Arts, Library of Congress, Metropolitan and Isabella Stewart Gardner Museums, Großer Sendesaal des Hessischen Rundfunks, Auditorium du Louvre, Teatro Gayarre, Suntory Hall, and Seoul Arts Center.

Yi has appeared as a soloist with the Russian National Orchestra, Houston Symphony Orchestra, Brevard Festival Orchestra and the North Carolina Symphony under the batons of Hans Graf, Julian Kuerti, and Mikhail Tartanikov. As a recitalist and masterclass instructor, he has completed residencies at University of Cincinnati College Conservatory of Music, Bowling Green State University, University of Georgia, Michigan State University, and University of South Carolina. As a chamber musician, he has collaborated with Itzhak Perlman, Miriam Fried, and Roberto Diaz on national tours and was invited to perform at the Kronberg, Ravinia, Trondheim, and the Mecklenburg- Vorpommern festivals and Carnegie Hall Presents, Curtis Presents, CIM Mixon Hall Masters, and Peoples' Symphony Concert series. He has recorded for FHR and Hänssler labels with violinist Itamar Zorman.

A recipient of many honors and prizes, Yi's awards include Mieczyslaw Munz Prize, National Federation of Music Clubs Award, and prizes in the Fourth Sendai International Piano Competition. Yi is a graduate of the Curtis Institute, Juilliard School and the Peabody Institute where he worked with Leon Fleisher and Robert McDonald. He currently serves as associate professor of piano at the East Carolina University School of Music.





I am deeply grateful to the late H.F. Gerry Lenfest and his wife Marguerite; and to Peter Benoliel and Willo Carey for their belief in my musical vision and supporting this recording. Thanks also to my friend of over twenty years, Kwan Yi, for joining me on this project. To Daniel Shores, Ulrike Schwarz and the whole Sono Luminus team, thank you for bringing this album to life. Particular thanks to the Marinus Ensemble, Joseph Kuipers and Erin Nolan; and to Jonathan and my children for inspiration, and the gift of time to realize this dream.

**Producer & Editing Engineer:** Ulrike Schwarz  
**Recording, Mixing, & Mastering Engineer:** Daniel Shores  
**Photography:** Jan Harrison and Jim Anderson  
**Liner Notes:** Rachel Yonan  
**Graphic Design:** Joshua Frey  
**Executive Producer:** Collin J. Rae  
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