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Serenade vol.2

Tommy Reilly, Harmonica • Skaila Kanga, Harp

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DDD ADD* TT = 60:22

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Serenade vol.2

TOMMY REILLY & SKAILA KANGA

arrangements for Harmonica & Harp



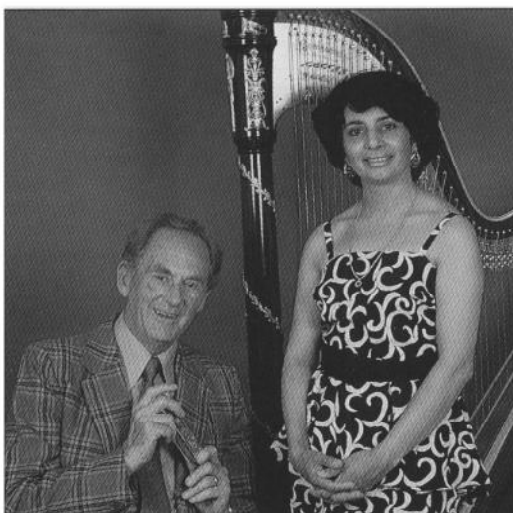


Photo: David Usill

Tommy Reilly & Skaila Kanga

There are no musical boundaries for Tommy Reilly, not forgetting his harpist Skaila Kanga, when it comes to his choice of another fine selection of melodies for his sixth compact disc for Chandos records. Whatever medium they were conceived for, each melody on this recording appears, as it were, like an old friend whom it's a joy to welcome into the household. And how did these familiar favourites become part of the fabric of our lives? Well the reply is quite simple: through virtually every medium of entertainment known to mankind. Artists have always needed new music to keep their repertoire from growing stale, and the composers have been happy to respond in kind.

Although no one knows, for instance for whom J.S. Bach composed his Partitas for solo violin, from which we hear a gavotte and rondo, it is recorded that there were a number of German violinists well known for their advanced playing technique, who could cope with the composers' exceptional demands of double-stopping (playing two, three or four notes at the same time). Nearer our own time, Manuel Ponce's *Estrellita* was given a lyric, "Star of love", and became a popular song in the repertoire of Deanna Durbin. Likewise the *Cavatina* by Stanley Myers, which attracted the attention of Cleo Laine, who penned the words, "He is beautiful". In the same year, 1971, Johnny Pearson's *Sleepy shores* became widely popular in a television series, *Owen M.D.*, whilst Erik Satie's limpid *Gymnopédie* and Villa-Lobos's *Aria*, in reality a song without words, are two comparatively recent additions to the lists of classical favourites.

Many pianists will have tackled Debussy's *Girl with the flaxen hair*, or set an audiences' feet a-tapping to the *Spanish dance* of Moszkowski, and there's little reason to doubt that Skaila Kanga's own contributions to this compact disc will find their way into the repertoire of harpists.

However it's undoubtedly the theatre that has played the pivotal role in entertaining us through the centuries with opera and ballet coming into their own from around 1600 onwards. From this vast cornucopia of work comes the ballet music from "Faust" by Gounod, a work that was heard in every season at Covent Garden from its' premiere in 1863 till the outbreak of the First World War, a fact that caused Bernard Shaw to declare he'd had enough of it, (as a music critic he'd sat through it ninety times in ten to fifteen years); then there's the soothing *Meditation* from "Thais" and *Gavotte* from "Mignon", two operas that have fallen much further from favour than even poor old Faust! Gounod, by the way, was responsible for adding the tune of *Ave maria* to Bach's little keyboard prelude. Leo Delibes's ballet, "Sylvia", often acknowledged as one of the masterpieces of the medium provides us with a sweetmeat, the *pizzicato*.

For several decades **Tommy Reilly** has been successfully convincing composers and conductors, as well as other musicians, critics and concertgoers, that the harmonica belongs on the concert stage. Resident in Britain for many years, Tommy Reilly was born in Guelph, Ontario, Canada, and began studying the violin at the age of eight. A few years later he took up the harmonica and became fascinated by its latent musical potential, at that time unexplored. While studying violin at the Leipzig Conservatory in 1939 he was arrested by the Gestapo. The five and a half years he spent as a prisoner-of-war in Germany gave him time to develop a classical harmonica technique, basing his ideas of phrasing and interpretation on the playing of his violinist ideal, Jascha Heifetz. It was this pioneer work and his early violin training which became the foundation of his career after the war when, in the words of Gordon Jacob, he "made the harmonica into a solo instrument of high artistic worth". Or, as Richard Morrison wrote in "The Times" after the world premiere of Paul Patterson's Harmonica Concerto by Tommy Reilly and the Academy of St. Martin-in-the-Fields at the Wigmore Hall in April 1987:

For five years, locked in a German prison-camp, Tommy Reilly set about discovering the harmonica as no one had discovered it before. For 40 years since, his determination to establish the "highbrow" credentials of his solid-silver instrument has been matched by his skill at coaxing lyrical, musicianly sounds from this most intractable and improbable of sources. By commissioning judiciously over the years he has given the harmonica a repertoire of pedigree.

He was the dedicatee of the first important full-scale Harmonica Concerto (by Michael Spivakovsky, first performance at the Festival of Britain, 1951) and in 1967 he designed the first concert harmonica of all time. The precision-made instrument was built to his specifications out of solid silver. In 1977 his LP of four original works with the Academy of St. Martin-in-the-Fields was warmly applauded by the critics. These are some of the milestones not only in Tommy Reilly's career, but also in the history of the harmonica as a legitimate musical instrument.

Tommy Reilly's tours have taken him to all corners of the globe and his musicianship has inspired a number of composers: his repertoire includes over forty major original works of such diverse composers as Gordon Jacob, James Moody, Villa-Lobos, Vaughan Williams, and Malcolm Arnold. He has played for countless films and TV-series, and has also collaborated closely with such personalities as Bing Crosby and Barbra Streisand. He performs continually with some of the world's finest orchestras – including a season with the Royal Philharmonic and the Bavarian Radio Symphony.

"**Skaila Kanga** was magical." So said the Daily Telegraph after a performance of Ravel's 'Introduction and Allegro' for harp and chamber ensemble at London's Queen Elizabeth Hall.

Skaila was born in Bombay, India, and came to England at the age of four. She won a Junior Exhibition to the Royal Academy and studied the piano under Vivan Langrish before turning to the harp when, aged seventeen, she was given the opportunity to study with Tina Bonifacio, Sir Thomas Beecham's harpist in the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra.

Three years later she joined the BBC Concert Orchestra, and went on to freelance with major British orchestras, at the same time developing her solo career with concerto work and accompanying many choirs, notably the Orpington Junior Singers.

Skaila Kanga's commercial work, in films, broadcasts, television and records, is extensive and she is considered the leading British harpist in this field. She has played for artists such as Sinatra, Barbra Streisand, Elton John, Andy Williams, Domingo and Pavarotti, and composers including Bernstein, Mancini and John Williams.

Skaila Kanga also plays regularly with the Nash Ensemble: performances with this group, at the 'Proms', at major festivals, on BBC radio and during European tours have gained widespread critical acclaim.

In 1977 she and Tommy Reilly formed a duo: a unique and highly successful combination of harmonica and harp.

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CHAN 8802 CD · LBT 026 Cassette

- Recording Producers: Dick Lewzy (tracks 1-4, 14-16 & 22), Dick Lewzy & Skaila Kanga (tracks 5-13, 17-21)
- Sound Engineer: Dick Lewzy
- Recorded in CTS (The Music Centre) London, April 1980 (tracks 1-4, 14-16 & 22), August 1989 (tracks 5-13, 17-21)
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- Sleeve design: Mark Thirsk
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