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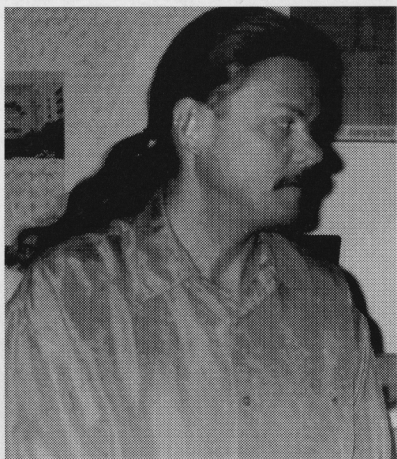
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Personal Touch

BEN KETTLEWELL

[A 30 year obsession with music — his way]



Forty-five year old composer, Ben Kettlewell has been involved with almost every aspect of music at one time or another over 30 years. He was touring professionally at the age of 20. He's most famous for his radio series for public radio, "Imaginary Voyage".

these to teach myself as well as playing along with records and picking up licks from various albums. I started out in 1966 as a folk musician playing in coffee houses in Baltimore and the Washington DC area. At that time I played acoustic 6 and 12 string guitars, banjo then focusing on slide guitar and the "Delta Blues" style of playing. I played mainly eclectic instrumental work similar to that of Dick Rosmini, John Fahey and Robbie Basho. In 1967 I started accompanying various folk artists from Electra and Vanguard when they were on the road. I performed with several well-known folk artists including; Patrick Sky, John Koerner, Willy Murphy, Tim Hardin and the notorious Holy Modal Rounders.

I: Moving ahead a few years: you were around to see the birth of what most people call the E-music scene. How did you become part of that?

Ben: I heard Bernie Krause performing on Moog modular equipment on a Warner Brother's sampler and was immediately hooked on E-music. Later, the following year, W. Carlos released the landmark *Switched-On Bach* which I still love now 25 years later. A couple of years after that I discovered the album *Electronic Meditation* which got me into the early

Interviewer: When did you first begin to become involved in music?

Ben Kettlewell: My actual interest in playing began when I was very young. I would go to church with my grandfather on Sundays and fool around on the piano after service.

By J. Engstrom

I really loved that piano, but I only had a chance to play on it once a week. When I got older, it seems like every piano I encountered after then was locked, so I didn't get a chance to play. So I started playing guitar in junior high school.

I: You are an electronic musician now, but your early musical career was centered around a folk background. How did that come about?

Ben: In the early sixties when I first started playing guitar, the only instruction books I could find were collections of folk songs, little notation books by Pete Segar and *Sing Out* magazine, a folk periodical. I used

German synth scene. Although my interest in E- music was intensifying, it wasn't until the mid-seventies when I actually thought of composing E-music myself.

I: What events brought this about?

Ben: In 1976, I went to see Jeff Beck when he was doing the *Wired* tour with Jan Hammer and Jerry Goodman. Jan did an hour and twenty minute solo set before the band started. He covered all the songs from his first two solo LPs, *The First Seven Days* and *Oh Yeah*. It was phenomenal! I was extremely inspired. So as soon as I could, I immediately went out and got my first synth. It was a 'guitar synth' made by Korg. It was called "X-911" and was very primitive. It had twelve presets and a crude analog to digital converter. You just plugged your 1/4" guitar cable into it and it was supposed to play one of the 12 tones along with your guitar's original sound. The bass and strings worked OK, but overall it was pretty ineffective.

I: How did you start your career as an electronic musician?

Ben: It just evolved from working with the guitar synth in various bands I played in. I was playing lead guitar in fusion bands doing covers of Weather Report, Return to Forever, Mahavaishnu Orchestra, etc. This was a sort of a fringe side of E-music instead. By 1980 I was getting frustrated with the band scene. Eventually got my first synth, a Korg Poly 6 and in '82 started composing my own E-music. I got a computer and in '84, I started utilizing the fledgling MIDI technology in my music. I started getting commissions from theater companies and other projects.

I: How did you get into radio?

In early 1982, an FM station opened up here and I knew several of the people involved. They urged me to do an EM show, since most people in the early eighties were still unaware of this scene. So, on March 10th, 1982, *Imaginary Voyage* went on the air. The show immediately became very popular, since the majority of the listeners had never heard of Tangerine Dream or Klaus Schulze.

Since it is a public radio station, we were looking for ways to raise funds to stay on the air. In 1985, the board of directors asked me about doing an E-music concert. I said yes, so we started arranging it. The radio station approached this owner of a local movie theater so we could use it as a concert hall. He agreed, and we went for it. I was supposed to play with Dave Prescott, but he got pneumonia so I ended up playing solo. The concert was very well-received. I almost got Steve Roach to play. He came to do an interview on my radio show after his '87 East Coast tour. However he did not have any gear with him and he was on a tight schedule, so he could not participate.

I: Let's get back to the fact that you have interviewed more than your share of great E-musicians. How did you get into contacting these artists?

Ben: I wrote for the now-defunct *SYNE* magazine back in the early to mid-eighties and got a lot of contacts that way. Also, in the summer of '84 I heard about Richard Ginsburg's show called *Synthetic Pleasure*. He also had a periodical magazine with reviews and interviews. I made many musical contacts through reading his magazine. In '87, the database of contacts I had built up came in handy. I had applied for and was awarded a grant by the Massachusetts Council on the Arts and Humanities to produce a radio series on the evolution of E-music. I called up Robert Moog, Michael Stearns, Susanne Ciani and many others too numerous to mention. To my amazement, they were all willing and eager to help me out. They discussed the first generation of commercially available synthesizers. They explained similarities and differences in various instrument designs as well as how the science of synthesis was evolving. The finished product consisted of two one-hour shows which originally aired in Provincetown and Boston in '87. Later, NPR eventually aired these shows on 33 affiliate stations in the US and Canada.

I: How did the Klaus Schulze interview in Electronic Musician materialize?

Personal Touch

Ben: I had wanted to interview Klaus for a long time and had written several letters to him which went unanswered. I then wrote to Ranier Bloss who sent me a ton of IC albums and suggested that I contact Klaus D. Mueller, K.S.'s manager. I contacted Mr. Mueller and within three weeks the interview was arranged and completed. Mr. Mueller and I have maintained a close relationship since then.

I: Steve Roach has a lot of praise about you. How did you achieve that?

Ben: I have a great deal of respect for Steve Roach and his music. He is the only

artist on Fortuna who stayed in touch with me on a regular basis. I've always thought he and his music were special and he knew it. When the station had fund drives, Steve would send lots of promos to give away to donors. After he played in Philadelphia in August '87, he came to visit and be a guest on my show. We really hit it off and got along very well so we've kept in touch ever since. He's given me a lot of valuable advice not only with my music, but also writing contacts including *Dreams Word* and *i/e* magazines.

I: How did you get into writing reviews?

Ben: Ten years ago, I never dreamed I'd be writing reviews for international publications. When I started doing my radio show

Ben Kettlewell — Then and Now

Forty-five year old composer, Ben Kettlewell has been involved with almost every aspect of music at one time or another for over 30 years. He began playing guitar at age 14. He was playing professionally at the age of 20 touring as 2nd guitarist/lead with folk singer Tim Hardin. This venture led to touring performances with such folk illuminaries as Pat Sky, Spider John Koerner, and the Holy Modal Rounders in the late 60's. He has also worked as lead guitarist in numerous blues and jazz bands since the early seventies.

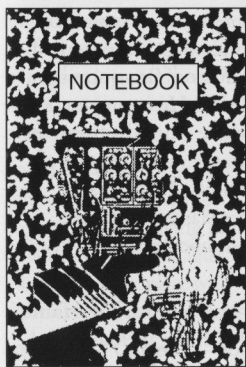
In March, 1982, Ben became involved in public radio and community theatre. He hosted a series for public radio called *Imaginary Voyage*, one of the first electronic music shows in the US. At one point from March, 1988 - November, 1991, this show was also aired on 4 NPR affiliates in New England. In 1987 he was awarded a grant from the Massachusetts Council for the Arts & Humanities to produce a series of one hour radio documentaries on the evolution of electronic instruments and computers in music. The series featured interviews with Bob Moog, Suzanne Ciani, Michael Steams, Harold Bode, Bill Rhodes, and Neil Nappe. It was uplinked and broadcast on public radio in 26 cities in the US and Canada during 1987 and 1988.

He also has done 8 commissioned scores for various theatre companies, culminating in winning the Academy for Community Theatre Excellence (ACTE) award for best music for a non-musical production in 1991 for the original score to Michael Prevlusky's original drama, *Phantasmagoriana*. Also in 1991 he collaborated on the soundtrack to director/producer Jonathan Morell's underground film *Johnny In Monsterland*, and the 1992 sequel, *The Bride of Johnny In Monsterland*.

His recordings have been released on Generations Unlimited in the US, and the UK label Electronical Dreams as well as his own Tarheel Productions. He has also been distributed by Poison Plant Records in Rockville, MD for the past 5 years. His work has also been featured on three samplers, a 1991 LP from Poison Plant Records called *Charmed, Flickerscapes Vol #1*, on ED in England, and *Electronic Cottage Magazine's* first sampler. Also, in the past two years, Ben has produced music for three New England cable television documentaries.

He has been a music journalist for 11 years contributing to such publications as *Airwaves*, *Electronic Musician*, *Syne*, *Music of the Spheres*, *HeartSong Review*, *Sound on Sound*, *Dulcimer Times*, *Dreamsword*, and *i/e*. Among his favorite assignments from these ventures are three very memorable interviews with Steve Roach, Bernd Kistenmacher, and Klaus Schulze. He also wrote liner notes for John Boswell's second release on Scarlet Records, *Kindred Spirits*. He is currently a staff reviewer for *i/e* and *Dreamsword Magazine* as well as freelancing for other music publications.

To augment his solo career as a composer, he is working on original material with a jazz trio called Little Big Toes featuring fusion guitar icon Isaac Jammarr, and NY City woodwind/brass virtuoso, Elia Sinaiko. When he's not playing or writing about music, he's promoting other people's releases at his gallery on Cape Cod. Obsessed with music... naah, no way!



Ben Kettlewell's most recent release, "Notebook" is available from CMC, item number KETTLEWELL100C. A complete description appears on the following page.

they wanted to have a monthly newspaper/program guide to inform listeners of what was happening at the station. After a couple of months of finding it hard to fill eight pages of magazine, I was asked to review 3 or 4 of the albums I played on my show for each issue. People seemed to like the reviews so about a year later I started writing for *SYNE* magazine. During that time I also had published interviews in *Sound on Sound*, *SYNE*, *Electronic Musician* and *Airwaves*. In '88 I was approached to write for a magazine called *Music of the Spheres*. Due to lack of funding, the first issue never appeared. However the ...*Spheres* editor told the editor of *Heartsong Review* to contact me. I reluctantly wrote for *Heartsong* for four years. It's basically a crystal-rubbing, spirit-channelling New Age magazine which I felt somewhat embarrassed about contributing towards. In '92, I told Steve Roach about how I felt. He was not too happy about some of the reviewers at *Dreams Word* at the time. So he told Elana Mell Beach (the editor of *Dreams Word*) to call me. She did, and I soon quit *Heartsong* and joined the *Dreams Word* volunteer staff. Later I talked to Darren at *i/e* magazine and started writing for him as well. I must say at this point that I'm very proud to be a part of these two incredible publications.

I: Let's talk about your albums. What was your first album and how did they progress?

Ben: Actually, there's quite a few that I produced myself in the Poison Plant catalog. Poison Plant is a record, cassette and CD label based in Rockville Maryland. They specialize in good electronic and industrial music. The first release on another label was the 1987 release *Kanji*. This was on Clive Littlewood's Electronical Dreams label in the UK. (Clive's project has no relation to Electronic Dreams, the organization which produces *Dreams Word* here in the USA. -ed.) He also recently re-released *Rites of Passage* which I previously distributed through Poison Plant here in the States. It's basically a compilation of music which I did for two theater companies.

I: Describe the theatrical music you've produced.

Ben: I've been involved with writing and performing original film scores for various theater companies for the past 15 years. I've always loved live theater and scoring a play gives me a great deal of satisfaction. Out of all the arts, it's the most magical because it incorporates every aspect of literature, visual, aural and performing art. I've scored nine plays, culminating in receiving the Academy of Community Theatre Excellence Award in 1991 for my score and performance in *Phantasmagoria*. It's a wonderful play by a well-known playwright, Michael Prevulsky. The AIDS disease took this brilliant man's life last year and I dedicated the re-release of *Rites of Passage* in his memory.

Getting back to releases of albums, I also did an LP with David Prescott titled *From Chance to Probability* on the Generations Unlimited label. I was also featured on Poison Plant's LP Sampler *Charmed*. I'm also on the first *Electro-Genesis Sampler*, two of the Electronical Dreams samplers from the UK and a collection titled *Flickerscapes* produced by the British magazine, *Flickers and Frames*. My latest release, *Notebook* was produced and released on my own label, Tarheel Productions and is available through the CMC as well as select retail outlets.

Personal Touch

I: What do you predict for the future of E-music?

Ben: I think there has never been a better time to be involved with this scene. I think the indie scene will continue to grow. Due to the big leaps in sound technology, recording quality nowadays is equal to that of the big-time producers. Also there are more and more publications like *Dreams Word, ile* and *Aftertouch* that are reaching new audiences everyday. Add to this fact that there are at least 400 more stations with programs featuring electronic and world music than there were 5 years ago and you've got a lot more awareness of the scene. Also, electronic music itself keeps transforming and going into new directions. The influence of ethnic music from around the world has played a major role in this exciting new development. Steve Roach, Forrest Fang, Robert Rich, and groups like Ancient Future have fused ancient traditions with modern technology to produce a wonderful hybrid music. E-music, unlike other music is constantly evolving and changing and so are the tools involved in producing it. Now is a VERY positive time to be involved!

I: Thank you for this interview!

J. Engstrom is an assistant to the coordinator of Electronic Dreams, USA.

NOTEBOOK

Notebook is a blend of a diverse group of musical influences. Some pieces emphasis the pastoral, with sampled orchestral instruments blended with synth textures, while others are distinctly electronic. To enhance the imagery Ben was aided by Dave Prescott's magnificent didjenidu playing on several cuts. This collection was written and recorded over a three year period. It is comprised of a combination of pieces written for live theatre, television, performance, and solo studio compositions: Collectively, it aims at a more

retrospective and contemplative expression than his previous works such as *Spheres* and the recent re-release, *Rites of Passage* on the Electronical Dreams label. He creates an hour long musical story where ethnic instruments occasionally drift into the mix, hovering at the threshold of audibility. It affects the listeners emotions in a classical narrative fashion, but invokes a mood of receptivity and introspection.

More Bad News — A percussive rhythmic piece with deep analog string melodies, and driving synth stabs augmented by a bed of gated percussion.

Green Aunts — Didjeridu and special effects begin this mixture of symphonic counterpoint and Berlin School electronics. It increases in intensity and slowly builds to full orchestration. It's an excerpt from the score to Edward Albee's "Seascape" commissioned for the Provincetown Theatre Co.

Subterraneans — Harpsichord and breathy flute samples carry the melody over a neo-baroque background. It was originally used in the score for "Phantasmagoriana" for the Harwich Theatre Company.

Halifax — The lonely sound of Loons leads into sequenced choirs with a flute-like melody. A brass ensembles gradually fades in with a "sci-fi" movie score ambience.

True Hallucinations — This piece begins with lots of tangled percussion, high pitched mandolin samples, and a consistent theme running throughout in an energetic high spirited piece.

Departure — Sparse piano textures and synth horns dart in and out of walls of didjeridu and underwater samples over a bed to swirling electronics. Wavestation saxaphones add to the texture by filtering in and out with off key bebop solo's.

Dreamtime in 5/8 — This is a somber atmospheric piece. It could also be described as a dramatic unpredictable collection of timbres and melodies.

Over the Mesa, The Last Roundup — This is a piece with layered breathy flute and string samples creating the leads. This

augments and builds on a flowing electric piano ballad with grand piano verses and string sections on the bridge. It ends with some very surprising samples of a herd of cattle stampeding.

Fools & Amber Locusts — Classically influenced piece with orchestral percussion augmented by driving sequences and Fairlight breathy sampled lead lines. It gradually evolves into a percussive piece with lots of giant taiko drums bathed in walls of rich reverb.

Loves First Caress — Sounds like an early morning canoe ride with the sun gradually rising on the eastern horizon. It's a symphonic piece with classical guitar, and Isham-like string sections gradually building to marathon proportions.

Tale of Five Rings/Fire in the Fields — Wavesequences begin this gurgling synth ballad. It would fit in nice with a Tolkien story. It builds with fast analog arpeggios and effects into a climatic segue to the next song.

Masada, Lifting the Veil — A slow ballad with nylon string guitar and vox performing a waltz while a thunder storm rages far in the distance.

Industry Retreats — This begins with South African Choirs echoing into a metallic steady

pulse with a suspenseful slowly building musical landscape. Lots of hand drums and didjeridu add to the other-worldly atmosphere.

Coming Home — This is an up tempo piece with staccato piano stabs countering minimal arpeggiated synth lines and woodwinds. Lots of percussion and occasional pan pipes adds a world music feel to the song.

1948 — This is the grand finale. It's a positive rhythmic piece that builds more intensity during each refrain. It ends in a dreamlike fusion of didjeridu, sound effects, and synth drones.

"My friends, if it's electronic music you like, sorry I mean love, *Notebook* is one album you must add to your collection. The style mix is superb. Ben is an absolute master. I've added it in my notebook of most favorites." — Ron

Instrumentation: Korg Wavestation EX, 03/RW, M3R, Poly Six; Emu Proteus 1 & 3, E-MAX HDSE, Vintage Keys; Roland Jupiter 8, D-110; Oberheim Expander; Yamaha TG 33; Kurzweil 250; acoustic and MIDI guitars, percussion, carpet rollers, and featuring David Prescott on Australian didjeridu.

Type: Instr/Electronic

Opinion: Professional **Snd:** A **Pkg:** A-
Notebook Kettlewell ©1991/1993
KETTLEWELL100C tape \$10.00



Wings 2002

"The myth of Daedalus and his high flying son Icarus are lovingly captured on this sonic voyage. Even in 'scenes' where the two do not fly the music catches the sunlight in the high mist, lifting you away on holy pilgrimages and angelic breezes. — *NAPRA Trade Journal*

"Melodic and elegant, this thematic album of electronic music is a transporting treat for the weary listener wanting to be wafted on musical wings. ...A sure bet for putting you to sleep, peace at the end of a hectic day or deepening the mood of a peaceful one." — *HeartSong Review*

"Basing their music on the ancient Greek legend of Icarus, the boy who flew too close to the sun, their music truly does soar. Uplifting and beautiful, the music retells the legend with stunning audio portraits of Crete, The Tower of Minos, and the jubilant first flight of Icarus and his father. ...Great for relaxation, bodywork, and for sitting outside and watching the birds ride the gentle winds of summer. Don't miss it!" — *Spirit of Change Magazine*

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