



Fermi's Paradox

Carolyn Surrick & Ronn McFarlane





The Recording

When I called Ronn McFarlane in January to ask if he wanted to play a house concert in April, he checked his calendar and said, “Sure, sounds great!” Members of Ensemble Galilei (the other people playing in the concert) are spread across the country, and we don’t usually get together until right before a performance. But Ronn and I live about twenty miles away from each other, so we started rehearsing.

It was a comfy fit. As musicians, we have early music in our backgrounds, but we both cross over into traditional music and write new compositions too. As journeyman players, we’ve spent plenty of time touring and recording. As people, we have homes, families, and most importantly, we remember the first time we heard *John Barleycorn Must Die* by Traffic, coming from a turntable and stereo speakers.

February turned to March in this year of COVID-19. There would be no house concerts. But we kept meeting on Saturday mornings.

The dogs, who barked at first, soon came to see Ronn as a member of our extended family. Thumper always made a point of enthusiastically welcoming him as he walked through the door. We drank tea, waited for the sticky-biscuits to cool, ate a snack, tuned up, and dug in.

It was a few weeks into March when I turned to him and said, “Hey, let’s make a recording in June.” It was a crazy idea. We didn’t have much shared repertoire, at least that hadn’t already been recorded by The Baltimore Consort, Ensemble Galilei, Ayreheart, or Trio Galilei. That meant a huge investment of time and energy.

I did not receive a resounding affirmative response. But days passed and the reality of the pandemic settled in. Nothing else was going to be happening this spring. No concerts. No tours. Cancellation after cancellation, with no end in sight.

“Yes,” he said, “let’s do this.”

I called Lindsey Nelson, Ensemble Galilei’s wonderful executive producer, and Collin Rae, the master of strategic marketing at Sono Luminus. They were all in. I texted our producer, Dan Merceruio. Totally on board. We added rehearsals. Wrote harmony parts. Wrote new music. Arranged our favorite tunes for lute and viola da gamba. Set to work every day, practicing, dreaming, thinking, and planning.

All in the shadow of the pandemic.

Would we have done this a year ago? Not a chance. We were too busy. Would we have made a recording with viola da gamba and lute (and just one additional instrument)? Unlikely. We would have reached out to our friends and added a fiddle here, recorder there, even a song or two. But we didn’t. We couldn’t.

The recording exists because of this moment in time. The locked down, minimalist, intense, and miraculous spring of 2020, which took so much from so many, allowed for this project to come to life with its unexpected creativity, enduring faith, and deep, deep, gratitude.



The Music

We had all the time in the world. We had three months. Our Saturday rehearsals turned into Saturdays and Sundays. Week after week we scoured our memories, stacks of books, piles of sheet music, and beloved recordings for pieces we might include on this CD.

Ronn brought tunes that have been part of his life since he was a young man – music he loves and had arranged for the lute. He arranged them again for the lute and viola da gamba. He asked, “Do you know *Little Martha*? It was originally recorded by the Allman Brothers.” I did not. *Blackwater Side* is a traditional Irish tune arranged by Bert Jansch. *John Barleycorn* fit perfectly with *She Moved Through the Fair*, an Irish tune I had never heard. It was a new song to be sung by my instrument. We both love Turlough O’Carolan and neither of us had ever recorded *Planxty O’Rourke*, *Second Air* with its mysterious blend of Irish and Italian sensibilities (tunefulness and raw emotion) so that made the short list. *The Rose of Raby* had been on my mind for years. This was the time and place.

It seemed ridiculous to even consider a recording for lute and gamba without something by John Dowland. It turned out just one of his compositions was for the two instruments – so we recorded it. If there’s Dowland, then there must be Marin Marais, one of the greatest composers for the viol who ever lived. If the gamba is going to sing a traditional Irish tune, why not a recitative and aria by Telemann? If she’s going to sing something by Telemann, why not an *Ave Maria*, written by Gounod and based on thematic material belonging to Bach?

If we loved it, the answer was, “Yes.”

As the pandemic increased in its fierce destruction, I sat alone, practicing. Some of us play from memory, some with the music in front of us. One night I began *Amazing Grace*. I had always played it in G major – there are lots of double stops easily available (playing more than one string at a time) and the instrument is super resonant in that key, but this time I tried C major. There was a kind of openness and freedom that had been hidden from me. I’ve played that piece for decades, but I had never heard it like that before. I sent a recording to Lindsey. I called Ronn. We had to include it.

I worked on the Bach harmonization of *O Sacred Head* using all the resources of the instrument – and then we added the lute. We paired another hymn, *Come Thou Fount* with the Swedish tune *Sjungar-Lars Visa* and fell in love with the two together.

Ronn and I both compose, usually inspired by people or places. His *Trinity Grove* and *Daniel’s Chaconne* are both tributes to dear friends. For me, *The Last Day* speaks of the weight of deep losses. And then, there’s *Fermi’s Paradox*. I love this story.

The brilliant Italian physicist Enrico Fermi was walking with friends at work one morning and said something like this, “It is mathematically impossible to imagine that there is not intelligent life out there in the universe.” When they were sitting in the cafeteria later that day, out of the blue, he said, “So, where are they?” All of his friends knew exactly what he was talking about.



Why us, why now? As concert after concert is cancelled, as rehearsals become unnecessary, as the future of live music performance remains uncertain, we have to wonder, "Is there anyone out there?" Without a reason to play, without audiences, without other musicians, why should we practice? The answer has to be: we play because we can. We make music because the world needs music, our hearts need music. This is what we do in the face of isolation and despair.

We are not alone.

Carolyn Surrick
July 7, 2020

Ronn McFarlane

Since taking up the lute in 1978, Ronn McFarlane has made his mark as a soloist, the founder of Ayreheart, and a founding member of the Baltimore Consort, touring 49 of the 50 United States, Canada, England, Scotland, Netherlands, Germany, and Austria. He has also performed as a guest artist with Apollo's Fire, The Bach Sinfonia, The Catacoustic Consort, The Folger Consort, Houston Grand Opera, The Oregon Symphony, The Portland Baroque Orchestra, and The Indianapolis Baroque Orchestra.

Ronn was on the faculty at the Peabody Conservatory from 1984 to 1995, teaching lute and lute-related subjects. In 1996, he was awarded an honorary Doctorate of Music from Shenandoah Conservatory for his achievements in bringing the lute and its music to the world. He has over 40 recordings on the Dorian/Sono Luminus label, including solo albums, lute duets, flute & lute duets, lute songs, the complete lute music of Vivaldi, a collection of Elizabethan lute music and poetry, and recordings with the Baltimore Consort.

Ronn has composed new music for the lute, building on the tradition of the lutenists/composers of past centuries. His original compositions are the focus of his solo CD, *Indigo Road*, which received a GRAMMY Award Nomination for Best Classical Crossover Album of 2009.

On this recording, Ronn is playing a 10-course lute by Travis Carey, Vancouver, BC, Canada (2016) and an 11-course lute by Andrew Rutherford, New York (1991), converted to a 13-course lute by David Brown, Baltimore, MD in 2012.



Carolyn Surrick

Carolyn Surrick has a B.A. in music from the University of California Santa Cruz and an M.A. in musicology from George Washington University. She founded Ensemble Galilei in 1990 and the group started touring the U.S. in 1995. With Ensemble Galilei, she recorded fifteen CDs and produced four special projects including a partnership with The National Geographic Society for the creation of **First Person: Stories from the Edge of the World** as well as a collaboration with The Metropolitan Museum of Art to produce **First Person: Seeing America**.

With Celtic harper, Sue Richards, and multi-instrumentalist, Ginger Hildebrand, Surrick spent eight years of Fridays working with wounded warriors at the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center. She also worked with wounded warriors at Fort Belvoir in Virginia, as well as with *Project Odyssey* for the Wounded Warrior Project. The trio recorded two CDs and gave away over six thousand copies to wounded warriors and their families. Surrick also penned *Between War and Here*, a book of poetry about her time at Walter Reed, and has given away over a thousand copies of the book to veterans. Her latest book, *The Last Day*, was published in December of 2019. She is a collaborator at heart and was thrilled when the opportunity arose to create this project with Ronn. She lives outside of Annapolis, Maryland with her extended family, in a house built from a hand-hewn barn, made of American Chestnut.

Carolyn's viola da gamba was built by Marc Soubeyran in 1995, her strings were made by Damian Dlugolecki in 2020, and her bow is by Harry Grabenstein. She credits the instrument, strings, and bow with the extraordinary resonance heard on this recording.





with Jackie Moran

A founding and driving force of such influential bands as The Drovers, Comas, Bua, and The Otters, Jackie Moran is a fixture in studio and concert settings, sympathetically accompanying such great artists as Alphonso Ponticelli, Kevin Burke, Dennis Cahill, Liz Carroll, John Doyle, Alain Genty, Martin Hayes, Paddy Keenan, Michael Londra, Philip Masure, David Munnely, Aidan Burke, Howard Levy, and Jimmy Keane.

Jackie's talents have also led him to appear on stage with *Riverdance* and to help form and perform with the Trinity Irish Dance Company. When Hollywood needs a musician to play the part, and look it as well, you'll see Jackie. *Backdraft* (1991), *Blink* (1993), *Traveler* (1997) and *The Road to Perdition* (2002) all had the wisdom to feature Jackie and his bodhrán.

"I just think he's the best of the best in our area of the country – and all over. I don't want to give him a swelled head but he's a really terrific drummer."

Liz Carroll

Music Credits

Daniel's Chaconne was commissioned by Daniel Shoskes, who recorded it on the CD, *Patrons of the Lute* release (2014) with the title *Passacaglia*.

The *Rose of Raby* is used with the permission of the composer, Dave Shepherd. The publisher is Blowzabella.

Ronn McFarlane's compositions are registered through BMI. Carolyn Surrick's compositions are registered with ASCAP.

Production

Producer: Dan Merceruio

Recording, Mixing & Mastering Engineer: Daniel Shores

Editing Engineer: Dan Merceruio

Photography: Photos of Surrick and Moran: Burgess Blevins.

Photos of McFarlane and Surrick: James F. Carr

Graphic Design: Gillian Morton, Raya Koren, and special thanks to Joshua Frey

Executive Producers: Lindsey R. Nelson; Collin J. Rae

Recorded at Sono Luminus Studios, Boyce, Virginia — June 15-19, 2020

Recorded in Pyramix with Merging Technologies Horus. Mastered with Merging Technologies Hapi. Recorded in DXD at 24 bit, 352.8kHz in Native 7.1.4



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Ronn McFarlane, lute Carolyn Surrick, viola da gamba

1. Fermi's Paradox (2018)	Ronn McFarlane	(5:13)
2. She Moved Through the Fair John Barleycorn	Traditional Irish Traditional English	(6:04)
3. Gånglåt efter Hamare The Last Day (2020) Gigue la petite (1714)	Traditional Swedish Carolyn Surrick Marin Marais (1656-1728)	(7:11)
4. Blackwater Side	Traditional Irish arr. Ronn McFarlane	(2:47)
5. The Rose of Raby	Dave Shepherd	(3:59)
6. Amazing Grace	John Newton (1725-1807) Tune of "New Britain"	(2:59)
7. Daniel's Chaconne (2013)	Ronn McFarlane	(4:52)
8. Trinity Grove (2019)	Ronn McFarlane	(4:21)
9. Cantabile (TWV 41:e5) Recitativo Arioso	G.F. Telemann (1681-1767)	(2:57)
10. Dowland's Adew for Master Oliver Cromwell	John Dowland (1563-1626)	(4:39)
11. O Sacred Head (1601)	Hans Leo Hassler (1564-1612) Harmonized by J.S. Bach (1685-1750)	(2:48)
12. Come Thou Fount (1758) Sjungar-Lars Visa	Robert Robinson (1735-1790) Traditional Swedish	(4:21)
13. Little Martha (1971)	Duane Allman (1946-1971)	(2:26)
14. Planxty O'Rourke, Second Air	Turlough O'Carolan (1670-1738)	(2:52)
15. Ave Maria (1853)	Melody by Gounod (1818-1893) Based on the Prelude from BWV 846 by J.S. Bach	(3:04)

Total Time: (60:34)