

Ayreheart to play two area performances this weekend

by Mike Telin



On Thursday, April 7 at 8:00 pm at the Bop Stop, the band Ayreheart (Ronn McFarlane, lute, Brian Kay, vocals and lute, Will Morris, colascione, and Mattias Rucht, percussion) will present a concert titled “Will You Walk the Woods so Wild.” The concert will be repeated on Friday, April 8 at Kent Unitarian Universalist Church in Kent, also at 8:00 pm.

“We do call ourselves a band, but we’re hard-pressed to figure out what kind of band we are,” Ronn McFarlane joked during a recent telephone conversation while *en route* to Michigan to start [Ayreheart](#)’s ten-day, nine-concert tour. “We formed to play original music that I was writing for lute, and songs with lute and other instruments like percussion and bass. But we also love the old music, so even when we have concerts focused on the new we always play a good bit of old.”

The program, divided between music of John Dowland and William Byrd, and folk music from the period, particularly focuses on the intersection between folk music and art music in England, Scotland, and Wales.

“We have examples where John Dowland and William Byrd have made very sophisticated arrangements of folk songs,” McFarlane said. “A number of them only come down to us as a tune and a set of words, so it’s up to us to make the arrangements musically viable — we have to become the kind of musicians that existed back in the Renaissance.”

The band’s program will also include intersections between Renaissance folk music and classic rock. “One of the highlights is the song *John Barleycorn*, which dates back to the

16th and 17th centuries. A lot of listeners, especially survivors of classic rock who lived through the 1960s and '70s as I did, might remember the rock group named Traffic, who released an album in 1970 called *John Barleycorn Must Die* with Steve Winwood singing the lead. I was in high school at the time, and I had no idea that it was a really old ballad. Years later I discovered that it had roots that went back to the time when lutes were very popular. So it's a double pleasure to play an English/Scottish folk song from the Renaissance while at the same time covering a rock song."

Another song that intersects folk song, art song, and rock will be *Nottamun Town*. "We're not sure how far back it goes. It's a traditional tune with a rather bizarre set of words, but it's a very durable tune. Its connection with rock is that Bob Dylan took the melody and set his lyrics to it for his *Masters of War*. So it's actually an old Medieval tune that Dylan rearranged for his own purposes, but that's what people have been doing for hundreds of years. It's a part of the oral tradition, where the music continues to change and adapt to generation after generation."

McFarlane said that the band's own arrangement of William Byrd's setting of *Will You Walk the Woods so Wild* (14 variations for harpsichord) gives them the opportunity to produce a lot of different sounds and colors. "I think it makes for a very successful arrangement and it's another connection between a folk song and art music."

No Renaissance music concert would be complete without some dances, and Thursday's program will include plenty. "We have a number of songs and instrumental pieces by John Dowland which have a dancelike quality, and are very beautiful."

Ayreheart's new album, *Barley Moon* on the Sono Luminus label, will be released June 24 and is now available for [pre-order](#) on Amazon. The album includes John Dowland's *Mr. Dowland's Midnight; Fortune my Foe; My Lady Hudson's Puffe; Come Again; Solus cum Sola; M. George Whitehead, and His Alman;* and William Byrd's *Will You Walk the Woods so Wild*, as well as music by the most famous Renaissance composer, Anonymous: *John Barleycorn; In a Garden so Green; Henry Martyn; Lully lulle; Twa Corbies; Ddoi di dai;* and *Nottamun Town*.

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