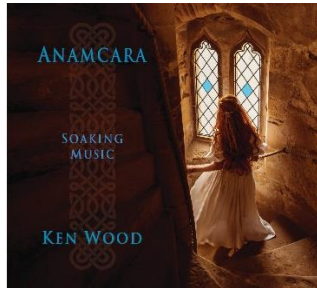


Ken Wood

Anamcara



To say that composer **Ken Wood**'s new album **Anamcara** is immersive is an understatement. I can best describe it by saying imagine if music was made out of water and you could bathe in it. That's what Ken's Irish whistle and light electronic ensemble collection feels like. Additionally, it sounds divine. I first got acquainted with Ken's music from his first album *Portals to Heaven* and his subsequent work, *Acoustic Retreat 1*. On *Anamcara*, his fifteen track Celtic flavored music is faith based and deftly produced giving it

a reverent, yet dynamic sense. Each time you listen you feel you are in a different sonic environment, and you can easily lose yourself within. Frankly, that's just where I want to be. *Anamcara* or "soul friend" is the Celtic concept of someone who is with you on a spiritual journey, not necessarily guiding, but sharing the pilgrimage. So welcome, friend.

Anamcara, the title tune, is a friendly invitation, an offer to do this together and see it through to the end. The music is so blissful it is impossible to turn down the offer. Tin whistle and guitar gambol together in quiet poise. There's the path. Let's see where it leads.

A bright, sunny day and the brightest jewel you can see is the golden wings of the butterfly as it dances in the sky around you. Button accordion accompanies tin whistle on the fanciful **Flight of the Swallowtail**. It a humming background to the butterfly who lives on the edge of fantasy. Which flower is next?

One of the more driving tunes on the album is called **Stay the Course**. Popping percussion and a forceful melody, it feels like you are going ever forward and with plenty of energy to spare. This theme reminds us that we should not only advance, but also keep positive no matter what the challenges we are given.

Let's join Ken up in the Scottish Highlands, but first, we'll take a **Ride Across the Glenn**. This mid-tempo excursion through the lush, green valley is just a way to get to a better place. This valley is secluded. You won't find it on the map, but you will delight it its peaceful beauty.

One of the loneliest tunes on *Anamcara* is called **The Shores of Dunmore**. Ken's melancholy instrumental gives us a sense of yearning, to back there again. You can stand at the tall, stone wall and look out to sea past the hooked pier and there is Wales in the distance. So many ships left from there. Some for fishing, some bound for the colonies never to return. A quick wave and a smile, and it's off you go to the New World, laddie.

Guitar, piano, and Wood's animated penny whistle come together to take you to **Avalonia**. Whether we think that Avalonia was real or imagined, the music lets us dream of a place of emerald fields, basalt cliffs, and quiet forests where fantasy and myths are born.

One of the best tunes on the album is called **Dance of the Angels**. Reminiscent of something out of the Riverdance sound track, it features echoing whistle, crystal harp, and an errant appearance of bagpipes and drums. Together they compose a scenario of swirling light and heavenly resonance. This dance is performed in the firmament of the spirit. Marching, whirling, turning, and radiating grace, this dance is one for the heart.

There is an homage in these tunes, to **Te Ata**. This bold, cinematic tribute celebrates the life of Te Ata, one of the greatest storytellers to ever come out of the Oklahoman Chickasaw Nation. Teacher, raconteur, and performer, she dedicated her life to imparting knowledge of indigenous cultures all over the world. When you hear that the history of a culture was handed down by native historians, they are speaking of Mary Frances Thompson Fisher. Te Ata.

There. Through the gift of emotionally-rich music, you have just traveled from the western shores of Ireland to the highlands of Scotland to the heartland of America. All in the blink of an eye and with a wonderful sound track to accompany you. Anamcara is the musical companion for any journey you wish to make. This “soaking music”, i.e., music that lets you have a spiritual relationship with your God, offers a transcendent cleansing and communion. This is what Ken Woods does. I for one, am ready to go again. Highly listenable. - R J Lannan, Artisan Music Reviews