
Elizabeth Kenny

Selected Reviews

'Songs and Sonnets' with Mark Padmore, Shakespeare in Music Festival (May 2025)

"It was a remarkable experience... There were all kinds of treasures in this recital. I was unaware, for example of the settings of the sonnets by the Earl of Essex where he expressed all his frustrations with Queen Elizabeth. This was a stunning concert performed by world class artists. Amazing to be able to hear them in Holy Trinity Church."

- Peter Buckroyd, *Stratford-upon-Avon Herald*

'I never laid eyes on Aeneas ...' Women's Stories from the Ancient World, Britten Studio, Britten Pears Arts (August 2024)

"Kenny on every word of [Nardus] Williams's, though a technical master in her own right, maintaining an artistic balance throughout the evening... The mood transformed with Purcell's 'Nymphs and Shepherds' and his brother Daniel Purcell's 'When Daphne first her Shepherd Saw'. Masterfully navigated, these faster-paced, more light-hearted pieces suited Williams's agile voice with the Kenny/Williams synergy at its finest... It's a new, wide perspective of opera and history's women and one for which [Mary] Beard, Williams and Kenny bring inclusivity, vibrancy, passion and humour."

- Hattie Butterworth, *Opera Now******

***De Pasión Mortal* - Songs from Two Golden Ages, Linn CKD746 (July 2024)**

"Toby Carr (modern and baroque guitars and theorbo) and Elizabeth Kenny (archlute, baroque guitar and theorbo) transcend stylistic categories to bring surprising colours, expressive textures and a wistful intimacy to the songs, whether solo or together."

- William Yeoman, *Gramophone*

"Kenny and Carr are most beguiling... In the domestic sacred song 'In the black dungeon of despair', in which a man awaits God's final judgement, the partnership between Mulroy and Kenny is most stylish. Two of the three instrumental tracks are by Purcell, of which Kenny's suite from *The Fairy Queen* entices with its improvisatory nature."

- Ingrid Pearson, *BBC Music Magazine******

'In the Shadow of the Tower' with Nardus Williams, Spitalfields Music Festival (June 2024)

"...uber-lutenist Elizabeth Kenny... Kenny's brief solo turns poured like liquid, musical lines barely troubled by the percussive quality of plucking... Switching mid-set to the larger, richer theorbo, Kenny illuminated significant elements of dense textures with unhurried virtuosity."

- Flora Willson, *The Guardian******

"Elizabeth Kenny's programme note wove it all together brilliantly; we could have heard even more of her talking during the concert."

- David Nice, *The Arts Desk*

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Matthew Locke: Consorts Flat and Sharp, Phantasm, Linn CKD737 (February 2024)

"The playing here is technically flawless: lines are articulated with a remarkable lightness of touch; rhythms are balletic and buoyant, subtly animated by Elizabeth Kenny's graceful theorbo playing."

- Kate Bolton-Porciatti, BBC Music Magazine*****

'Drammi in Musica: Virtuoso Songs from 17th Century Italy' with Nardus Williams, Wigmore Hall (January 2024)

"Elizabeth Kenny's delicately dazzling theorbo... Williams's vocal dexterity and emotional finesse turned the singer's sorrow into the listener's joy – as did Kenny's ravishing accompaniments, punctuated by a couple of brief explanatory talks... Kenny made us hear how the old bass lute blossomed in Baroque Italy into a virtuoso vehicle, not simply as a wandering counterpoint to Williams's voice but with a couple of solo excursions of her own: an almost flamenco-like toccata by Piccinini, and a dance by the Austro-Italian Kapsberger that brought Michael Praetorius delightfully to mind."

- Boyd Tonkin, The Arts Desk*****

Lamento d'Arianna, Prologue to Ariadne auf Naxos and Witch, Royal Academy Opera, Susie Sainsbury Theatre (March 2022)

"... her changing emotions captured too in the responsive textures of the three theorbos led by Elizabeth Kenny"

- Claire Seymore, Opera Magazin

Baroque with the Benedetti Baroque Orchestra, Battersea Arts Centre / Edinburgh International Festival (July & August 2021)

"...every triumph of Benedetti was matched by the triumphs of her eight specialist colleagues, all experts in performing baroque music with flair and enjoyment while avoiding stylistic extremes. My special joy was Elizabeth Kenny, queen of the guitar and that overgrown lute, the theorbo, enthusiastically thrumming at impossible speeds."

- Geoff Brown, The Times*****

"The necessity for amplification in the Festival's temporary substitute for the Usher Hall has created some difficulties at other concerts, but Benedetti Baroque made it work to their advantage. In an entirely acoustic setting, harpsichord and lute or theorbo can often be too quiet to be fully appreciated, while here Steven Devine, and particularly lutenist Elizabeth Kenny provided a crucial rhythmic ingredient from the opening performance of Geminiani's somewhat relentless La Folia."

- Keith Bruce, The Herald Scotland*****

Recital with Iestyn Davies, Wigmore Hall (June 2020)

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"It was in Kenny's solo arrangement for theorbo of *Sefautchi's Farewell*, however, that the most virtuosic music of this section [Purcell] was heard... In another solo, Kenny unwound Robert Johnson's *Fantasia* with languid elegance... Escape came at last in the honeyed reverie of the spellbinding encore, Handel's *Hide me from day's garish eye*."

- Neil Fisher, *The Times******

"The underlying sadness of Dowland's songs, meanwhile, can spill into his instrumental pieces, and Kenny's performance of his *The King of Denmark's Galliard* captured the ambivalence of music that reflects even as it dances. Keenly alert to shifts in mood and meaning as an accompanist, and ceaselessly engaging in her solos, she played with beautifully understated dexterity throughout."

- Tim Ashley, *The Guardian******

"Kenny's own arrangement of keyboard work 'Stefauchi's Farewell' was witty and light while 'Lilliburlero' cheered with a gentle sway... Kenny's solo performance of Johnson's *Fantasia* was intricate and compelling, with delicately measured rubato, and Dowland's 'The King of Denmark, his Galliard' had a beautifully refined rusticity."

- Miranda Heggie, *The Arts Desk******

"'By beauteous softness mixed with majesty', from the first birthday Ode, offered more delicate, muted reflections, Kenny's lute spinning a translucent spider's web of interlocking voices... Kenny closed the Purcell sequence with her own arrangements of a brusque Rigadoon, a contemplative Farewell and a nonchalant 'Lillibulero', her playing always lucid and tender as she stroked and plucked her beautiful theorbo's strings with care and understanding, nurturing Purcell's music into being..."

- Claire Seymour, *Opera Today*

"The combination of the countertenor voice and the lute is a very special one, the sweetness of one melding with the astringency of the other, and Davies and Elizabeth Kenny blended exquisitely here [Purcell]... Kenny's arrangements of three of Purcell's short pieces displayed the agility and versatility of the lute in such expert hands..."

- Melanie Eskenazi, *MusicOMH******

17th-Century Playlist; Ed Lyon, Theatre of the Ayre, Delphian DCD34220 (September 2019)

"Joined by Theatre of the Ayre – a flexible and innovative ensemble led by the lutenist Elizabeth Kenny"

- Gramophone

"...brilliantly, wittily accompanied by the five-piece Theatre of the Ayre."

- Graham Rickson, *The Arts Desk*

"...it is not surprising that Lyon and Kenny have been able to put together such a toe tapping selection... The thread running through these pieces is that most are 'ear worms', whether fast or slow they are based on motifs which holds us by the ears (to use a 17th century phrase which Elizabeth Kenny's lively and

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informative CD booklet essay elucidates for us) ...aptly complemented by the playing of the Theatre of the Ayre."

- **Robert Hugill, *Planet Hugill***

"The voice is accompanied by a rich, keyboardless array of continuo instruments, with Elizabeth Kenny on lute..."

- **Anthony Burton, *BBC Music Magazine********

"Elizabeth Kenny is both lead guitar and rhythm section, roaming seamlessly on to both lute and theorbo"

- **Alexandra Coghlan, *Gramophone***

Theorbo Fantasy, Cleveland International Classical Guitar Festival (June 2019)

"In the hands of Kenny these images became as real as if a theatrical production were taking place onstage beside her... Kenny's playing of both his [Piccinini's] Partite variate sopra la Folia and Ciaconna was simply magical... Kenny's abundant technique and keen musical sensibilities were front and center during Hieronymus Kapsberger's Toccata, Passacaglia, Capona, Canario, and Colascione. Defined by sudden shifts of mood and virtuosic melodic lines, the work ends with a hit of Turkish exoticism. Music from the French Baroque — Robert de Visée's Suite in c, Prelude, Les Sylvains de M'Couperin, and Chaconne — rounded out the program. The theorbist relished every moment of these charming pieces. Throughout the afternoon, Kenny supplied the perfect amount of informative commentary as she explained the evolution of the theorbo and its complicated tuning system."

- **Mike Telin, *ClevelandClassical.com***

Ars longa: Old and new music for theorbo, Linn CKD603 (June 2019)

"There are three examples on Elizabeth Kenny's *Ars longa: Old and new music for theorbo* (Linn) – by James MacMillan, from a 2011 work, and two new ones by Benjamin Oliver and Nico Muhly – all stylish uses of the pungently plucked sounds of this large-size lute. ...She frames the premieres with toccatas that sound like improvisations, hypnotic chaconnes that weave around repeated bass lines, and Robert de Visée's lovely tribute to his fellow Frenchman, Les Sylvains de Mr Couperin."

- **Nicholas Kenyon, *The Guardian***

"Here playing a theorbo — a lute elongated by the addition of bass strings — Kenny partners elegantly turned early baroque pieces by Piccinini, Kapsberger and de Visée with new work. James MacMillan's devout Motet 1 (from *Since it was the day of Preparation*), Benjamin Oliver's rather grittier *Extending from the inside* and Nico Muhly's colourful *Berceuse*, with seven variations, make for excellent contrast and complement. Kenny's playing is, as usual, sublime."

- **Stephen Pettitt, *The Times***

"Kenny lacks neither extensive playing experience in chamber, orchestral or operatic contexts nor a brilliant musical imagination. She brings both to bear on these performances of 'old and new music'. Whether it's a richly layered toccata by Piccinini or Kapsberger, a mournful tombeau by de Visée or a

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bittersweet berceuse by Muhly, she beautifully combines an expansive orchestral conception with an almost painful improvisatory intimacy. It's just lovely."

- **William Yeoman, *Gramophone***

"Old and new are deftly interwoven...Kenny's performances are superb, technically assured in the trickiest variations, and always with a sense of spontaneous re-creation...The recording provides an intimate focus on the performer, yet with enough ambience to suggest a space gratefully shared by the listener."

- **Anthony Burton, *BBC Music Magazine********

"On this excellent CD, Elizabeth Kenny, one of the finest contemporary exponents of the theorbo (and, incidentally, of the lute), juxtaposes - perhaps one might say 'integrates' - pieces written for the instrument during its original 'golden age' as a solo instrument - i.e. the 'long' Seventeenth Century) - with pieces by British composers of our own time. The result is superb, engaging heart and mind alike and helped by a gorgeous recorded sound... Kenny plays Piccini's work with great insight and sympathy and proves to be an outstanding advocate for his music, in these subtle and persuasive interpretations... Kenny is up to all the music's demands and must, I think, be ranked alongside Jonas Nordberg as one of the best contemporary interpreters of this music [Kapsberger]... Elizabeth Kenny's playing throughout is all that one could ask for; it is hard to imagine a better case being made for either the value of the theorbo's traditional repertoire or its modern possibilities."

- **Glyn Pursglove, *MusicWeb International***

Matthew Locke: *For Lovers of Consort Music*, Phantasm, Linn CKD594 (October 2018)

"Elizabeth Kenny's polished and beautifully judged theorbo accompaniments subtly enrich Locke's delicately chromatically inflected textures...It is recordings of this calibre that will attract new listeners to the English consort repertoire"

- **Julie Anne Sadie, *Gramophone***

"Phantasm trips the light fantastic, with Elizabeth Kenny's thrumming theorbo adding pizzazz."

- **BBC Music Magazine*******

***Inventing Bel Canto*, Theatre of the Ayre, Wigmore Hall (April 2018)**

"it was a wonderfully exhilarating night... the fierce eloquence of those singers and instrumentalists gathered together in Elizabeth Kenny's ensemble"

- **Geoff Brown, *The Times********

Dowland *Lachrimae*, Phantasm, Misteria Paschalia Festival (March 2018)

"The British but now Berlin-based viol consort Phantasm, joined by lutenist Elizabeth Kenny, gave a stirring performance of Dowland's *Lachrimae*, with every note at once clear and crisp yet beautifully rounded... Kenny is a joy both to listen to and to watch. Her intricate ornamentation is as natural as it is detailed, and her leadership of the viols beautifully sensitive to the music. The lush dissonances teased out

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during the pavans were deliciously wistful and the rhythmic interplay displayed in the dance movements gave an infectious, impish quality with a real swing."

- **Miranda Heggie, *The Arts Desk***

York Early Music Christmas Festival, National Centre for Early Music (December 2017)

"Kenny's artful accompaniment injected extraordinary intensity and variety."

- **Robert Gammon, *The York Press***

Cavalli *Hipermestra*, Glyndebourne Festival Opera, Glyndebourne (May 2017)

"It was, however, the 10 exceptional players in the pit – including Christie and the peerless lutenist Elizabeth Kenny – who gave this music pulse and vitality."

- **Fiona Maddocks, *The Observer***

***The Masque of Moments*, Theatre of the Ayre, Linn CKD 542 (February 2017)**

"There are exquisite sounds from Kenny's plucked-instrument ensemble, and beautiful numbers from masques by Henry and William Lawes, Coprario, Locke and others, with nicely refined singing."

- **Nicholas Kenyon, *The Observer***

"Elizabeth Kenny's artfully planned programme is a most welcome arrival, lacing together 'moments' from sundry 17th-century masques with music by Campion, Coperario, Henry and William Lawes, Nicholas Lanier and Matthew Locke...the instrumental playing on a battery of 'twangling instruments' (lutes, theorboes, citterns, guitars, harps, violins and violas) is full of flair and improvisatory spirit."

- **Kate Bolton-Porciatti, *BBC Music Magazine***

"Elizabeth Kenny interprets this repertory with stylistic knowledge and that neat efficacy-which rarely reaches the brilliance of the British historicist ensembles"

- **Juan Ramón Lara, *Scherzo***

"The lutenist Elizabeth Kenny and her ensemble "Theatre of the Ayre" bring their listeners closer to the music they have been playing since the time they were created, in a virtuosic and entertaining way."

- **Niels Kaiser, *HR2***

Dowland: *Lachrimae or Seven Tears*, Phantasm, Linn CKD 527 (2016)

"Another veteran of a previous *Lachrimae* recording, the lutenist Elizabeth Kenny, makes a thoughtfully judged contribution to this disc"

- **Julie Anne Sadie, *Gramophone Special Awards***

Shakespeare Songs with Ian Bostridge, Wigmore Hall, London (November 2016)

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"The lutenist Elizabeth Kenny offered superb accompaniment in the early material."

– Neil Fisher, *The Times*

"Nothing is more evocatively Shakespearean than a lute and Elizabeth Kenny's played with melting beauty William Byrd's *Caleno Custure me* and Thomas Morley *It was a lover and his lass*."

– Louise Flind, *bachtrack*

Shakespeare Songs with Ian Bostridge, Warner Classics (August 2016)

"The recital is well constructed: Elizabethan lute songs (with the incomparable Elizabeth Kenny)."

– Fiona Maddocks, *The Observer*

Duo Recital with Robin Blaze, Totnes Early Music Society, Dartington Hall (June 2015)

"Elizabeth Kenny matched Blaze to sheer perfection, accompanying with the greatest empathy, as well as balancing total technical control with such poignant expression in her lute and theorbo solos. The ornamentations always flowed seamlessly, never excessive or in any way intrusive, yet always sufficiently varied to maintain interest from start to finish."

– Philip R Buttall, *Seen and Heard International*

A Restoration *Tempest*, devised/directed for the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, Sam Wanamaker Playhouse, London (January 2015)

"With just two violins, a viola, a cello, a gamba, a hurdy-gurdy, a theorbo and what appeared to be a tennis ball in a tin (for thunder), lutenist Elizabeth Kenny and director Caroline Williams conjured up an intimate reduction of *The Tempest* in which Locke's music was the focus... A mongrel entertainment, but one of great charm, played stylishly by the soloists of the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment." – *The Times*

"A forgotten corner of musical history has been brilliantly re-animated by the lutenist Elizabeth Kenny plus a group of her colleagues from the Orchestra of the Age of the Enlightenment...The candle-lit Wanamaker Playhouse seems to confer magic on everything staged there, and so it was when Kenny and four other string players launched into Matthew Locke's elegant introductory suite. Two actors (Molly Logan and Dickon Tyrrell) brought comic zest to the incarnation of Prospero, Ariel, Caliban, Miranda, et al; singers interwove a tissue of masques and dances with songs of the period, soprano Katherine Watson and tenor Samuel Boden being outstanding."

– Michael Church, *The Independent*

"Although this was a restoration piece, the whole evening had a vigour and life that made it seem as if we were watching a much more modern production. The depiction of the story through words, music and song was a delightful concoction which flowed with ease from piece to piece and was a feast for all the

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senses."

– Emily Owen, *Bachtrack*

Duo Recital with Iestyn Davies, Spitalfields Festival, London (December 2014)

"The songs poured forth with perfect ease and naturalness, with no sense of strain either on the performers' part or ours. Two hours of counter-tenor and lute might seem too much of a good thing, but Iestyn Davies and Kenny programmed the evening shrewdly to provide maximum variety...both performers showed a gift for spinning subtle variations in the melody, without interfering with its ease and flow...the whole thing was a joy, perfectly judged and yet apparently totally spontaneous."

– Ivan Hewett, *The Telegraph*

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"Elizabeth Kenny's dexterous handling of harmonics and glissandi made the theorbo variously chime and roar." – *Bachtrack*

"The true engine-room of City Musick's sextet is the lutenist Elizabeth Kenny, whose fingerwork enlivens everything she touches." – *The Yorkshire Post*

"A bronze Liz Kenny should be on the empty plinth in Trafalgar square, in my opinion."

– *Early Music Review*

"...a lovely solo for theorbo...played exquisitely by Elizabeth Kenny." – *The Observer*

"The brilliant Kenny ... played with remarkable clarity." – *Early Music Today*

"Exzellent die Continuobegleitung von Elizabeth Kenny ... [und] perfekt Solostücken." – *Die Presse*