

*(For Clare Longendyke)*

## **Seven Descriptive Preludes** (one for each of the seven diatonic modes)

for Piano Solo  
(begun in 1958; completed in 2020)

by Donald M. Wilson

1. Locrian Prelude ("Autumn Leaves") (1:32)
2. Phrygian Prelude ("Saul's Pursuit of David") (1:04)
3. Aeolian Prelude ("Morning Haze") (2:18)
4. Dorian Prelude ("David's Lament for Jonathan") (3:21)
5. Mixolydian Prelude ("Summer Diversion") (2:26)
6. Ionian Prelude ("Spring Song") (3:15)
7. Lydian Prelude ("Icicles") (1:35)

**TOTAL = 15:31**

### **Program Notes**

How the system of diatonic modes (originally "church modes") evolved is an interesting study of its own. But any discussion of the seven modes must include a description of how each one is built. Six of these modes can be compared to what since 1600 A.D. has become known as the major-minor system (i.e., tonality as opposed to modality). Thus, Phrygian can be seen as a minor mode with lowered second scale-degree; Aeolian is seen as equivalent to what student musicians come to learn in basic music theory as the "natural minor" scale; Dorian is like minor with a raised sixth scale-degree which imparts a sense of hope and uplift. Mixolydian is seen as a major scale with the seventh degree lowered by a half-step; Ionian is the major scale now so prevalent in our music (e.g., do-re-mi-fa-sol-la-ti-do); Lydian is likened to the major scale with a raised fourth that (like Dorian) elicits a sense of hope and uplift. Finally, Locrian. This is the only mode without a perfect fifth with which to build a consonant chord on the first scale-degree. In other words, this mode has a tonic chord that is dissonant. For this reason, it is impossible to resolve the tension that is inherent in the diminished fifth between the first step of the scale and the fifth step. Play the notes B C D E F G A B on any instrument and then play that first note again. Does it sound final?

1. Locrian Prelude. "Autumn Leaves" was inspired by a haiku from the Japanese poet Taniguchi Buson suggesting the effect of wind gusts on some stray leaves in the road.

2. Phrygian Prelude. Saul's relentless pursuit of David ended with Saul's military defeat by the Philistines and his death by an Amalekite (see I Samuel 31).

3. Aeolian Prelude. Another haiku from Buson depicts the start of a day in the hills of Japan (possibly) where there would be "Morning Haze" to obscure the activity of people going about their daily activities.

4. Dorian Prelude. David's poem of mourning over the death of his brother-in-law Jonathan begins and ends with the phrase "How are the mighty fallen!" (see II Samuel 1).

5. Mixolydian Prelude. A change of pace from the drama of the first four preludes, "Summer Diversion" is just that. Written in the style of a two-part invention, its subtitle refers back to a time when composers were hired to provide "lawn music" for outdoor parties and gatherings.

6. Ionian Prelude. Spring is the season of revival, rebirth, resumption of activity for those animals and plants that were dormant for weeks or months. Thus, it is a time of optimism, of hope, of awakening.

7. Lydian Prelude. Winter is a time of snow and cold wind, of frozen lakes and hibernation. "Icicles" was the first of these preludes to be completed--on a brittle, crisp day in late December 1958. It was composed at a baby grand piano in a deserted faculty lounge during Christmas break at the University of Chicago during my senior year of college there.

#### The "back story" for the SEVEN DESCRIPTIVE PRELUDES:

The American Composers Alliance, in response to the COVID lockdowns, issued a Call for Scores to launch its Shelter project: scores already in their system for 1-3 players suitable for netcast. I submitted a short list of works that fit these criteria. Sometime later I got word that two of my submissions had been chosen by pianist Clare Longendyke and her performances had just been posted to YouTube as part of her 100 pieces in 100 days project.

I was so impressed with Ms. Longendyke's performances of my "Icicles" and my Nocturne that I wrote her an enthusiastic letter to thank her. She replied and thus began a back-and-forth email conversation that evolved into this book of Preludes.

"Icicles" (Lydian Prelude) was composed in 1958 while I was in my senior year of college at the University of Chicago. In 2016 it was retrieved from my "archives of forgotten works," polished up and submitted to ACA for inclusion in Richard Cameron-Wolfe's anthology, *The Soul of Brevity* (2017).

Two other preludes, these from my grad-student days at Cornell, started hollering for my attention. I set to work on the Phrygian & Dorian Preludes (begun in 1961) and finished them in short order. I emailed them to Clare Longendyke for her reaction.

Another unfinished solo-piano work from years ago reminded me of its partial existence & demanded completion: my "Spring Song" from 1988-90, which became the Ionian Prelude.

Having at that point compiled four preludes, each in a different mode, I began flirting with the idea that a set of seven preludes could be put together under the title SEPT PRÉLUDES A LES MODES ÉCCLESIASTIQUES simply for the pun on our epicurean use of the phrase "à la mode." Here, though, I went back to my student days and found two works for other media that could be transcribed: the Aeolian Prelude from my FIVE HAIKU for Tenor Voice & Chamber Ensemble (1962) and the Mixolydian Prelude from my SUITE for Two Oboes (1961).

Finally, only the Locrian Prelude was left to write. I turned again to the haiku so capably translated by Harold G. Henderson in 1958 and sketched some musical gestures evocative of dry leaves being stirred up and blown around by an autumn breeze. These sketches sewed themselves together & became the Locrian Prelude which opens the work.

As I completed each piece, I forwarded it to Ms. (now Dr.) Longendyke for her reactions, comments and approval. In view of her having studied at the École Normale de Musique in Paris, I asked for her opinion on the quasi-French title. She suggested that my subtitle, "Seven Descriptive Preludes (one for each of the seven diatonic modes)," was more apt and thus more appropriate and meaningful than the original (working) title.

Considering all my email interaction with this superb pianist, it seemed only natural to dedicate the entire book of *Seven Descriptive Preludes* to Dr. Clare Longendyke. If she had not chosen "Icicles" for her YouTube recording project, these other preludes would have quite likely never seen completion.

--Donald M. Wilson

### **Biographical Sketch: Donald M. Wilson**

A native of Chicago, Donald M. Wilson studied composition with Karel Husa and Robert Palmer at Cornell University and with Gunther Schuller at the Berkshire Music Center (Tanglewood). In 1965 Wilson became the first music director of the educational FM station in Philadelphia now known as WHYI-FM. Now a professor emeritus at Bowling Green State University, Wilson joined the BGSU music faculty in 1967, taught music theory, analysis and composition for 31 years and chaired the Music Composition/History Department for two four-year terms (1973-77; 1994-98). From 1983 to 1995 Wilson produced over 80 one-hour programs in the annual "New Music Festival" radio series for national distribution. A member of the [American Music Center](#) since 1964 and a member of the [American Composers Alliance](#) since 1967, Wilson became a founding member of the [Christian Fellowship of Art Music Composers](#) in 1995.

### **Biographical Sketch: Clare Longendyke**

Clare Longendyke serves as Director of Chamber Music and Artist-in-Residence at the University of Chicago. Hailed a "superlative pianist," (*Journal of the IAWM*), Clare Longendyke is a passionate soloist and chamber musician recognized for her colorful musicality, technical fluency, and ability to interpret repertoires across the musical spectrum. Clare has performed solo and chamber music recitals across Europe and North America and has won 1st place prizes in competitions across the United States. In 2018-19, Clare performed 50 concerts around the globe, including two performances of Joan Tower's Piano Concerto and solo recital performances in Italy, Paris, Minnesota, Maine, San Francisco, and Boston. She made her orchestral debut in 2012 performing Bartók's 3rd Piano Concerto with the Indiana University Concert Orchestra.

Clare has been a featured soloist in the Fazioli Piano Series (Los Angeles), the Schubert Club of Minnesota's Courtroom Concert Series, the Boston Museum of Fine Arts' SoundBites Series, as well as in performances on NPR's Performance Today. An active performer of new music, she has premiered over 90 new works since 2012 and is the founder and Artistic Director of Music in Bloom, a new music festival in Indiana. Through her solo and ensemble work, she has worked with and performed the music of living composers Joan Tower, Frederic Rzewski, Mason Bates, Vivian Fung, Gabriela Lena Frank, and Joseph Schwantner, among many others.

Clare holds degrees from the Boston University College of Fine Arts, the École Normale de Musique in Paris, France, and the Indiana University Jacobs School of Music.

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