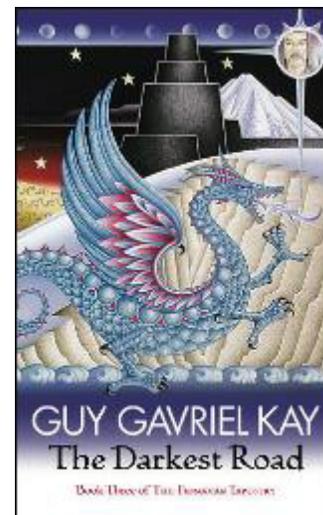
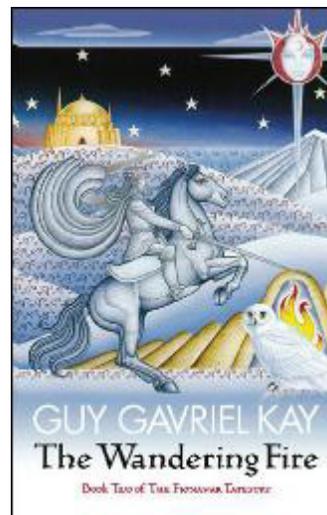
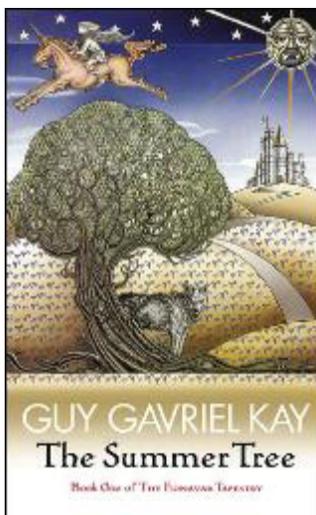


Words, Music, Vision: A Multi-Media Literary Adventure with Martin Springett
by Victoria Hoyle

Earlier this year I found myself in attendance at a very small convention. It was all of five people (at times, only four) in a pub in London, brought together by a serendipitous confluence of events: a chance meeting at University, a review I wrote, an e-mail I received, a CD that crossed the Atlantic and a spot of antique collecting. The *raison d'être* of this “convention” (dubbed *SpongCon* for arcane reasons quite beyond my powers of explanation) was Martin Springett, the artist behind the beautiful original illustrations for Guy Gavriel Kay’s *Fionavar Tapestry* and the composer-musician of the Kay-inspired CD *Bright Weavings*. I took the opportunity to chat with him, over a few pints and several plates of nachos, about his visual and musical journey through Kay’s literary worlds’.

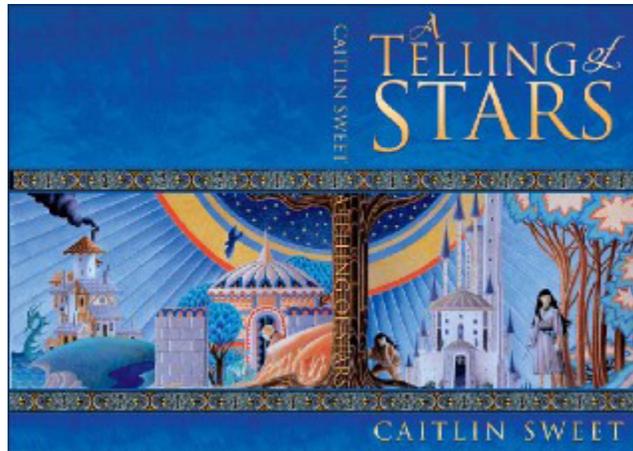


The recent Twentieth Anniversary reissues of *The Fionavar Tapestry* by HarperCollins in the UK (below) do Springett’s cover design proper justice, accentuating their style, so reminiscent of manuscript illumination and mediaeval iconographical painting.

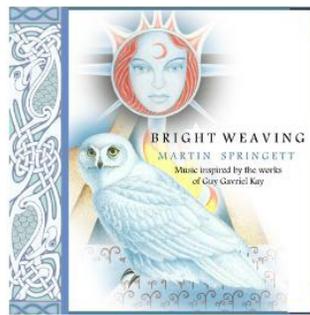
Born in Kent, UK but resident in Canada since the mid-1960s, Springett began his career with a comic strip – “Awaken” – and a series of illustrative images for *Heavy Metal Magazine* in the late 1970s and early 1980s. His earliest genre forays were focused mostly on the science fiction side of the market, but as he explains: “I was leaning more and more towards Fantasy and eventually left the SF scene entirely, spaceships, aliens and the like no longer my thing.” Like many illustrators he “trotted” his portfolio around to various publishers and, subsequently, landed a commission with McLelland & Stewart to illustrate the cover of a Fantasy novel by first time author Guy Gavriel Kay. This was, of course, *The Summer Tree*, the first novel in Kay’s ***The Fionavar Tapestry***, to be followed by *The Wandering Fire* and *The Darkest Road*. It was the start of a great friendship with Kay and also of a lifelong creative relationship with his work, that has translated into both images and into music. As he explains: “The visual aspect came first with *Fionavar*, but after, having taken that journey and

explored that world, I felt compelled to write some music. I felt I “knew” it then.”

For my own part, Springett’s images have always been central to the power of the *Tapestry*. Their bold lines and delicate palettes speak clearly of Kay’s broad thematic strokes and his writing’s emotional resonance. As such they have a power – symbolical and iconographic – all of their own that reminds me of the illustrated fairytales of my childhood, and of the medieval manuscript illustration that I frequently come across in my professional life. More recently Springett has illustrated Caitlin Sweet’s debut novel *A Telling of Stars* (which is itself stylistically akin to Kay’s *Tapestry*) with a similar clarity of geometric line and colour.



But I also like the idea that good fiction has a cadence, a timbre, a tempo, a music. Not a soundtrack or an accompaniment - I don't quite mean that - but an alternative personality that plays and sings, a state of affairs in which sound is fiction and fiction resonates out through music. The compositions that Springett himself has written “inspired” by Kay’s oeuvre – through from the *Tapestry* to the most recent *Last Light of the Sun* – are like this and have now been collected together on a CD: *Bright Weavings*. This was the recording that bravely made the Atlantic crossing to me and later became one of the catalysts that took me to *SpongCon*.



It begins with “First Light” and a soft sense of the sun rising, a low hum of voice and instrument with the poem attributed to St. Patrick (the one that begins “I arise today/ through the strength of heaven;/Light of the sun”) spoken over. This is both a beginning and

a part of the final balance of the album, since 45 minutes later the final track, inspired by *The Last Light of the Sun*, turns out to be a rhythmic sunset. It is all strong drumbeat, a guitar and a violin coming through, adamant somehow and then gone as suddenly. The sun comes up and then goes down. Springett takes lyrics for it from the *Liber Hymnorum* manuscript, another eleventh century Irish text:

*"I have a tale for you
A stag bells, winter snows, summer has gone
The wind is high, cold. The sun is low. Its course is short
The sea is strong and running.
The bracken is very red; its shape has been hidden
The cry of the barnacle goose has become usual.
Cold has taken the wings of the birds.*

*Season of ice; this is my tale;
Season of ice; this is my tale;
Season of ice; this is my tale.
This is my tale.
This is my tale.
(Repeat)"*

The translation is unusual; poetic. Certainly the Latin original is bleaker and more like the season it portrays. But the character of the version Springett has chosen is most akin to the spirit of Kay's most recent novel, which is embedded in the Anglo-Saxon experience of landscape and season. "This is my tale" sung over and over at the end is also apt. Not only because it captures the insistent, determined overlay of voices and stories in *The Last Light of the Sun* but because it recalls the Anglo-Saxon *scop*, the poet-bard, and also because it stands as a statement for the CD in its entirety, it being a tale in itself.

Each of Kay's novels is represented musically, with the result that Springett's musical career runs close to the bone of G.G.K's development as a writer. He told me: "I felt as much at home with Guy's world's musically as visually, and kept noodling away at various themes and ideas over the years. Each new book inspired new musical ideas. I suspect it's my way of staying in these marvellous places, lingering a little longer."

First is *The Sarantine Mosaic*. "Shirin's Dance" is a duet of guitars that ends on a note of query, very like the fate of eponymous dancer herself, while "Painted Feet on Ochre Sand" is a questing palimpsest of guitar, percussion, flute and bansuri (a kind of wooden flute) that, like "Shirin's Dance" captures the urgency and ephemerality of the act of artistic creation. It was apparently inspired initially by *The Lions of Al-Rassan* but only came into its own after the release of the *Mosaic*, which takes many of the same themes – memory; sacrifice; beauty – and renders them deeper, making them more integral to the musical narrative. This is the same relationship (although partly in the inverse) enacted between "Shirin's Dance" and "Painted

Feet on Ochre Sand”. With their similar phonic patterns, they speak loudly to one another. *Lions* appears again behind “The Gardens of Al-Rassan”, a suite of three pieces that reaches out to the three vibrant cultures at the heart of that novel, weaving them together and about each other. As the music progresses it brings them, inexorably, into confluence and conflict.

Certainly though, the most moving composition is “Dianora”, a deeply poignant and wandering evocation, by cello and guitar, of a woman defined by loss and betrayal. Similarly, the most involved are the two long Fionavar suites that take scenes and characters from the weft of the Tapestry – the crossing; Paul’s loss of Rachel; Diarmuid; The Wild Hunt – and connect them up in new, wholly evocative ways. My favourite though, almost bizarrely, is the short but delicious melodic play with flutes that represents *A Song for Arbonne* and carries with it all the swift light and deftness that I associate with the ambience of Kay’s alternate Languedoc.

Nevertheless, the CD is still a whole thing; a body of work that, bracketed by “First Light” and “Last Light”, is a story or “tale” in its own right. I asked Springett about this: “The music, or at least the way it eventually appeared on the CD, has a thematic thread, and the emotional weave runs through fairly strongly... I have always loved the idea of a journey when listening, and so I instinctively went for an overall effect. Rather than pull out the differences in the novels, I think I ended up bringing out those themes that they all share: a sense of loss, compensated for by moments of beauty and redemption.” This seems true to me: the humanity and clarity of these wefts are key to Springett’s music and, equally, to his artwork.

It is quite startling to experience your favourite novels in another media; they speak to you, and to each other, in strange new ways. You *listen* the music, you *re-read/re-think/re-approach* the prose; and then, quite unexpectedly, it re-reads you. Thus I’m hearing, on new levels, how the themes of *The Sarantine Mosaic* and *The Lions of Al-Rassan* twine together, and how Kay’s female characters – Shirin, Dianora and even Jehane bet Ishak – dance on similar sands, placing down their feet in the spaces they find, balanced between conflicts and resolutions, between love and life. Springett elaborates: “I hope that it will communicate how I felt about the various stories and themes, and awaken a similar emotion in the listener. I must admit it always startles me when this does happen.” Indeed.

There is also, more simply, the delicious pleasure of good music well played. Martin Springett’s music is a lot like his illustrative work: distinct and clean lines; striking motifs; a deep engagement with narrative; a love of what he is creating. Also (and I find this particularly inspiring) the CD is a physical incarnation of the acts of creation and creativity that Kay’s work has been so focused on: the novels made not flesh, but sound perhaps? Whether you love Kay’s work or not I recommend the experience of *listening* to Martin Springett’s evocation of it. And then, of course, you should read the novels while *listening* to it and while poring over the associated images. How about that for a multi-faceted, multi-media literary experience?

[You can buy *Bright Weavings: Music Inspired by the works of Guy Gavriel Kay* directly from Martin Springett's website: www.martinspringett.com. Prints, posters and bookmarks of his *Fionavar Tapestry* artwork are also available, as is information on his most recent project *Jousting with Jesters: An ABC for the Younger Dragon*. You can also listen to sample tracks from the album at Guy Kay's dedicated website www.brightweavings.com/music/index.htm. His next public performance will be on September 14th at the Toronto Public Library (The Merrill Collection of SF), where he will play in compliment with readings by Guy Gavriel Kay, Caitlin Sweet and R. Scott Bakker.]



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