

 In spring 1985, David Byrne released `Music For The Knee Plays`, a series of musical vignettes designed as 'joints' between longer scenes in a projected theatrical epic by Robert Wilson entitled The CIVIL WarS.

The use of such "knee plays" was not original to this work - for they had been a feature of the 1976 opera by Wilson and Philip Glass 'Einstein on the Beach'. Glass described them there as being 'short connecting pieces which appear throughout the work much as prelude, interludes and post-ludes. Taken together they form a play in themselves.'

It was natural for Byrne to link up with Wilson, whose theatrical vision began in the visual arts and relied on observational, conceptual themes. The notes to the Japanese version of the LP provide (in translation) something of the background : "At first, Robert Wilson asked David to compose pieces for several sections of The CIVIL warS, but on account of David's limited time, he composed only The Knee Plays part. The CIVIL warS was supposed to be played in its complete form at the Olympic Games in Los Angeles, but if one plays every part, it takes at least eight hours. There was also a financial problem for playing every part. So only some parts of it were staged there. David himself was very interested in composing for such a play and dance and this time again he enjoyed this work very much. Last time, for The Catherine Wheel, he used recorded tape, but this time he made musicians play on the stage."

"The Knee Plays" was released on cassette and vinyl - an expanded CD plus bonus DVD was released in 2007.

[Order The Knee Plays CD + DVD](http://www.amazon.co.uk/gp/product/B000VEA320/ref=as_li_tf_tl?ie=UTF8&camp=1634&creative=6738&creativeASIN=B000VEA320&linkCode=as2&tag=thenameofthis-21)

 Adelle Lutz, Robert Wilson and David Byrne during a workshop in Tokyo, April 1983

Tracks:

- Tree (Today Is An Important Occasion)
- In The Upper Room
- The Sound of business
- Social Studies (The Gift Of Sound)
- Where The Sun Never Goes Down
- Theadora Is Dozing
- Admiral Perry
- I Bid You Goodnight
- I've Tried [Things to Do]
- Winter
- Jungle Book
- In The Future

The Knee Plays music - for a brass ensemble, interwoven with occasional spoken narrative - was quite a departure for Byrne, and the result was suggestive of early New Orleans funeral dirges. This connection is acknowledged on the LP sleeve : 'This music was inspired by the Dirty Dozen Jazz Band of New Orleans.'

Although not present on the album cover, the record label provides the following information/credits :

2. In the Upper Room : Traditional, arranged by The Baptist Methodist Choir Church of God

5. The Gift of Sound : Traditional, arranged by Clara Hudman, "The Georgia Peach"

6. Theadora is Dozing : Traditional, arranged by Ensemble of The Bulgarian Republic

8. I Bid you Goodnight : Traditional, arranged by The Pindar Family

9. I've Tried : Traditional, arranged by Swan's Silvertone Singers

It was the first music Byrne had actually 'composed' for performance, played out on an emulator rather than transcribed into musical notation, as Byrne does not read music. The narrative sections, recited by David with deadpan intonation, are droll. After Stop Making Sense, Byrne said he sensed that people were picking up on his wit better than before : 'They can see that I'm not always

completely serious or not always completely demented'.</div> <div>
The album was released as an LP and cassette, on ECM in America and EMI Zonophone elsewhere. The music was first produced and performed at the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, 26, 27, 28 April 1984 - and subsequently, as noted above, in Los Angeles. It was also performed twice during a benefit concert at The Cambridge Theatre in London, 2 July 1988, with Les Miserables Brass Band - an occasion recorded by BBC-TV.</div> <div>
This London performance included material not present on the LP - most notably words to Knee Plays 6 and 8 - both of which appeared on the LP as instrumentals only. While the words to I bid you Goodnight (Knee Play 8) are well known, those to Theadora is Dozing (Knee Play 6) are new, as is the title added to the piece - Song of a Sea Shore. Taken from the concert programme these words are as follows :</div> <div>
SONG OF THE SEA SHORE (KNEE PLAY 6)</div> <div>
Big waves, and when they make a big splash into the water</div> <div>Then they believe that the weather will be good for a few days</div> <div>That's how the song goes</div> <div>Been windy for a couple of days, and they hear the big splashes</div> <div>They even have different splashes in the different sound and they know the weather will be nice</div> <div>When it's really windy you can hear the waves, but they don't make sense</div> <div>When the wind dies down you can hear the waves more</div> <div>Song of a Name</div> <div>This song was a song for a boy trying to make the boy like his name</div> <div>Song About A Thumb</div> <div>The person was making fun of another one's thumb</div> <div>Look Where Somebody Slept</div> <div>People From Different Places Singing</div> <div>This one is about the different people in different small settlements, families of ten or six families</div> <div>When the people came from different places and finally got together they used to play some game and also do some throat singing, all the settlements</div> <div>A family would come from another settlement</div> <div>They would throat sing with this woman</div> <div>They used to know how to throat sing too</div> <div>Sometimes they would know their different own ways of singing.</div> <div>This text is stated in the concert programme to be 'From : Inuit Throat & Harp Songs. Canadian Music Heritage Collection. MH011' which, added to the music, as we have seen, inspired by the Ensemble of The Bulgarian Republic, shows how wide-ranging Byrne had been in his search for sources. In the London concert only the last half of the text (starting at Song of a Name) was used.</div> <div>The concert programme also provides texts for Knee Plays 1, 3, 4, 5, 9 and 12. These are substantially in agreement with those published in the lyrics section, with the exception of those for Knee Play 12, which are reproduced below. From these, which would seem to be an earlier draft to those used on the LP, we gain something of a glimpse of a work in progress.</div> <div>
IN THE FUTURE (KNEE PLAY 12)</div> <div>
In the future everyone will have the same haircut and the same clothes</div> <div>In the future everyone will be very fat from the starchy diet</div> <div>In the future everyone will be very thin from not having enough to eat</div> <div>In the future it will be next to impossible to tell girls from boys, even in bed</div> <div>In the future men will be 'super-masculine' and women will be 'ultra-feminine'</div> <div>In the future atomic fusion will enable us to build a skyscraper with</div> <div>the energy obtained from a grain of salt</div> <div>In the future through genetic surgery there will be a race of menial</div> <div>workers, studs, 'whores', TV personalities and politicians</div> <div>In the future half of us will be 'mentally ill'</div> <div>In the future there will be no religion or spiritualism of any sort</div> <div>In the future the 'psychic arts' will be put to practical use</div> <div>In the future we will not think that nature is beautiful</div> <div>In the future the weather will always be the same (relative to the way it is

now) <div>In the future no one will fight with anyone else because anyone can</div>
<div>be anything he or she want to be</div> <div>In the future there will be an atomic war that
will reduce the survivors to savages</div> <div>In the future water will be expensive</div>
<div>In the future all material items will be free</div> <div>In the future everyone's house will
be like a little fortress</div> <div>In the future everyone will think about love all the time</div>
<div>In the future TV will be so good that the printed word will function as an artform only</div>
<div>In the future people with boring jobs will take pills to relieve boredom</div> <div>In the
future everyone but the wealthy will be very happy</div> <div>In the future everyone but the
wealthy will be very filthy</div> <div>In the future everyone but the wealthy will be very
wealthy</div> <div>In the future communication/distribution systems will be so good that
no</div> <div>one will live in cities</div> <div>In the future farming will be managed through a
nationwide computer hookup</div> <div>In the future there will be mini-wars going on
everywhere</div> <div>In the future political and other decisions will be based completely on
opinion polls</div> <div>In the future only the very wealthy will be able to travel or move out
their houses</div> <div>In the future individuals with soldier inclinations will go out for 'killer'
sports</div> <div>In the future there will be machines which will produce a religious</div>
<div>experience in the user</div> <div>In the future there will be a classless society, no one
richer than anyone else</div> <div>In the future people will constantly be having plastic
surgery, altering</div> <div>their features many times during a lifetime</div> <div>In the
future there will be many mass suicides</div> <div>In the future there will be groups of wild
people, living in the wilderness,</div> <div>who will rob suburbanites</div> <div>In the future
there will be only paper money which will be personalized</div> <div>In the future everyone
will only get to go home once a year</div> <div>In the future everyone will stay home all the
time</div> <div>In the future we will not have time for leisure activities</div> <div>In the future
we will only 'work' one day a week</div> <div>In the future our bodies will be shrivelled up but
healthy and our brains will be bigger</div> <div>In the future there will be starving people
everywhere</div> <div>In the future no one will be able to afford TV or newspapers, resulting
in</div> <div>no one knowing what's going on</div> <div>In the future people will live in
space</div> <div>In the future only the very wealthy will have pets</div> <div>In the future the
poor will be regulated by the rich</div> <div>In the future the crippled, retarded, and helpless
will be killed</div> <div>In the future everyone's house will be a total entertainment centre,
with</div> <div>video, pills, dancing, sex tools, holographic movies, and game machines</div>
<div>In the future everyone will have his or hers own individual style of very way-out
clothes</div> <div>In the future we will all eat our favorite foods, only they will all be
synthetic</div> <div>In the future we will fuck anything, anytime, anywhere</div> <div>In the
future there will be so much going on that no one will be able to keep track of it</div> <p>

<A

href="http://ws.amazon.co.uk/widgets/q?rt=tf_w_mpw&ServiceVersion=20070822&MarketPlace=GB&ID=V20070822%2FGB%2Fthenameofthis-21%2F8014%2F79860fd3-38e7-48c2-97e1-2fb0a3770359&Operation=NoScript"
mce_href="http://ws.amazon.co.uk/widgets/q?rt=tf_w_mpw&ServiceVersion=20070822&MarketPlace=GB&ID=V20070822%2FGB%2Fthenameofthis-21%2F8014%2F79860fd3-38e7-48c2-97e1-2fb0a3770359&Operation=NoScript">Amazon.co.uk Widgets</p>