

# PETER MAXWELL DAVIES

(b. 1934)

## *Renaissance & Baroque Realisations*

### THE FIRES OF LONDON

SIR PETER MAXWELL DAVIES *conductor*

Mary Thomas, soprano

Philippa Davies, flute/piccolo/alto flute

David Campbell, clarinets

Beverley Davison, violin/viola

Alexander Baillie, cello

Timothy Walker, guitar

Stephen Pruslin, piano/harpsichord/celesta/honky-tonk/chamber organ

Gregory Knowles, percussion

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Recording Engineer: Geoffrey Barton

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#### Purcell: Fantasia and Two Pavans

[1]	Fantasia on a Ground	5:01
[2]	Pavan in A	2:12
[3]	Pavan in B-flat	1:48

[4]	Purcell: Fantasia upon One Note	3:56
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[5]	Bach: Prelude & Fugue in C-sharp minor	5:15
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[6]	Bach: Prelude & Fugue in C-sharp major	4:12
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#### Tenebrae super Gesualdo

[7]	I ('Beats irregular')	3:08
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[8]	Interlude	1:12
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[9]	II (Moderato)	2:29
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[10]	Interlude	1:16
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[11]	III (Andante)	2:29
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[12]	Interlude	1:08
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[13]	IV (Slow)	3:18
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#### Dunstable: Veni Sancte-Veni Creator Spiritus

[14]	Transcription	3:25
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[15]	'Commentary'	6:42
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#### Three Early Scottish Motets

[16]	Si Quis Diligit Me	2:35
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[17]	Our Father Whiche in Heaven Art	3:39
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[18]	All Sons of Adam	3:26
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[19]	Kinloch his Fantassie	3:33
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Total: 61:58

## RENAISSANCE AND BAROQUE REALISATIONS

Clearly, the assignment of Renaissance and Baroque pieces to a timbrally mixed ensemble of modern instruments can in no way be construed as 'authentic' – more importantly, these realisations were never intended as such. As the word 'realisation' suggests, Peter Maxwell Davies is interested in using the works concerned as a departure-point for his own very personal interpretations. While this may not appeal to the purist, such interpretations still very much inhabit the world of 'pure' music. Far from representing a philosophical platform from which to moralize at the prevalent authentic temper of the times, the realisations are audibly the extension of an enormous knowledge and love of early music, carried out in a spirit of collegiality across the centuries. If anything, the current swing of the pendulum to the authentic 'far right' serves only to enhance the relevance of these versions as a refreshingly different view of the subject.

There is much humour here, also parody and irony both subtle and explicit. As is usual with Maxwell Davies, the presence of these qualities does not preclude the presence of a serious and relevant point underneath. Conversely, the real erudition that underlies many of these realisations is worn very lightly and does not obtrude into the sheer listening experience they represent.

The listener will readily recognize three different sorts of realisation within this collection. There are works in which the identity of the original is clearly maintained within the context of an orchestration or re-orchestration (Bach *Preludes and Fugues*, Purcell *Fantasia upon a Ground*, Dunstable *Veni Sancte-Veni Creator*, Transcription, Peebles/Heagy *Si Quis Diligit Me*). Then there are cases where the original undergoes an extensive character-transformation that partially or wholly disguises its identity (Purcell *Fantasia upon One Note* and *Two Pavans*, Dunstable *Veni Sancte-Veni Creator*, 'Commentary'). Finally, there is a group (in some cases overlapping the 'character-transformation' category) where a chemical amalgam is effected between Maxwell Davies's own *harmonic* style and the style of the original to the point where they become inextricable (Anon. *All Sons of Adam*, John Angus *Our Father Whiche in Heaven Art*).

### PURCELL *Fantasia* and *Two Pavans* (1968)

[1] The *Fantasia*, in Purcell's key of F-major, is presented in the boldest possible colours. Paradoxically, the boisterously updated orchestration (in particular the piccolo doubling at the twelfth) creates an authentic dimension of its own: a superb impression of the shrill brilliance of a baroque organ.

[2] & [3] In a volte-face from this simulated authenticity, the two pavans (in Purcell's keys of A and B-flat major, respectively) are resurrected as foxtrots. Whether or not one finds such treatment outrageous, there is no denying the virtuosity with which this bravura stylistic exercise is carried off, nor the sheer technical acumen that enables the composer to imbed

every note of the Purcell originals within the foxtrots. And perhaps any sense of stylistic discomfort can be put to rest by Maxwell Davies's own commonsensical remark that, after all, one dead dance-form is merely being reinterpreted in terms of another.

### PURCELL, *Fantasia upon One Note* (1973)

[4] Maxwell Davies has described the Purcell original as 'emerging gradually out of a blue haze', and this apt image could be applied to the realisation as a whole in that it is fundamentally a delicate study in reality and illusion, with the original *Fantasia* gone through in 'dumb show', but seen from many different distances and angles. After reaching a climax in hillbilly style, the work dissolves back to the phosphorescent shimmer in which it began.

Intrinsic to the 'atmospheric lighting' of the work is its transposition from Purcell's F-major to the much more rarefied key of F-sharp, which is used as a colour-filter, under which a familiar musical object becomes insubstantial and remote. It is worth mentioning that the lower level of old pitch, which would rightly be invoked in an authentic context, is not relevant here, because Maxwell Davies is playing on the psychological connotations of 'familiar' and 'unfamiliar' keys as we know them through present-day ears.

### BACH, *Prelude and Fugue in C-sharp Minor* *Prelude and Fugue in C-sharp Major*

Both from 'The 48' Book I

(unconducted chamber performances)

The C-sharp minor was realised in 1972 to precede a performance of the Schoenberg/Webern *Kammersymphonie*, Opus 9, whose home key is the relative E major. The C-sharp major came two years later as an 'advance companion-piece' to Maxwell Davies's own *Ave Maris Stella* (Unicorn-Kanchana UKCD 2038), which shares the same key-centre. Subsequently the Fires began to perform the two preludes and fugues as a unit.

The choice of these preludes and fugues is in part simply a sign of affection for them and partly a function of the original concert-pairings mentioned above – but it also relates to the particular resonance created by the keys of C-sharp major and minor when transferred from the keyboard, where they are already rare, to the instrumental combination used, and above all to the two stringed instruments.

[5] The C-sharp minor prelude is notable for the frequent hocket-like division of melodic lines, particularly between the timbrally distinct flute and clarinet. In the fugue, the marimba takes its place as an absolutely equal voice in the texture.

[6] Anyone who enjoys musical puzzles and detective-work will have a field-day with the *Prelude and Fugue in C-sharp major*. The orchestration of the prelude 'X-rays' the music to reveal cross-relationships with the fugue which are anywhere from implicit to non-existent

in the original, while the fugue pokes fun at Webernesque *Klangfarbenmelodie* by segmenting the subject into three successive instrumental colours.

#### **Tenebrae super Gesualdo (1972)**

Mary Thomas, soprano

[7] – [13] This work consists of four meditations, in Maxwell Davies's own style, on Gesualdo's darkly chromatic *Tenebrae*. There are moments, when the violin, celesta and glockenspiel come into their own, that are shot through with light – but the predominantly dark instrumentation (alto flute, bass clarinet, with strings, harpsichord, chamber organ and marimba used mainly in their low registers) and the generally very soft dynamic level combine to create a shadowy and mysterious atmosphere that further reflects Gesualdo's title.

The meditations are separated by three interludes for voice and guitar which distil an essence of the Gesualdo original and which, taken together, set the text, 'Attendite et videte si est dolor similis sicut dolor meus' (Behold and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow).

One might almost imagine a performance of the original *Tenebrae* in which the Maxwell Davies movements arose as commenting interludes. What is perhaps most fascinating about the work is that the relationship between the 'old' and the 'new' sections is reversed as in a photographic negative, so that the meditations are perceived as the 'originals' and the brief glimpses of Gesualdo as the 'commentary'.

#### **DUNSTABLE Veni Sancte-Veni Creator Spiritus (1972)**

[14] The dual title refers not to the two completely distinct sections that comprise this work, but to the double-texted motet which the first section transcribes. This is set in a dark but brilliant orchestration that admirably suits the flamboyant severity of Dunstable's thought.

[15] The second section is an independent piece that comments on the Dunstable in Maxwell Davies's own style. It begins by invoking eerie wisps and fragments, but grows into a climax of astonishing intensity before ending in a rapt echo of the Dunstable. The discrepancy between the work's size and its weight gives the impression that a very large piece is being looked at through the wrong end of a telescope, creating a fascinating perceptual distortion.

#### **Three Early Scottish Motets**

These short works are published together with a fourth work, *Psalms 124*, under the title 'Four Instrumental Motets from Early Scottish Originals'. [16] The first of them, *Si Quis Diligit Me* (1973) is a straightforward setting of a quietly confident work by David Peebles and Francy Heagy. [17] The second, *'Our Father Whiche in Heaven Art* (1977, after John Angus) [18] and the third, *All Sons of Adam* (1974, after an anonymous 16th-century original) both begin

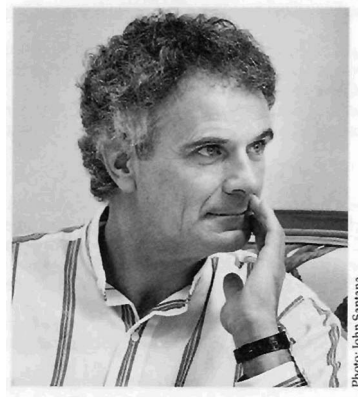
equally straightforwardly, but are then progressively overlaid or infiltrated from within by various processes which result in an eventual amalgamation with Maxwell Davies's own style. Taken together, the three pieces present a musical portrait of the cool severity of the Kirk of Scotland, a quality inherent in the original pieces.

#### **Kinloch his Fantassie (1976)**

(unconducted chamber performance)

[19] This severity is certainly dispelled by the final work on the disc, in which William Kinloch's *Fantasia* is presented in an orchestration that reinforces its innate exuberance.

Stephen Pruslin © 1991



PETER MAXWELL DAVIES

Sir Peter Maxwell Davies is universally acknowledged as one of the foremost composers in the world today. As the New York Times has written, "today, Davies counts as Britain's leading composer. He has achieved that status through his prolific outpouring in nearly every medium, his vivid theatricality and a musical idiom that combines mediaeval mysticism, modernist rigor and a happy accessibility."

His protean and charismatic musical personality expresses itself in his 150 published works including the operas, *Taverner* and *Resurrection*, the full-length ballet, *Salome*, the orchestral works (the *Violin Concerto* and *Trumpet Concerto*, the four *Symphonies* and *An Orkney Wedding, with Sunrise*), the chamber operas, *The Lighthouse* and *The Martyrdom of St. Magnus*, the music-theatre works such as *Eight Songs for Mad King* and *Miss Donnithorne's Maggot*, as well as the many works written for non-specialist children including the operas, *Cinderella* and *The Two Fiddlers*.

He founded The Fires of London and was its Artistic Director throughout its existence, 1967–87. He founded the St. Magnus Festival in the Orkney Islands and was its Artistic Director from 1977 to 1986. He is now President of the festival. He was knighted in the 1987 New Year's Honours for his services to music. In 1988, he undertook an extensive tour of the United States and Canada with the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, which included performances in San Francisco, Los Angeles, St. Louis, Kansas City, Chicago, Toronto, New York and Washington.

Sir Peter's *Symphony No. 4* was premiered in the 1989 BBC Promenade Concerts. He has recently completed a new full-length ballet, *Caroline Mathilde*, for the Royal Danish Ballet, which was premiered in Copenhagen in March, 1991.

Maxwell Davies's music has been recorded on numerous labels, including Decca, EMI, Philips, Deutsche Grammophon and CBS, and he has a special association with Unicorn-Kanchana.

### THE FIRES OF LONDON

Throughout its twenty-year existence (1967–87) The Fires of London was regarded as one of the world's outstanding chamber ensembles. The group played all over the world, including every major international festival. The Fires' impact started from their celebrated staged performance of Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire*, with Mary Thomas as soloist, conducted by the group's Artistic Director, Sir Peter Maxwell Davies. This was followed by Davies's own *Eight Songs for Mad King*, *Vesalii Icones*, *Miss Donnithorne's Maggot* and *Le Jongleur de Notre Dame*, which together virtually established the genre of music-theatre in the sixties and seventies, and continued with his chamber operas, *The Martyrdom of St. Magnus* and *The Lighthouse*, and the 'apocalyptic comedy' *The No. 11 Bus*.

But the legendary Fires virtuosity, teamwork and commitment also informed their performances of pure chamber music, beginning with the Schoenberg/Webern *Kammersymphonie*, Opus 9, continuing with Maxwell Davies's *Hymn to St. Magnus*, *Ave Maris Stella* and *Image, Reflection, Shadow* and branching out to Elliott Carter's *Triple Duo*, the flagship of a long list of works, by other composers of every generation, called into being by the Fires.

The ensemble's life-history ended on January 29, 1987 with a sold-out Fires' Farewell/ Twentieth Birthday Gala Concert in London's Queen Elizabeth Hall, since which time all of its members continue to enjoy varied and flourishing careers.



SOUVENIR SERIES



# Peter Maxwell Davies RENAISSANCE & BAROQUE REALISATIONS The Fires of London

Conducted by Sir Peter Maxwell Davies

*Henry Purcell*

Henry Purcell

*Henry Purcell*

