

NAXOS

**PETER  
MAXWELL DAVIES**

**Naxos Quartets Nos. 1 and 2**

**Maggini Quartet**



## Peter Maxwell Davies (b. 1934)

### Naxos Quartets Nos. 1 and 2

Although filtering the extraordinary light, weather and seascape of Orkney through the comparatively restricted medium of the string quartet was of huge interest, it was architectural challenges which preoccupied me in the composition of the first *Naxos Quartet*, in three movements. I am very aware that this is the first in a sequence of ten quartets, which enabled me to think from the outset of an architecture spanning the whole cycle. I feel like a novelist who issues a book chapter by chapter at regular intervals in the pages of a periodical. This feeling is not entirely new. When I reached *Symphony No. 4*, in 1989, I realised that I was midway in a sequence of seven symphonies, and could henceforth design the architecture of the remaining three with unusually strong interconnections and through-planning, eventually making the end of No. 7 loop back into the opening of No. 1.

The first slow bars of the *Quartet* recall the mood of the start of Beethoven's F sharp major piano sonata, in that they provide a nostalgic glimpse into a "safe" world of the past. The precise point of that world is the middle, slow section of my third *Strathclyde Concerto*, also of 1989. This material was subjected to a process of transformation through a twelve-unit "most perfect pandiagonal magic square". Perhaps this sounds more daunting than it is – it works as a catalyst to musical invention, engendering enough related but varied basic rhythmic and melodic outline for the whole series, with due harmonic accountability. The methods of application, the degrees of rigour for sections with different architectural functions within the grand design, would be the proper material for a composition seminar, hardly for a programme note. Suffice to say that the discipline involved in the increasing awareness of constituent symmetries, with audible choices to be made at each juncture in each parameter, liberated fantasy and freedom of composition. This square is one I have exploited over many years, and although its workings have become very familiar indeed, I am still astonished

at new evolutions. It is like an ever-fruitful vine, copiously bearing new grapes.

The exposition of this first movement is based on classical models: Haydn looms large, with the energetic first subject, and a more contemplative second subject group. A ghost of the four opening slow measures leads to a "repeat" of this exposition – the harmonic regions traversed are the same, the thematic material is at least similar, and although the individual bar and phrase lengths are often dissimilar, the two expositions in toto are isometric. It amounts to an alternative exposition. These two expositions will be quoted as necessary and developed in later quartets.

A variation of the opening slow figure leads to a short section of three ascending phrases, with the first violin having the main part, summarising the contents of the double exposition, and it is upon this short section that the ensuing development is based. This has three parts, first a "classical" section, with modulation, various types of counterpoint, the breaking down and rebuilding of material, in a reworking of Germanic developmental style. The second part employs pure thematic transformation, the third is continuous variations-in-reverse, that is the gradual stripping down of by now quite complex material, rather than the usual process, in "variations", of adding to a simple outline an ever-increasing decorative overlay. This is the most dramatic section of the movement. At the close, the material has distilled to the near vanishing; there could not be, after this, any recapitulation.

The second movement starts out as a passacaglia; this holds good until the tremolo on solo cello. Harmony and rhythm move at a stately pace reminiscent of Jacobean dance music, as if a chest of viols were subtly present. Once the other three instruments have established the framework, the first violin makes a delayed entry, suggesting a "slow air", such as one might hear in a contemplative moment in an Orkney folk fiddle gathering. This is contrasted absolutely by a

section taking to even further extremes the contrasts of the last part of the first movement. There are violent contracts of pace, texture and material very close together. I think of it as a dramatic recitative, where the participants are nowhere close to mutual understanding. The calm *passacaglia* returns, in varied guise, but the thematic shapes begin to assume characteristics of those of the previous recitative.

As the second movement progresses, the two moods and the two kinds of material coalesce gradually, so that by the final unisons, the participants have come to an understanding, and the originally contrasting sections have assumed one identity.

The physical sound of the third movement was suggested by a strong breeze through dry heather, as well as referring obliquely to a well-known Chopin piano sonata finale. It is "too short"... it evaporates at the end, disappearing beyond the upper limits of the audible register of the instruments, before very much has happened to the material at all. It is a scherzo, very fast and quiet with its thematic discourse continuing that of the middle movement. I felt it was enough, in these particular circumstances, after the concentrated nature of the previous movements. This scherzo will be brought back from the stratosphere (where I imagine it to continue, inaudibly) and its conversation, started here, taken up again, in the *Third Quartet*.

This quartet is dedicated to my Manager of 27 years, Judy Arnold.

The second of the series of ten quartets commissioned by Naxos records was finished in January, 2003. It has four movements: the second and third are closely related, and separated by only a very brief pause, and the first is the most substantial.

A slow, hushed introduction defines the outlines of harmonic and rhythmic spaces which the first movement, and indeed the whole work, will fill out. One hears the shapes at a distance, as if enshrouded in fog. The *Allegro* proper has a firm initial nine-bar sentence, where Scottish dance rhythms prevail, followed by what I think of as its shadow, a pianissimo echo, where the phrases within the sentence are now

divided by short insertions, foreshadowing second subject harmonies. A D minor cadence signposts clearly the termination of the first subject. The second subject group has four sections of contrasting natures, of which the last, in a defining sequence of chords, clinches the tonal space – the ultimate C minor chord functions clearly, I hope, as an F minor dominant, within the discipline of a most perfect pandiagonal magic square. A Germanic, in the classical sense, development follows; do not be deceived by the premature return to D minor, and what seems to be the initiation of a second exposition with inverted material – this is a trap, merely triggering the next developmental procedures. This whole section suggests to me a maze of mirrors, some distorting. Where the recapitulation is expected, I have placed the mere ghost of a scherzo, all in pianissimo, which bridges into and prepares the harmonic ground for a coda. This coda refers back to the end of the exposition, but dwells on the augmented fourth away from the D tonic, as outlined in the first bars of the introduction, and of the *Allegro*. The joined up melodic line suggests that the whole movement has ultimately been monothematic, all along.

The second movement has two parts, a *recitative*, full of drama and contrast, and a short, expressive *arioso*. A scherzo proper follows directly: I thought of this as an *Intermezzo*, offering some gentle relief. It ends with a brief reference to the opening of the second movement, underlining the unity in diversity of the pair. The fourth is a slow movement, and builds gradually, and I would like to think, inevitably, to the harmonic core and crystallisation of the processes set in motion. The final AC diad mediates quite decisively between the dominant of D minor, and a major resolution of F minor.

This quartet is dedicated to the composer Ian Kellam. He was my first musical friend, when we both played our compositions on BBC Children's Hour, more than fifty years ago.

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## The Maggini Quartet

**Laurence Jackson** Violin I • **David Angel** Violin II • **Martin Outram** Viola • **Michal Kaznowski** Cello

Formed in 1988, the Maggini Quartet is established as one of the finest string quartets on the international chamber music circuit, performing at major festivals and concert halls throughout Europe, the United States and the Far East. Renowned for championing British composers, the Quartet won Gramophone Chamber Music CD of the Year 2001 for the *String Quartets and Phantasy Quintet* of Vaughan Williams (8.555300), part of the Gramophone Award-winning Naxos series that has brought world-wide sales of more than 100,000 discs. The recording of Elgar's *String Quartet and Piano Quintet* (8.553737) with Peter Donohoe was a 1997 winner of the Diapason d'Or, France's most prestigious award for classical music recordings, and the release of the *String Quartets and Trio* (8.554079) by E. J. Moeran proved to be one of the best selling chamber music CDs of 1998. The Maggini has also recorded all the Britten *String Quartets* for Naxos (8.553883), winning praise from Diapason in France, while the second volume was an Editor's Choice in Gramophone and in Classic CD. The recording of Walton's *String Quartet and Piano Quartet* with Peter Donohoe (8.554646) was nominated for a Gramophone Award, as well as being an Editor's Choice in Gramophone and the BBC Music Magazine, and the CD of Bax *Quartets Nos. 1 and 2* (8.555282) won a 2002 Cannes Classical Award. The first CD of repertoire by Bliss (8.557108) was nominated for a Grammy Award 2004. Future releases include repertoire by Bliss, Bridge, Rawsthorne, Arnold and John Ireland. The Maggini Quartet has won similar praise for other recordings and has commissioned a number of works, including Robert Simpson's last work, his *Cello Quintet*, first performed at the Cheltenham International Festival in 1996, a year which also saw the first performance of *Olivia* by Roxanna Panufnik, commissioned for the Maggini by Brunel University Arts Centre in London. The Maggini's 10th Anniversary commission was James MacMillan's *Second Quartet*, which received its world première at the Wigmore Hall in London in 1998, with subsequent performances in North America and Europe. The Maggini has embarked on an exciting collaboration with Sir Peter Maxwell Davies, performing and recording his ten new *Naxos Quartets*. The Wigmore is hosting performances of all ten works, including six world premières. Commissioned by Naxos, the works fulfill the composer's long-held intention of bringing a major contribution to chamber music repertoire, and the project is providing a unique opportunity for performers and composer to work together over a five-year period. The Quartet takes its name from the famous sixteenth-century Brescian violin-maker Giovanni Paolo Maggini, an example of whose work is played by David Angel.

NAXOS

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Peter Maxwell Davies is universally acknowledged as one of the foremost composers of our time, and is currently Master of the Queen's Music. Plainchant, musical tradition and the haunting landscape of his adopted Orkney Islands all serve as inspiration to Maxwell Davies' extraordinary and fecund imagination. This CD launches a remarkable and possibly unique commission from Naxos for ten *String Quartets*, each to be premiered live and subsequently recorded by the Maggini Quartet.

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#### Naxos Quartet No. 1

- 1 I. Adagio - Allegro 13:54  
 2 II. Largo 13:38  
 3 III. Allegro molto 2:03

#### Naxos Quartet No. 2

- 4 I. Lento - Allegro 16:13  
 5 II. Lento flessibile 6:15  
 6 III. Allegro 4:45  
 7 IV. Lento flessibile 15:52

#### Maggini Quartet

Laurence Jackson, Violin 1 • David Angel, Violin 2  
 Martin Outram, Viola • Michal Kaznowski, Cello

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