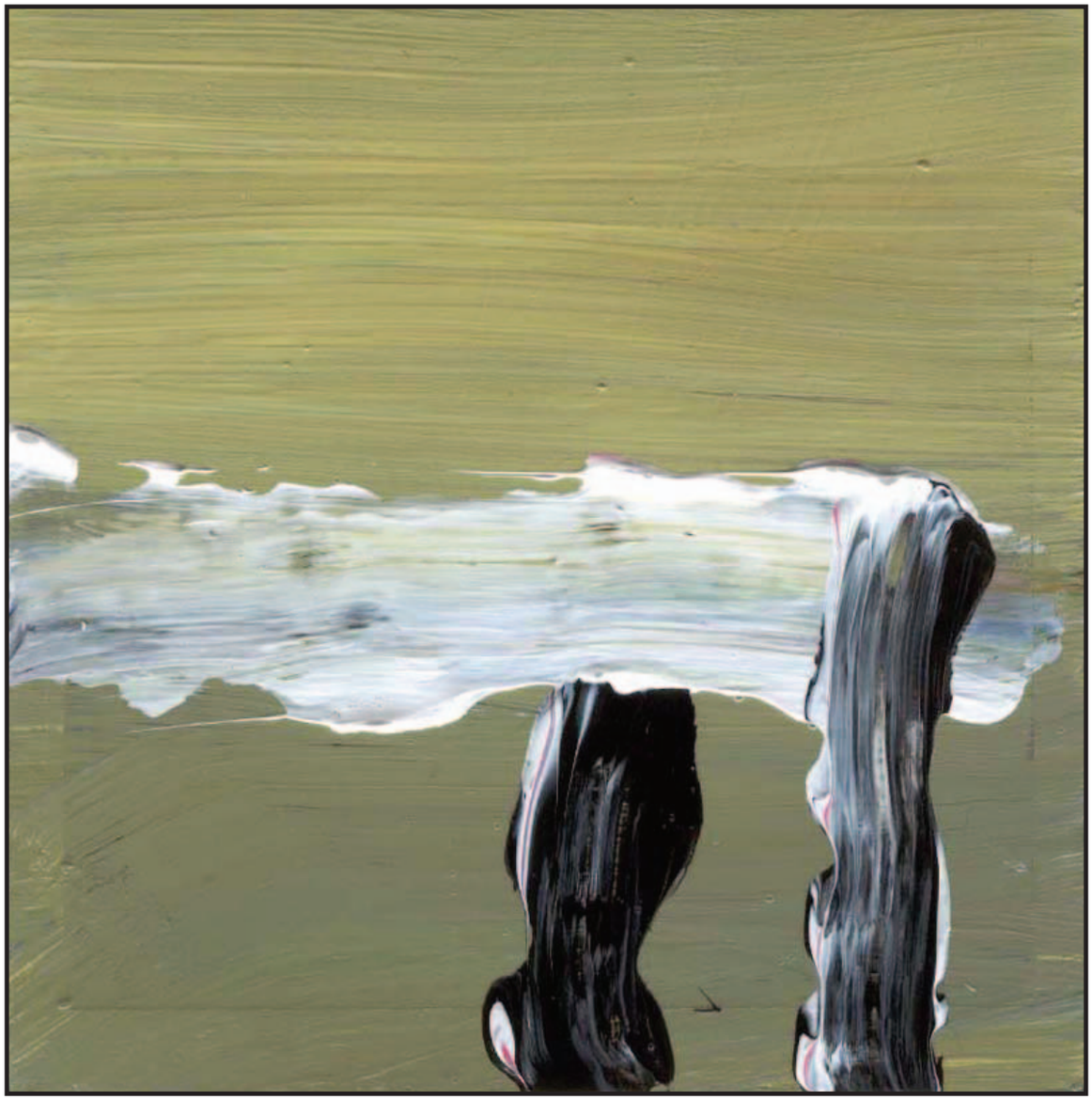
PETER MAXWELL DAVIES

Naxos Quartets Nos. 3 and 4

Maggini Quartet



Peter Maxwell Davies (b. 1934)

Naxos Quartets Nos. 3 and 4

The intention with *Naxos Quartet No. 3* was to create a work exploring the compositional potentialities of a magic square of Saturn (3 x 3) within one of Mars (5 x 5) within one of Venus (7 x 7). This would all be developed alongside an independent square of the Moon (9 x 9), with the associated isometric disciplines, based upon the plainsong proper to the celebration of St Cecilia on 22nd November, '*Audi filia et vide*'. In this way I set myself creative problems whose intricacy and complexity posed new and formidable challenges. This concentrated attempt at virtuoso composition owed much to a restudy of Bach's two and three part keyboard inventions, and was intended, eventually, to be an honest contribution to musical literature honouring its patron Saint. However, during the course of composition, March and April 2003, external events affected the Quartet's unfolding: the invasion of Iraq.

The first movement, *March*, starts with a short exposition (C minor), followed by a varied repeat: there is little hint thus far of any music suggestive of the title. The following development, however, gradually transforms the material into a military march of a fatuous and splintered nature, after which there is, in place of any expected recapitulation, a brief, slow meditation, then by way of a coda, a ghost of the march, in a very slow tempo, drained of all energy, forms a tonal resolution in the correct key: the bones of the march are now exposed as a strict mensural canon. The movement dismisses this with a brief '*maestoso'*.

The second movement, a slow *In Nomine*, does not at first make use of the '*Gloria Tibi Trinitas*' plainsong common to Renaissance *In Nomines*, but draws heavily on their polyphonic techniques, while exploring further ramifications of the plainsong with magic squares encountered in the first movement. When the music comes to a resolution on a low G major chord, the violins take up the argument left hanging in the air at the close of the first Naxos Quartet – there it evaporated into the highest ether and silence. Now, in the course of this material's swift descent from upon high, we are prepared for the appearance of the '*In Nomine*' melody in its original form, going back to John Taverner's early sixteenth century '*Gloria Tibi Trinitas*' Mass and the organ transcription in the contemporaneous *Mulliner Book* which uses that section of the Mass setting the words '*Benedictus qui venit in nomine Domini'* (Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord): this *In Nomine* is quietly distorted and dissonant, that is, very much not 'in Nomine'.

The third movement, *Four Inventions and a Hymn*, stands in for a Scherzo. It takes up the thread left from the first Naxos Quartet in the previous movement, borrowing more of the techniques of Bach's *Inventions*, but the character is burlesque, becoming even grotesque towards the end, where the short *Hymn* is marked '*stucchevole*' (cloying, nauseating).

The finale, *Fugue*, begins with successive instrumental entries in period style, recalling the typical procedure of the form. This is soon interrupted and replaced by quicker, more dynamic music, suggesting the Italian '*fuga'* (flight) rather than the form Bach perfected. The movement ends with a return to the initial slow tempo, with part only of a cumulative stretto – one has to imagine that the period-style fugue will, meantime, have (silently!) progressed thus far. This is another mensural canon, recalling the *March*'s ghost towards the end of the first movement, the '*In nomine*' quoted at the close of the second and the Hymn which ends the third. Here, in unison with the cello line, I imagine a baritone voice, quietly intoning Michelangelo's words:

Mentre che 'l danno e la vergogna dura;
Non veder, non sentir m'è gran ventura:
Però non mi destar, deh, parla basso.

(While damage and shame persist,
it is my great fortune to neither see nor hear
– so please do not disturb me, and speak quietly.)

The closing measures, however, show that it is just impossible to neither see, nor hear.

The quartet is dedicated to my oldest school-friend, Eric Guest.

The *Naxos Quartet No. 4* was written in January and February of 2004, with the intention of producing something lighter and much less fierce than its predecessor, an unpremeditated and spontaneous reaction to the illegal invasion of Iraq,

I returned to the well-known Brueghel picture of children's games (1560, now in Vienna), which had been the inspiration for my sixth *Strathclyde Concerto*, for flute and orchestra. These illustrations liberated my musical imagination, but I feel it would limit the listener's perception to be too specific about which game relates to exactly which section of the work. Suffice it to say that there is vigorous play - leap-frog, bind the devil with a cord, truss, wrestling – alongside quieter pastimes – masks, guess whom I shall choose, courting, odds and evens. The single movement juxtaposes these activities as abruptly and intimately as they occur in Brueghel. Rather as the eye is taken into different perspectives and proportions of scale within the picture, taking liberties which would never be present in, for instance, Brunelleschi architectural drawings, so here, with a constant sequence of transformation processes, I have distorted the neat, precise implications of modal progression, expressed in the unison opening phrase (from F to B through A sharp/B flat), so that the ear is led, en route, into the sound equivalents of strange passageways and closed rooms: *sicut expositio ludus*.

As work on the quartet progressed I became aware that I was reading into, and behind the games, adult motives and implications, concerning aggression and war, with their consequences. It was impossible to escape into innocent childhood fantasy.

The nature of the F to B progression underlying the whole construction derives from a passage in the development of the first movement of Mahler's *Third Symphony*, and the opening of Schoenberg's *Second String Quartet*. Unlike in these models, however, here a real – if temporary – sense of resolution occurs at the close of the quartet: as when the curtain falls on the reconciled Count and Countess in *Figaro* one wonders how long the F/B truce will hold, and 'games' break out again.

The quartet is dedicated to Giuseppe Rebecchini, Roman architect, and friend since the 1950s.

© Peter Maxwell Davies

The Maggini Quartet

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

Formed in 1988, the Maggini Quartet is 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 and 8.554360), 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, and further recordings include repertoire by Bridge, Rawsthorne, Arnold, John Ireland and Tippett. 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 fulfil 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 first CD of *Naxos Quartets Nos. 1* and *2* (8.557396) was an Editor's Choice in *Gramophone*. 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

MAXWELL DAVIES: Naxos Quartets Nos. 3 and 4

8.557397

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, the second release in a series of ten quartets commissioned by Naxos, features two contrasting works: *Naxos Quartet No. 3*, a spontaneous reaction to the 2003 invasion of Iraq, and *Quartet No. 4*, inspired by Brueghel's famous painting of children's games.

PETER MAXWELL DAVIES
(b. 1934)

Naxos Quartets Nos. 3 and 4

Naxos Quartet No. 3

1 I. March 7:58

2 II. In Nomine 11:42

3 III. Four Inventions and a Hymn 6:19

4 IV. Fugue 5:05

Naxos Quartet No. 4: Children's Games

5 I. Moderato 25:05

Maggini Quartet

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

Recorded from 28th to 30th September 2004, at Potton Hall, Suffolk, England
Producer: Andrew Walton (K&A Productions Ltd.) • Sound Engineer: Eleanor Thomason
Post-Production: Andrew Walton • Publishers: Chester Music Ltd. • Booklet Notes: Peter Maxwell Davies
This recording was made in the presence of the composer and was recorded and edited at 24bit resolution
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