

NAXOS

Peter
MAXWELL DAVIES

Symphonies Nos. 4 and 5

Scottish Chamber Orchestra
Philharmonia Orchestra • Maxwell Davies



Peter Maxwell Davies (b. 1934)

Symphonies Nos. 4 and 5

Looking back over the symphonic output of Peter Maxwell Davies is to be struck by its cohesion as regards both form and expression. While aspects of symphonic thinking were evident in his orchestral music from the 1960s – especially the *Second Taverner Fantasia* (1964) and *Worldes Bliss* (1969), it was only with his *First Symphony* (1976) [8.572348] that the composer produced a work which tackled the issues of large-scale symphonic organization head on. The *Second Symphony* (1980) [8.572349] brought a degree of consolidation that the *Third Symphony* (1984) [8.572350] continued with a Mahlerian layout of two scherzos framed by two large-scale adagios. Notable across these works is the increasing emphasis on textural clarity as well as reduction in the use of percussion which, in the *Third Symphony*, results in an orchestra of almost Classical focus – with timpani being the only addition to the expected forces of strings, woodwind and brass.

From here to the *Fourth Symphony* is but a relatively small step in terms of instrumentation, the present work deploying an orchestra recognizably that of the late Classical and early Romantic eras. It was composed for the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, for whom Davies had previously written a triptych of chamber-like sinfonias and was already in the process of writing a series of ten *Strathclyde Concertos* for varying combinations of soloists. Something of this is reflected in the constitution of a work that not only looks back to its composer's early preoccupations (the plainsong *Adorna thalamum tuum Sion*, sung at the Feast of the Purification of the Virgin Mary, is a motivic nexus for all of the thematic material), but also furthers his more recent classicizing tendencies in the underlying formal trajectory of its four movements. Davies himself conducted the premiere with the SCO at the Royal Albert Hall, as part of the BBC Proms season in London, on 10th September 1989.

Angular brass fanfares launch the first movement, pensive wind and strings providing an expressive contrast that reaches down into the depths before the cor anglais

unfolds a ruminative theme which gains momentum as it passes to the strings and woodwind. Strings and brass presently build to a forceful climax, from where upper strings and flutes subside before a further intensification that features skirling strings against held chords on brass and woodwind – the music all the while gaining rhythmic impetus until the initial idea is brought back climactically. This is then cut off to leave flute and strings musing uncertainly against pulsating timpani and aggressive trumpets, before the cor anglais theme makes its fleeting reappearance against dispersing strings.

Without pause the second movement commences with timpani rolls and a steadily emerging motion on lower woodwind with pizzicato strings. A sudden surge of activity brings trumpets to the fore, woodwind pursuing an intensive dialogue against simmering strings that gains in complexity as it builds steadily towards a brief climax. From here a clarinet interlude leads into an intensive passage for the strings, activity subsiding as the music heads into virtual stasis and a plaintive soliloquy from the cor anglais rounded off by curt trumpet chords.

The third movement begins with a ruminative dialogue between lower woodwind against fleeting gestures on strings, brass and timpani then entering as the expressive ambit opens-out accordingly. Upper woodwind are heard musing wistfully over halting strings, the underlying motion presently continuing on all the strings as a brief climax is soon reached. From here the mood intensifies rapidly as strings and brass engage in a headlong interplay over pounding timpani, but this in turn quickly subsides to leave woodwind and strings once more in a pensive dialogue as the music winds down to a calm yet quietly expectant conclusion on divided strings.

The fourth movement opens with angular woodwind gestures to which the strings provide an active response, the momentum being maintained as woodwind and strings discuss the ideas already outlined in increasingly dense and intricate textures. The entry of the brass increases the emotional tension accordingly, as timpani

rolls underpin steadily accumulating activity from the strings, and the brass drives the music onwards to a climax where the main melodic idea is sounded eloquently on strings. This transfers to woodwind and brass, before implacable orchestral chords cancel out any further response and strident trumpets are met with a final pizzicato gesture.

Six years were to elapse before Davies presented his *Fifth Symphony* – which was duly commissioned by the Philharmonia and given its première by that orchestra, again with the composer conducting and once more as part of the BBC Proms in London on 9th August 1994. Outwardly the work appears to mark a decisive break with the formal thinking of its predecessors, unfolding as a single movement in which – as with the *Seventh Symphony* of Sibelius – sectional divisions can be readily perceived though not easily identified. Given that the tendency in those earlier symphonies had been towards an intensive transformation of ideas as overrides the divisions across and even between movements, the move to continual metamorphosis of material was both logical and necessary. With its starting point in the tone poem *Chat Moss*, the work also utilizes a more varied orchestral palette than its two predecessors, with a sizable percussion section often in evidence.

The work opens with the calm intertwining of woodwind, suddenly confronted by a strident outburst on brass and timpani to which strings (complete with the unmistakable sound of flexatone, and latterly underpinned by tuned percussion) and woodwind respond with music of no mean eloquence. The music now moves forward in a rolling paragraph of cumulative intensity that gradually draws in the full orchestra, reaching a rhetorical pause

from which it continues with a capricious interplay of strings and woodwind. A sudden hush descends as glissandi on lower brass are offset by harmonics on upper strings, before renewed rhythmic activity from brass and strings leads into a surging orchestral tutti followed by a passionate climax with strings to the fore. This subsides to reveal a pensive dialogue for woodwind, to which strings respond with an eloquent threnody that is succeeded by the woodwind gesture from the opening. From here the activity again picks up as brass and tuned percussion emerge to drive the music forward in a striding processional which is, in turn, curtailed by the strings as the pace slackens in a series of expressive exchanges for woodwind and strings. Reaching a point of near stasis, activity is once again renewed before a sudden gesture from timpani presages the main climax – brass and percussion sounding aggressively over strings before a return to the earlier introspection as strings emerge effortfully from the depths towards a final appearance of the woodwind gesture. From here the texture thins out to leave strings winding down to a spectral interchange of pizzicato and timpani chords.

The acclaim accorded to the *Fifth Symphony* marks it out as something of a highpoint in Davies' symphonic output, albeit one whose trajectory he has chosen not to repeat until the recent *Ninth Symphony*. What remains consistent, of course, is his concern for the integration of expressive contrasts which endows each of these subsequent works with a formal cohesion and inevitability such as can only be designated symphonic.

Richard Whitehouse

Scottish Chamber Orchestra



The Scottish Chamber Orchestra was formed in 1974 with a commitment to serve the Scottish community. It is recognised as one of Scotland's major cultural ambassadors, touring internationally and appearing regularly at the Edinburgh, St Magnus and Aldeburgh Festivals and the BBC Proms as well as performing throughout Scotland. Principal Conductor Robin Ticciati took up his post from the 2009/10 season and has established a highly successful partnership. The SCO's long-standing relationship with its Conductor Laureate, the late Sir Charles Mackerras, resulted in many exceptional performances and award-winning recordings. The Orchestra enjoys close relationships with many leading composers and has

commissioned more than a hundred new works, including a number of pieces by its Composer Laureate Sir Peter Maxwell Davies. The Scottish Chamber Orchestra receives funding from the Scottish Government.

Philharmonia Orchestra



Established in 1945, the Philharmonia Orchestra is one of the world's great orchestras. It boasts relationships with the world's most sought-after artists, notably its Principal Conductor and Artistic Advisor Esa-Pekka Salonen and remains at the heart of British musical life. Conductors associated with the Orchestra have included Furtwängler, Richard Strauss, Toscanini, Cantelli, Karajan and Giulini. Otto Klemperer was the first of many outstanding Principal Conductors, and other great names have included Lorin Maazel, Riccardo Muti and Giuseppe Sinopoli, with currently titled conductors Christoph von Dohnányi (Honorary Conductor for Life), and Vladimir Ashkenazy (Conductor Laureate). Since 1995 the orchestra's work has been underpinned by its United Kingdom and International Residency Programme, which began with its residencies at the Bedford Corn Exchange and London's Southbank Centre, and also includes De Montfort Hall in Leicester, The Anvil in Basingstoke, The Marlowe Theatre in Canterbury and The Three Choirs Festival. The Orchestra's international extensive touring schedule each season involves appearances at the finest concert halls across Europe, the United States and Asia.

Sir Peter Maxwell Davies

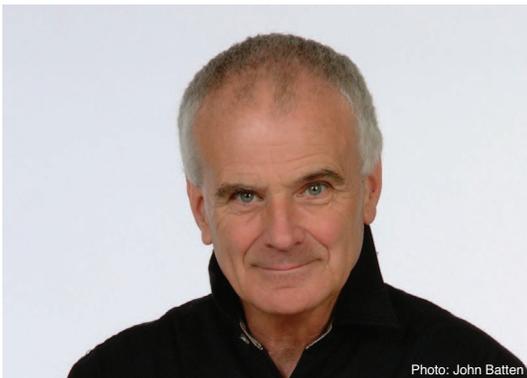


Photo: John Batten

Universally acknowledged as one of the foremost composers of our time, Sir Peter Maxwell Davies has made a significant contribution to musical history through his wide-ranging and prolific output. He lives in the Orkney Islands off the north coast of Scotland, where he writes most of his music. In a work list spanning more than five decades, he has written across a broad range of styles, yet his music always communicates directly and powerfully, whether in his profoundly argued symphonic works, his music-theatre works or witty light orchestral works. Maxwell Davies' major dramatic works include two full-length ballets, music-theatre works *Eight Songs for a Mad King* and *Miss Donnithorne's Maggot*, and operas including *Resurrection*, *The Lighthouse*, *The Doctor of Myddfai*, *Taverner* and *Kommilitonen!* (Young Blood!). His huge output of orchestral work comprises numerous symphonies and concerti, and light orchestral works such as *An Orkney Wedding, with Sunrise* and *Mavis in Las Vegas*. His substantial chamber and instrumental catalogue includes the landmark cycle of ten string quartets, the *Naxos Quartets*, described in the *Financial Times* as "one of the most impressive musical statements of our time". Maxwell Davies has held the position of Composer/Conductor with both the Royal Philharmonic and BBC Philharmonic Orchestras. He has guest-conducted orchestras including the Cleveland Orchestra, Boston Symphony Orchestra, Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, San Francisco Symphony, Russian National Orchestra, Oslo Philharmonic and Philharmonia Orchestra. He retains close links with the St Magnus Festival, Orkney's annual arts festival which he founded in 1977, is Composer Laureate of the Scottish Chamber Orchestra and is Visiting Professor at London's Royal Academy of Music and Christchurch University Canterbury. Maxwell Davies was knighted in 1987 and appointed Master of the Queen's Music in 2004, in which rôle he seeks to raise the profile of music in Great Britain, as well as writing many works for Her Majesty the Queen and for royal occasions.

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The orchestra used by Peter Maxwell Davies for his *Fourth Symphony* is of Classical period proportions, but this relatively compact framework belies a richness of ideas and sonorities. With its starting point in the tone poem *Chat Moss*, the single-movement *Fifth Symphony* utilizes a more varied orchestral palette than its predecessor, with a large percussion section often in evidence. Both works are performed here by the orchestras for which they were written. The *First Symphony* can be heard on 8.572348, the *Second Symphony* on 8.572349, and the *Third Symphony* on 8.572350.

Sir Peter MAXWELL DAVIES (b. 1934)

Symphony No. 4 (1989)*	42:46
1 I. Moderato	13:37
2 II. Allegro	7:23
3 III. Adagio	11:06
4 IV. Andante-Allegro	10:40
5 Symphony No. 5 (1994)†	26:25

Scottish Chamber Orchestra* Philharmonia Orchestra† Peter Maxwell Davies

Previously released on Collins Classics in 1991 and 1995

Recorded at Glasgow City Hall, Scotland, in April 1990 (tracks 1-4),
and at All Saints Church, Tooting, London, on December 3rd, 1994 (track 5)
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