

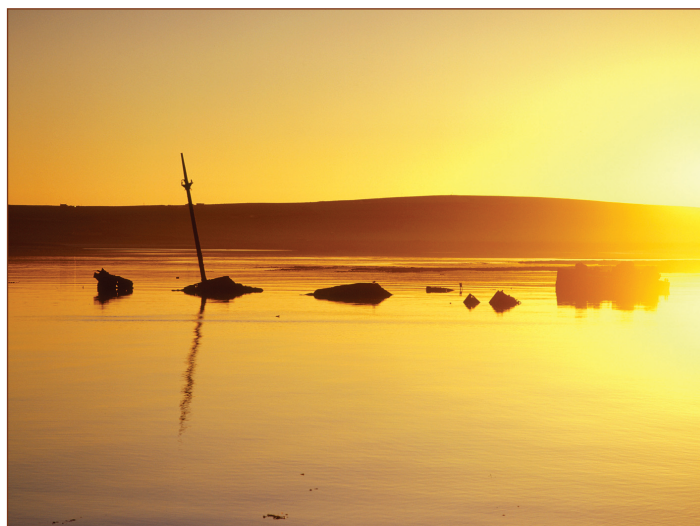


**Peter  
MAXWELL DAVIES**

**Symphony No. 6**

**Time and the Raven • An Orkney Wedding with Sunrise**

**Royal Philharmonic Orchestra • Maxwell Davies**



## Peter Maxwell Davies (b. 1934)

### Symphony No. 6 • Time and the Raven • An Orkney Wedding with Sunrise

#### Symphony No. 6 (1996)

*Symphony No. 6* was composed during the first half of 1996. It has three movements. The starting-off point is a slow tune from *Time and the Raven*, a work commissioned to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations. This is heard at the outset, as an introduction to the first movement, and returns at the close of the symphony, having been subjected to continuous transformations in between.

The first movement proper is a scherzo masquerading as a sonata-allegro, and the second a sonata-allegro masquerading as a scherzo. As well as this 'play' at surface level with 'classical' musical form, background layers of slow, independent transformations, sometimes suddenly exposed – one magic square becoming another, over time, enfolding, digesting, or even spawning another – suggest deeper motions, life-forms, slowly breathing way below, and determining the active surface. In the second movement – a 'double' of the first in many ways, complete with slow introduction – rhythmic modulations activate the gradual dredging to the surface of these slow-moving depths, with disruptive interaction at surface level. The last movement – with introduction briefer than that of the second, but whose close 'rhymes' with its predecessor – is slow, and attempts to reconcile the varying time-flows and disjunct elements of all the previous music.

The symphony was written very much with friends at the Royal Philharmonic in mind, recognising, and I hope constructively calling upon, their very special musical virtuosity. It is dedicated to the memory of George Mackay Brown.

Peter Maxwell Davies

#### Time and the Raven (1995)

The art of the occasional overture, commissioned for a specific celebration, has given rise to some remarkably fluent and even inspired exercises in the genre in the nineteenth century. Tchaikovsky and Glazunov both composed curtain-raisers for important public events which have survived in the repertoire; a later generation of Russian composers found itself under more compulsion to serve the state, but Prokofiev and Shostakovich both obliged in a far from perfunctory fashion – while at around the same time the young Britten wrote several occasional overtures which help to extend our appreciation of his purely orchestral output.

Of all these glittering survivors, Sir Peter Maxwell Davies's *Time and the Raven* comes closest – albeit unintentionally – to Prokofiev's *Russian Overture* of 1936, a highly sophisticated collage and combination of folk-tunes, dazzlingly orchestrated and paraded before us with breathtaking sleight of hand. The difference is that Max's material is mostly his own; having listened to a vast cross-section of national anthems, he plumped instead for a treated version of an Australian aboriginal song, launched by alto flute and first violins, which is then developed, treated, and in the composer's words, 'interrupted by "National Anthems" which are not "real" either – again, so as not to give offence, one way or the other – rather, they are outcrops, growing directly from the internal thematic process'. You will hear the contrasts clearly delineated by shifts in orchestration and tempo (one notable intruder is a slow march theme, *adagio*). Finally, as in the Prokofiev overture, the 'Anthems' meet in a majestic apotheosis, rounded off by a boisterous coda which threatens to end in a jubilant *fortissimo* but in fact fades away to nothing on a long double-bass harmonic – the players instructed to 'stop playing one by one' until only the section leader is left.

This subtle truce is in tune with the meaning of the title, borrowed from a painting by Scottish artist John Bellamy. In it, the composer remarks, 'the Raven

becomes a symbol of warning – in my work, dark music hints at what could be, were attitudes to nationalism not to modify'. Hence the non-triumphant ending, hinting at the manner in which the anthems 'can get along together, and accommodate each other. This is, perhaps, the most "real" for which we can hope'. Despite the note of caution, the orchestration is of suitably celebratory proportions, with triple woodwind, a sizeable (though by no means overblown) brass ensemble and a percussion department which includes an impressive array of drums and a very brief flourish from the flamboyant flexatone, a favourite Maxwell Davies purveyor of the bizarre. The work was commissioned by the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra for the 50th anniversary of the founding of the United Nations, and served as a showpiece on the orchestra's UN tour.

David Nice

#### An Orkney Wedding with Sunrise (1984)

Works of a 'lighter' nature have been a feature of Maxwell Davies's output throughout his career, whether in terms of inter-war popular music from his youth that he parodied in *Fantasia on a Ground and Two Pavans* [Naxos 8.572712] or that of the American mid-West as in *Mavis in Las Vegas* [8.572348]. That of Scotland is nowhere more evident than in *An Orkney Wedding with Sunrise*, written for the centenary of the Boston Pops Orchestra and first heard on 10th May 1985 with John Williams conducting. As the composer has written, this "is a picture postcard record of an actual wedding I attended on Hoy in Orkney.

At the outset, we hear guests arriving, out of extremely bad weather, at the hall. This is followed by the processional, where the guests are solemnly received by the bride and bridegroom, and presented with their first glass of whisky. The band tunes up, and we get on with the dancing proper. This becomes ever wilder, as all concerned feel the results of the whisky, until the lead fiddle can hardly hold the band together any more. We leave the hall into the cold night, with echoes of the processional music in our ears, and as we walk home across the island, the sun rises, over Caithness, to a glorious dawn. The sun is represented by the highland bagpipes, in full traditional splendour".

Skirling strings and fanfaring brass provide a lively introduction into the main theme, sounded plaintively by oboe over pizzicato strings before being passed among woodwind and expanding harmonically in the process. It is then taken up by strings as a robust dance before a sudden disintegration across the orchestra, which now resumes discussion of the theme to livelier effect. Once again it becomes lost in a welter of confusion, only for woodwind to take it up in a whimsical new guise over a lilting accompaniment, the theme being heard as a lively 'barn dance' version for strings and brass. Solo violin now has a poetic version against halting strings and woodwind, before full strings take it up in a forthright Bartók-like incarnation. This dies down to leave woodwind in musing uncertainty, solo horn guiding the music to a sudden orchestral explosion in which the theme emerges resplendent on bagpipes against a surging orchestral backdrop and on to the uproarious close.

Richard Whitehouse

## Royal Philharmonic Orchestra



Photo: Robert Taylor

Acknowledged as one of Britain's most prestigious orchestras, the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra enjoys an international reputation for bringing audiences worldwide first-class performances and the highest possible standards of music-making across a diverse range of musical repertoire. Since its formation, the orchestra has been directed by some of the world's finest conductors, continuing with current Artistic Director and Principal Conductor, Charles Dutoit. The Royal Philharmonic Orchestra is resident at London's Cadogan Hall, performs regularly at the Royal Albert Hall and gives a prestigious series of concerts each year at Southbank Centre's Royal Festival Hall. The orchestra is committed to offering an extensive British regional touring programme and has also toured more than thirty countries in the last five years. The orchestra records extensively for film and television as well as for all the major commercial record companies and also has its own record label. [www.rpo.co.uk](http://www.rpo.co.uk)

## Sir Peter Maxwell Davies

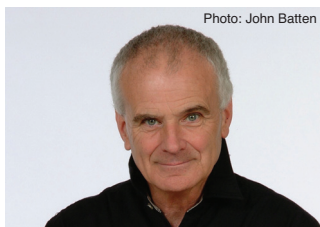


Photo: John Batten

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. [www.maxopus.com](http://www.maxopus.com) [www.intermusica.co.uk/maxwelldavies](http://www.intermusica.co.uk/maxwelldavies)

Sir Peter Maxwell Davies's passionate *Sixth Symphony* is dedicated to the memory of the writer George Mackay Brown, with the 'very special musical virtuosity' of the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra in mind. It is one of his most beautifully expressive works and, whilst not untroubled, reaches moments of serene beauty. Composed for the 50th anniversary of the founding of the United Nations, *Time and the Raven* is a brilliant and exciting collage, whilst few contemporary works enjoy such popularity as the magical *An Orkney Wedding with Sunrise*.

## Sir Peter MAXWELL DAVIES (b. 1934)

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|---|--------------|
| <b>Symphony No. 6 (1996)</b>                        | <b>49:27</b> |
| ① <b>I. Adagio – Allegro</b>                        | <b>20:11</b> |
| ② <b>II. Adagio non troppo</b>                      | <b>9:30</b>  |
| ③ <b>III. Adagio – Più animato</b>                  | <b>19:46</b> |
| ④ <b>Time and the Raven (1995)</b>                  | <b>13:37</b> |
| ⑤ <b>An Orkney Wedding<br/>with Sunrise (1984)*</b> | <b>13:13</b> |

## George McIlwham, Bag-pipes\* Royal Philharmonic Orchestra Peter Maxwell Davies

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