

Peter
MAXWELL DAVIES

Suite from The Boyfriend

**Suite from The Devils • Seven in Nomine
Yesnaby Ground • Farewell to Stromness**

Peter Maxwell Davies, Piano • Aquarius • Nicholas Cleobury



**Peter Maxwell Davies (b. 1934): Suite from The Boyfriend • Suite from The Devil
Seven in Nomine • Yesnaby Ground • Farewell to Stromness**

All the works on this recording have connections with stage or theatre – indicative of the significance which such music has long held for Peter Maxwell Davies, whether in terms of opera, music-theatre and, on at least two occasions, film. Few composers, moreover, have been involved with so widely divergent projects that yet bear so distinctly personal a stamp.

The earliest work here is *Seven In Nomine* (1965), four of whose pieces derive from the melody of the antiphon *Gloria Tibi Trinitas* as heard in the Mass of that title by John Taverner (c.1490-1545) and are among numerous satellite works that emerged while the opera *Taverner* (1970) was being composed. Scored for wind quintet, string quartet and harp, it was first given by the Melos Ensemble with Lawrence Foster at London's Commonwealth Institute on 3rd December 1965.

The first piece opens on solo cello, before the strings unfold in thoughtful as well as methodical terms. The second piece (much the longest) begins with clarinet then flute, other woodwind then the strings entering as the texture becomes fuller and the harmony more astringent – building to a brief yet dissonant climax before it subsides into woodwind arabesques over sustained low strings. The third piece commences with lively gestures on woodwind and harp, the texture growing more complex before thinning out until only cello and harp remain. The fourth piece consists of flowing polyphony from strings over held chords (which 'spell out' the plainsong) for woodwind and harp, heading to a graceful close. The fifth piece then disperses the plainsong over the extreme registers of the woodwind via an increasingly hectic discourse. The sixth piece takes the name of the actual plainsong, which can be heard unfolding across the texture on wind and strings. The seventh piece starts with austere phrases on woodwind and strings, clarinet emerging as soloist in a sombre epilogue.

The two suites featured here are derived from scores that Maxwell Davies wrote for films by Ken Russell (a fruitful collaboration that also made possible pioneering

recordings of two of the composer's seminal works from this time – the monodrama *Eight Songs for a Mad King* and music-theatre piece *Vesalii Icones* [Naxos 8.572712]). Based on Aldous Huxley's novel *The Devils of Loudun*, Russell's film depicts lust, corruption, exorcism and execution within a medieval religious setting. Maxwell Davies' suite, premièred by The Fires of London and the composer at London's Queen Elizabeth Hall on 11th December 1971, gives a good account of the extremes of violence and introspection which are contained within the film as a whole.

Titles consists of sombre phrases that unfold on the lower woodwind and strings against ominous percussive gestures. *Sister Jeanne's Vision* continues on from the above, before the soprano emerges with a setting of the Sanctus. This is then parodied by woodwind and brass at the extremes of their register, over intense chords on strings and assaultive gestures from percussion (flexatone much in evidence), which is ultimately curtailed to leave the soprano against chords on the horn. *Exorcism* opens with a nostalgic tune on trumpet and strings which is parodied as a foxtrot, the music then continuing as fragmentary exchanges between wind and strings with the bird calls momentarily to the fore. A brief climax on brass and timpani subsides to reveal the soprano in dialogue with strings and percussion, prior to continuing unaccompanied. *Execution and End Music* commences with raucous dance music on woodwind and percussion before calming into an eloquent solo for cello over low woodwind and drum strokes. The melody passes to the flute while agitated strings and ever more active percussion increase the emotional intensity towards a sustained climax in which the main theme is stridently declaimed on trumpets and the buzzing of a positive organ is heard. This subsides and, following a brief pause, the music from the opening emerges on flute and lower strings against soft gong strokes – effecting a calm yet desolate conclusion.

That such a project was followed by one so

completely different says much for the versatility of director and composer. In *The Boyfriend* (1971), Russell chose a 1954 musical by Sandy Wilson – updating it from the 1920s to the 1930s and incorporating the original plot into a complex 'play within a play' scenario. Maxwell Davies expanded the original piano and drum-kit scoring to a large dance band that, during the final section, enhances the film's imagery with a range of allusions. The suite, premièred at the same concert as that for *The Devils*, links its seven sections with specially written piano cadenzas.

Honeymoon Fantasy sets the tone with its evocation of the period in dance-band music which is alternately lively and nostalgic, building to a soulful culmination. A brief piano cadenza leads into *Sur la Plage*, with its nimble clarinet solos over dexterous kit-percussion, the melodic line passing first to saxophone before being taken up by woodwind. Another piano cadenza leads into *A Room in Bloomsbury*, one of the most memorable songs in the show with a wistful melody passed between wind and strings (almost a sequence of variations) against lively though discreet backing on percussion. Another piano cadenza leads into *I Could Be Happy*, a further show-stopper accorded suitably suave treatment from woodwind and strings – with the occasional interjection on percussion as if in emulation of tap-dance routines – before moving to a heady culmination. Another piano cadenza leads into *The 'You-Don't-Want'*, whose foxtrot undertow recalls the dance's ubiquity in Maxwell Davies' music of this period, yet here with a wit and insouciance which are very much in keeping with the content of the film and the era in which it is set. Another piano cadenza leads into *Poor Little Pierette*, one of the most affecting numbers and treated to a personable arrangement with banjo to the fore. A final piano cadenza leads into *Polly's Dream*, a fantasy sequence during which elements of

earlier tunes are recalled as, following the initial crescendo, the dance-band launches into a hectic routine that is interspersed with potent reminders of the dream context. Gradually this latter assumes dominance as the alternations between dance and dream become more intertwined, leading to a hushed passage for tremolo strings and percussion from which the dance music makes its final and decisive return.

The final pieces on this recording are taken from *The Yellow Cake Revue* (1980), the 'yellow cake' in question being deposits of uranium found in the Stromness area of the Orkney Islands where Maxwell Davies has made his home, and the mining of which was once a distinct possibility. This work – first heard at Stromness Hotel on June 21st 1980 with the reciter Eleanor Bron and the composer as pianist – was Maxwell Davies' contribution to the successful anti-mining campaign, its 11 numbers comprising songs, recitations and two piano pieces which have transcended their context to become popular recital items in their own right.

Farewell to Stromness has established itself as arguably Maxwell Davies' most familiar piece, its effortless evocation of the old whaling port and also Orkney's second town achieved by simple yet memorable means. The gently undulating melody unfolds over a repeating bass-line such as finds contrast with the more varied and uneasy theme at the centre, and with the transition back into the main theme a deft masterstroke of tonal elision. *Yesnaby Ground* is shorter and livelier, its theme unfolding over a repeated harmonic 'ground' in the bass – thus making the piece refer to its own musical content as well as to a majestic coastal area, with its offshore stack known as Yesnaby Castle, several miles north of Stromness.

Richard Whitehouse

Aquarius

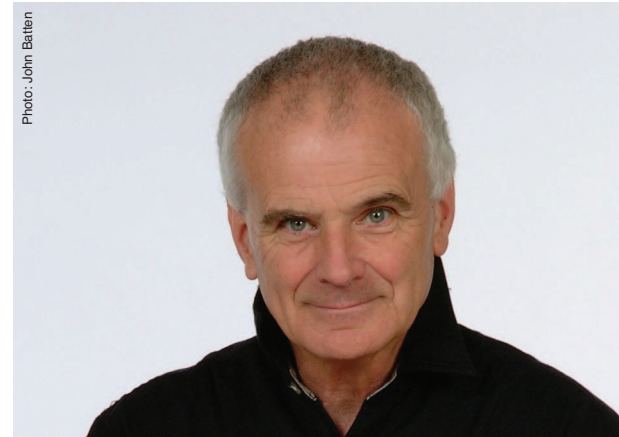
The contemporary music group Aquarius was formed by Nicholas Cleobury in the 1980s and worked for over a decade bringing new music to many in an approachable way in concert, music theatre and opera. Working with their president Michael Tippett and many other leading composers from Lennox Berkeley, Peter Maxwell Davies and Harrison Birtwistle, to George Benjamin, Paul Patterson and Steve Martland, also championing young composers, they appeared frequently on London's Southbank, at many festivals across the UK, and notably in Aldeburgh, Berlin and Vienna with Birtwistle's own production of his *Punch and Judy* and in a touring production of Stravinsky's *The Soldier's Tale* by Timothy West. They broadcast frequently for the BBC and made many recordings including music by Peter Maxwell Davies and of the original versions of Falla's ballet scores *El amor brujo* and *El sombrero de tres picos*. Nicholas Cleobury continued much of their work when he founded the Britten Sinfonia.

Nicholas Cleobury



Nicholas Cleobury is Artistic Director of Mid Wales Opera, Principal Conductor of the John Armitage Memorial (JAM), Principal Conductor and Founder Director of Sounds New, Principal Conductor of the Oxford Bach Choir, and Founder Laureate of the Britten Sinfonia. Cleobury has a wealth of operatic experience, having worked with companies including English National Opera, Glyndebourne and Opera North, Canadian Opera, Chicago Opera Theatre, the Royal Opera Stockholm, and extensively with Zurich Opera. Noted in particular as an orchestral and choral conductor, Nicholas Cleobury has conducted all the major orchestras in the UK, Europe, Scandinavia, Singapore, South Africa and beyond, and choirs including the Swedish and Danish Radio Choirs, the Berkshire Choral Festival (UK and USA) and numerous major choirs in the UK, including the Royal and Huddersfield Choral Societies and the BBC Singers. He is a regular broadcaster with the BBC, Classic fM and on European radio, and his discography includes highly regarded recordings of Mozart Concertos with the Britten Sinfonia and Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, an award-winning CD of the music of Richard Strauss for EMI, Bridge, Headington, Maw and English Music with the Britten Sinfonia, and many others including the Chopin Piano Concertos.

Sir Peter Maxwell Davies



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* (8.572348). His substantial chamber and instrumental catalogue includes the landmark cycle of ten string quartets, the *Naxos Quartets* (8.505225), 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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All the works on this recording have connections with stage or theatre. The two suites are derived from scores that Maxwell Davies wrote for films by Ken Russell and could not be more different. *The Boyfriend*, based on a 1954 musical by Sandy Wilson, introduces a large dance band and period motifs to great effect, while dramatic extremes depicting the film's themes of corruption, exorcism and execution within a medieval religious setting are explored in *The Devils*. *Seven in Nomine* evokes Maxwell Davies' interest in medieval plainsong. The composer himself plays two of his most popular piano pieces with their memorable evocations of Orkney landmarks.

**Sir Peter
MAXWELL DAVIES**
(b. 1934)

Suite from <i>The Boyfriend</i> (1971)	26:11	Seven In Nomine (1965)	16:18
1 Honeymoon Fantasy –	2:11	12 In Nomine	2:13
2 Sur la Plage –	2:01	13 In Nomine	5:10
3 A Room in Bloomsbury –	3:22	14 In Nomine	1:14
4 I could Be Happy –	3:56	15 In Nomine	1:57
5 The You-Don't-Want –	2:41	16 In Nomine	1:13
6 Poor Little Pierette –	3:19	17 Gloria Tibi Trinitas	1:57
7 Polly's Dream	7:41	18 In Nomine	2:34
Suite from <i>The Devils</i> (1971)	20:23	The Yellow Cake Revue (1980) (excerpts)	8:08
8 Titles	2:12	19 Yesnaby Ground (1980)	2:27
9 Sister Jeanne's Vision	5:01	20 Farewell to Stromness (1980)	5:41
10 Exorcism	4:36		
11 Execution and End Music	8:34		

Aquarius • Nicholas Cleobury [1]-[18]
Peter Maxwell Davies, Piano [19]-[20]

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