

Peter
MAXWELL DAVIES

The Beltane Fire

The Turn of the Tide • Sir Charles his Pavan

BBC Philharmonic • Maxwell Davies



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

The Beltane Fire (1995)	37:56	The Turn of the Tide (1992)	24:34
1 Scene I: In the Barn of the Bu		Section I: First Life	
First General Dance – Second General Dance –		8 I. The creation of underwater plants –	2:38
The Greule's Dance – The Greulik's Dance –		9 II. The creation of plants on land –	0:55
The Minister and his Kirk Elders – Sword Dance	6:42	10 III. The creation of the first sea creatures –	1:20
2 Interlude I	2:10	11 IV. The creation of birds –	1:08
		12 V. Mammals, and first people	2:51
3 Scene II: A Field		Section II: Creation Established – Life Flourishes	
Sowing Dance – The Skuddlar's Processional –		13 I. The underwater plants flourish –	0:36
The Minister and his Elders Break the Spell –		14 II. The trees flourish –	0:50
The Skuddlar and the Bu-Master's Daughter	9:12	15 III. The prosperity of fish –	1:11
4 Interlude II	2:11	16 IV. Bird migration –	0:38
5 Scene III: The Kirk	4:10	17 V. Instinct and intellect in mammals and mankind	0:40
6 Scene IV: The Field	4:37	Section V: The Worst that Could Happen –	
7 Scene V: The Beltane Fire		The Corruption and Dissolution of All Nature Completed	
A Spell for Water – A Rune for Ripeness –		18 I. The sea plants are poisoned –	0:54
A Prayer for Good Ale	8:54	19 II. The trees are suffocated –	0:17
		20 III. The fish are deformed and cannot function –	0:16
		21 IV. The birds fall from the sky –	0:34
		22 V. Hubris triumphant –	0:24
		23 Section VI: The Warning is Heeded –	
		Nature Reborn – The Decline is Reversed*	9:23
		24 Sunday Morning (1994)	2:07
		<i>As featured in the BBC Radio 3 programme</i>	
		<i>'Brian Kay's Sunday Morning'</i>	
		25 Threnody on a Plainsong	
		for Michael Vyner (1989)	3:29
		26 Sir Charles his Pavan (1992)	4:43

*The Manchester Cathedral Girls Choir • *The Boys of the Manchester Cathedral Choir

*The Boys of the Manchester Cathedral Voluntary Choir

*The Choir of Manchester Grammar School

BBC Philharmonic • Maxwell Davies

Peter Maxwell Davies (b. 1934): The Beltane Fire • The Turn of the Tide • Sunday Morning
Threnody on a Plainsong for Michael Vyner • Sir Charles his Pavan

The works on this recording comprise a varied miscellany of Peter Maxwell Davies' orchestral output across the earlier 1990s. Most substantial here is *The Beltane Fire*, described as a 'choreographic poem' and derived from a ballet project which fell through, and premièred by the BBC Philharmonic with the composer at Symphony Hall, Boston on 3rd April, 1995. What resulted is a set of imaginary dances whose balletic impulse is allotted to the musical ideas and instruments on which these are realized. The underlying confrontation between collective traditions and the advent of new ideas with their implications of 'progress' is a familiar premise in Maxwell Davies' music – graphically so in the vocal symphony *Black Pentecost* [Naxos 8.572359] – but is represented here through a notably subtle emotional complexity. (Although the piece is arguably best listened to as an abstract entity, the composer has also provided a detailed synopsis covering each of its seven sections, and this can be consulted at the composer's own website, maxopus.com.

The *First Scene* opens with sombre phrases on woodwind and strings, percussion adding to the ominous effect. Gradually the rest of the orchestra enters, a livelier passage for upper woodwind and pizzicato strings leading to a jagged outburst on brass and percussion which sees the tempo accelerate into another glowering outburst on brass and timpani. This finds contrast with a spectral passage for flutes, before strings have a brief threnody leading into the *First Interlude*, a brief yet highly tender and folk-inflected dialogue for violin and harp.

The *Second Scene* begins with menacing brass then heads into a restless passage in which woodwind (notably cor anglais) are to the fore. Solo violin then unfolds a further folk-like melody which draws in the other strings and brass, subsiding into chorale-like woodwind writing before the strings resume their earlier threnody and the texture gradually thins out. There follows a leisurely expansion in the same rapt atmosphere, leading into the *Second Interlude* – an animated dance for flute, harp and percussion finally joined by tolling bells.

The *Third Scene* sees intricately divided strings joined by brass then woodwind as a violent climax is reached. This tails off to leave solo violin musing soulfully over sustained strings, the furtive ambience continuing when the addition of lower woodwind quietly ushers in the *Fourth Scene*. This initially focusses on suspenseful woodwind and percussion, then strident brass effects a more sustained build-up that also draws in the percussion. Brass and strings are then combined in an even more forceful accumulation, though this is rapidly curtailed.

The *Fifth Scene* brings the dramatic and musical elements to a head as it builds swiftly to an angry outburst on brass, countered by animated strings and percussion – a third element duly emerging as capering woodwind introduce a new dance-like motif. This is soon transformed into a hectic dance for the whole orchestra, cut off to leave lower brass and marimba musing in its wake. The dance tries vainly to reassert itself, but shimmering percussion initiate a last section in which woodwind muse on earlier ideas as ethereal strings recede beyond earshot.

Even in the context of Maxwell Davies' wide-ranging output for children and young people, *The Turn of the Tide* has a distinctive profile. Here the composer's music has been juxtaposed with that written and/or improvised by amateur players who are situated in five groups, placed between the professionals. It can be tackled by either full or chamber orchestras, with the first hearing given by the Northern Sinfonia and Richard McNichol in Newcastle on 12th February, 1993.

The piece takes an evolutionary approach to convey its concern over environmental pollution. In the first section, *First Life*, lower woodwind and strings emerge – followed by violins and woodwind at the top of their register 8. Lifting woodwind and strings are joined by livelier strings and percussion in a sudden build-up 9, then dextrous phrases on marimba incite comparable activity on woodwind and percussion 10. A vaulting theme on trumpet is followed by swirling activity on woodwind

and percussion 11, before undulating brass gestures gradually coalesce into a somnolent chorale unfolding over pizzicato strings 12.

In the second section, *Creation Established – Life Flourishes*, gently trilling arabesques on upper woodwind and percussion create an enticing ambience 13, continued by eloquently wrought brass phrases that are briefly prolonged by lower strings 14. Strings take up the narrative in an increasingly lively interplay with woodwind 15, then brass and percussion engage in a reticent dialogue which also draws on earlier motifs 16, before the woodwind and strings are discreetly underpinned by percussion as the music stealthily fades away 17.

The third and fourth sections, depicting the flourishing of nature then its gradual decline, are created solely by the amateur players. Maxwell Davies' own music resumes in the fifth section, *The Worst that Could Happen – The Corruption and Dissolution of All Nature Completed*, as woodwind muse uncertainly on previous motifs as the texture remains frozen and distant 18. Lower brass sound a fragmented threnody that swells towards a brief crescendo 19, then woodwind and side drum sound an animated tattoo that builds to a threatening climax 20, while woodwind muse aimlessly as descending strings and strident brass gain impetus 21. Elements of the last five fragments then combine in a brief yet desperate outburst 22.

The sixth section, *The Warning is Heeded – Nature Reborn – The Decline is Reversed*, forms a culmination in all respects. Solo trumpet then flute and oboe sound plaintively over upper strings, which latter continue with the melody that is suddenly taken up by the voices over full orchestra in (to quote Maxwell Davies) "a triumphant dance of all creation". Aspects of this are exchanged between strings and brass, voices continuing with the chant prior to an ominous crescendo on brass. The voices proceed as before, their percussion undertow growing more insistent before it leaves them exposed over strings. A final upsurge on brass and percussion results in violent dissonance, but voices (and their message of hope) ultimately prevail 23.

Maxwell Davies' only designated 'signature tune', *Sunday Morning* was written in 1994 to introduce the Radio 3 programme *Brian Kay's Sunday Morning*. In its full version (which makes overt the music's direct lineage to the lighter orchestral works of Sibelius), this commences with a plaintive melody for woodwind (cor anglais to the fore) over strings that undergoes several changes in both mood and colouring as it rises towards a more uncertain and even ominous culmination, before moving into calmer environs then, at last, regaining its initial poise.

The closing two pieces on this disc are both memorial tributes. *Threnody on a Plainsong for Michael Vyner* was written to commemorate the former artistic director of the London Sinfonietta and was first performed by that ensemble with the composer at Glyndebourne Opera House on 25th October 1989 (six days after the death of the dedicatee). After the plainsong has unfolded sombrely on brass, the strings begin an elaboration that draws in the woodwind as the texture quickly becomes fuller and more expressive. The semblance of a climax is then followed by a final reiteration of the theme which recedes into silence.

Sir Charles his Pavan was written to commemorate Sir Charles Groves, the conductor who had encouraged Maxwell Davies in his earliest years and who also – while at the helm of the BBC Northern Orchestra (later the BBC Philharmonic) during 1944-51 – gave many concerts which were attended by the budding teenage composer. Woodwind plaintively intone the pavan (based on a theme that was written by Maxwell Davies when he was twelve), which is heard more sombrely on brass and then moves onto the strings for a more intensive elaboration that culminates in a short-lived climax. The theme presently re-emerges on flute – from where, in the company of other woodwind, it dies down to a subdued and poignant close.

Richard Whitehouse

23 Final Chorus: The Warning is Heeded – Nature Reborn

Text by Peter Maxwell Davies

May tides turn bright.
Pure salt spangles, spindrift glint,
a-shimmer through the mirrored spread
of scatheless cirrus sky.

May reborn woodlands' spangled shadows
safeguard night-jar, fawn and fox.
May wildcat stalk again.
May lichen flourish on the stone,
where wheatfields,
mottled gold and green,
make waves, unsullied as the sea.

May we who hesitate here on the edge
turn to join the round of all Nature's dance:
Let's not hesitate any longer,
for time's not running out on us –
till we join in the dance –
Nature's helpmates,
certain of our right place,
Nature's servants,

certain of all the right steps in the dance,
in tune with all Nature's creation,
in step, in time
with the whole of creation,
in step, in time,
in step, in time,
in tune with all creation.

[Text repeats from 'May we who hesitate here on the edge.']

For the sake of our children,
and our children's children,
may resolve be firm, immutable, evergreen,
our hallowed trust,
our hallowed trust – evergreen.

The Turn Of The Tide
Music by Peter Maxwell Davies
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Manchester Cathedral Choir



Photo: Derrick May

The critically acclaimed Manchester Cathedral Choir is part of the historic fabric of the city of Manchester. It has been in existence for over five hundred years and consists of up to twenty choristers (girls and boys aged 8-13 years) and lay clerks, who are among Manchester's leading professional male singers. The Choir has sung for the recent visit of the Archbishops of Canterbury and York to Manchester, visits by Her Majesty the Queen in 2002 and 2007, and other high profile occasions at the Cathedral. BBC Radio 3 broadcasts Choral Evensong from Manchester Cathedral on a regular basis and the Choir have made a number of recordings and numerous radio and television broadcasts. The Choir also tours to sing in other venues around the UK and abroad. The activities of the Choir contribute greatly to Manchester's

historic and musical credentials and do much to raise the profile of Manchester as one of the UK's destination cathedral cities. The Choir is directed by Manchester Cathedral's Organist and Master of the Choristers, Christopher Stokes, and the choristers are all educated at Chetham's School of Music.

Manchester Grammar School Choir



The Manchester Grammar School Choir comprises boys from the ages of eleven to eighteen. Many of the boys involved are also talented instrumentalists, playing in other school and youth ensembles. The choir numbers approximately seventy boys. Over the past few years the Choir has visited France, Spain, Germany, the Czech Republic, Italy, Canada and Holland to give concerts, has performed on British radio and television, and sung with both the Hallé and BBC Philharmonic Orchestras. It has featured in recent performances in school of Mozart's *Requiem*, Elgar's *Dream of Gerontius*, and Britten's *War Requiem* and performs a wide variety of repertoire regularly at school concerts, and in Manchester Cathedral and the Royal Northern College of Music.

Manchester Cathedral Voluntary Choir

The Manchester Cathedral Voluntary Choir usually meets at least twice each week to rehearse and sing for services and concerts within the Cathedral timetable. The Choir sings a cross-section of the whole repertoire of traditional Cathedral music, including works by Palestrina, Byrd, Mozart, Stanford and Howells. Throughout the year, the choir also participates in a number of extra services and events in the cathedral and throughout the diocese. These include special services at Harvest, Advent, Epiphany and Holy Week. The choir has made appearances on television and has toured abroad to France, Ireland, Germany and Switzerland. For the last few years, during the late August Bank Holiday, the choir has sung for services in various cathedrals, abbeys and colleges around the country.

BBC Philharmonic



Photo: Sussie Ahlberg

1982, soon after moving to the BBC's new building on Oxford Road in Manchester, it changed its name to the BBC Philharmonic. As an internationally-renowned orchestra, the BBC Philharmonic regularly tours in Europe and Asia.

Sir Peter Maxwell Davies

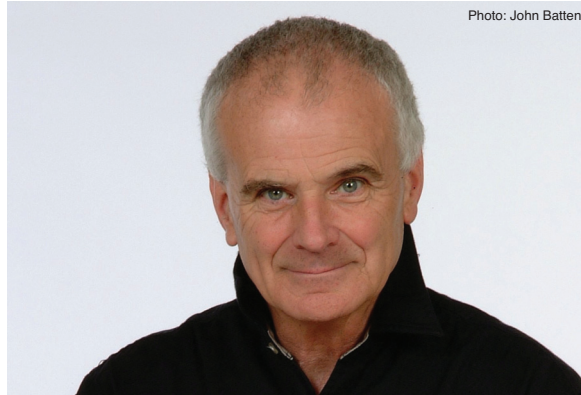


Photo: John Batten

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* (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.

www.maxopus.com www.intermusica.co.uk/maxwelldavies

The works on this recording embrace a varied miscellany of Peter Maxwell Davies' orchestral output from the early 1990s. The 'choreographic poem' *The Beltane Fire* pits the sternness of the Reformation clergy against the pagan traditions of the Orkney Islands. Concerned with environmental pollution, *The Turn of the Tide* ultimately reaches "a triumphant dance of all creation", while the *Threnody* and *Pavan* are poignant memorial tributes for significant figures in the composer's life.

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(b. 1934)

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BBC Philharmonic • Maxwell Davies

Previously released on Collins Classics

A detailed track list and the English sung text can be found inside the booklet.

Recorded by arrangement with BBC North at Studio 7, New Broadcasting House, Manchester, England, on 11th and 12th July, 1995 (tracks 1-7), in September 1992 (tracks 8-23 and 26), on 22nd July, 1994 (track 24), and live in Cheltenham Town Hall at the 47th Cheltenham International Music Festival of Music, England, on 12th and 13th July, 1991 (track 25) • Producers: Veronica Slater (tracks 1-23, 25, 26); Brian Pidgeon (track 24) Engineers: John Timperley (tracks 1-23, 25, 26); Don Hartridge (track 24)

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