

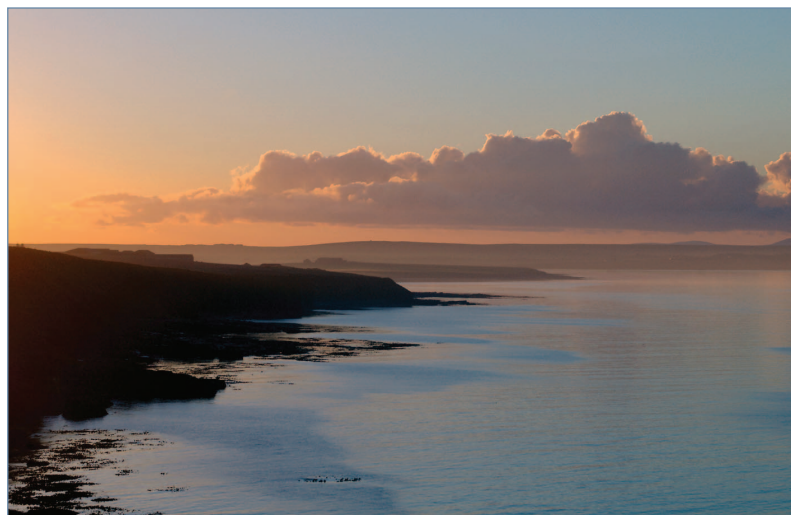
NAXOS

Peter
MAXWELL DAVIES

Symphony No. 1

Mavis in Las Vegas

BBC Philharmonic • Maxwell Davies



Peter Maxwell Davies (b. 1934)

Symphony No. 1 • Mavis in Las Vegas

Symphony No. 1

When I started the present work, in 1973, I had no idea that it would grow into a symphony. The Philharmonia Orchestra had commissioned an orchestral work for 1974, and I wrote a moderately long single movement, provisionally called *Black Pentecost*. This title, taken from the end of a George Mackay Brown poem, concerns the ruined and deserted crofts in the Orkney valley, which had become my home, and I had set it, for soprano and guitar, a short time before in the song-cycle *Dark Angels*:

*The poor and the good fires are all quenched.
Now, cold angel, keep the valley
From the bedlam and cinders of a Black Pentecost.*

The symphony eventually grew into the first extended orchestral work where the music was permeated by the presence of the sea and the landscape of this isolated place off the north coast of Scotland. I felt very keenly that this single movement was incomplete, and withdrew it before performance. It was, as it were, budding and putting out shoots, and although I had firmly drawn a final double bar-line, it was reaching out across this, suggesting transformations beyond the confines of a single movement.

Its next step was to become two movements in one, the existing movement compressing to become a short slow movement that changes into a scherzo of a kind, but with the tripartite formal connotations of that name reduced to a 'ghost' in the form's far hinterground. This is now the second movement, a *lento* that becomes a *presto scherzo*.

Next, backwards from it, the second movement's first chord sprouted a large new span of music, which eventually became the present separate first movement. The point of connection is still aurally present, in that what is now the last chord of the first movement makes, retrospectively, the first chord of the second.

The ending of the second movement was no conclusion, so a few months later a slow movement proper followed – and finally, the concluding *Presto*. The scope of the original provisional title had long been outgrown. I had been bolstering my own orchestral composition by analysing various symphonies and large orchestral works in some detail, and applied in this work certain symphonic solutions and devices into which I believe I gained some kind of insight for the first time – hence I ventured to call the work '*Symphony*'. It might be constructive, for the acute listener, if I pointed out these symphonic 'antecedents'.

The transformation from *lento* to *scherzo* in the second movement stems from the first movement of Sibelius's *Fifth Symphony*, where a *moderato* sonata-style movement becomes a *scherzo*. The cross-phrasing and time-perspective devices in my third movement were developed from the opening of Schumann's *Second*, and the overall shape and some of the detailing of formal structure in the last movement came, on the surface level, from '*Don*' in *Pli Selon Pli* of Boulez.

The end of the whole work – the stabbing off-beat chords – is an adaptation of Sibelius's solution at the end of his *Fifth*. These chords, in my work, are a fifth above their harmonically 'logical' position. I did not want the last gesture to sound 'final' in a rhetorical way, giving the impression that I thought I had completely worked through and solved the problems posed by the symphony and could therefore afford to write a (falsely) affirmative conclusion – but, rather, to make audible my impression that the argument was not concluded and that I was aware I had only opened up fields of investigation and not finally harvested all their fruits.

As in my previous works, there is no 'orchestration' as such – the instrumentation functions simply to make the musical argument clear, and one of this size and complexity needs large forces. An unusual feature in the orchestra, however, is the percussion section. It consists of tuned instruments only – the glockenspiel, crotales,

marimba and tubular bells, together with celesta, harp and timpani forming a section of the orchestra which carries as much of the thematic and harmonic argument as any other section, and, unusually, has material as musically demanding.

Perhaps it would help to put listeners in a frame of mind sympathetic to at least the intention, if not the result of this work, to know that possibly the creative artists I admire most are two twelfth-century writers, whose language, to my mind, builds the only sound-structures parallel to the statement made by the medieval cathedrals – Dante and St Thomas Aquinas. To their vision and example I owe a great deal of what might be positive about my efforts towards a musical logic.

The work is dedicated to William Glock, as a mark of friendship and in appreciation of his work for contemporary music during his years as Music Controller at the BBC.

Mavis in Las Vegas

In 1995 the BBC Philharmonic toured the United States, performing under the batons of Yan Pascal Tortelier and myself for four weeks, from California across the whole country to Boston, New York and Washington. One of the most unforgettable stops was at Las Vegas, that most unreal synthetic city in the middle of a desert, devoted to gambling, quick weddings and the cult of kitsch so tacky as to be a source of wonder and inspiration.

While I was in Las Vegas, the following article appeared in the London Independent newspaper.

My attempts to contact Sir Peter Maxwell Davies last week during his 15-date, coast-to-coast US tour with the BBC Philharmonic proved unexpectedly problematic. I rang the Flamingo Hilton, Las Vegas, at 9am US time, by arrangement, and asked to be connected to the composer's room. "I'm sorry," replied the receptionist, "I just lurve your British accent, but could you just repeat the name more slowly, please." I repeated it. "Davis? How do you spell

that, please? Oh, Day-vees." Short pause. "I'm sorry, we have no Mr. Day-vees registered."

I suggested we try Maxwell. Then Peter. Then Sir. "I'm sorry, What's 'sir'". "It means he's a knight of the realm. He's a famous British composer, he's giving a concert in Las Vegas tonight and he's meant to be staying at the Flamingo Hilton."

"I'm sorry, but if he's a famous British composer, what's he doing staying at the Flamingo? No one stays at the Flamingo if they can afford to stay at the Las Vegas Hilton. Shall I transfer you there?" She does. I repeat the routine. Same result.

Forty minutes of to-ing and fro-ing between the composer's British and American press agents solved the mystery. Maxwell Davies had been in the Flamingo all along registered as Mavis. Guess they had some problem with his accent.'

It is easy to understand how my name 'Maxwell Davies' could, in the United States, be contracted to 'Mavis' for ease of computerized registration: I immediately imagined Mavis having wonderful adventures in the glitzy environment of Las Vegas.

Although in effect this work could be regarded as a concert overture, it is strictly a theme with variations. At the outset, we hear Mavis's theme on solo violin, and are immediately transported to the gambling hall of a large hotel – always lit by harsh electric light, windowless, disorientating, with the C major (and inexplicably, the odd D flat) of the sputtering gambling-machine filling the air. Mavis makes her entrance – I imagine her all outrageous flounces and hip-jerks, her generous ball-gown streaming, descending a magnificent (pink!) curved staircase into the gambling area.

We move out into the street – the 'Strip' – to hear music issuing from a club, a wedding chapel, and an Elvis shrine. There is a visit to Caesar's Palace, where a huge central fountain, bathed in violet-sweet light, boasts not only magnificent water displays but moving Classical

statues which intone platitudes with Shakespearean accents. We visit the Liberace Museum, with its displays of impossibly glamorous costumes, cars and grand pianos, and look at the city skyline glowering and twinkling, seen from the desert at night – an oddly disorientating experience. Finally, we watch the 'volcano' erupt – all synthetic geysers and controlled explosions of gas, with an expensive light show, and loudspeakers relaying suitable rumblings and bangs – with the 'Mavis' theme finally triumphant through it all.

The work is dedicated to Mary Jo Connealy, of Columbia Artists Management Inc, New York, who did so much to make our American tour possible. She accompanied us throughout, with extreme grace, really practical help and encouragement.

Peter Maxwell Davies

BBC Philharmonic



Photo: Jon Parker Lee

The BBC Philharmonic was founded in 1934 as the BBC Northern Orchestra, and changed its name to the BBC Philharmonic in 1982. It has now moved from its earlier home in Manchester to nearby MediaCityUK in Salford Quays, joining other programme departments at the BBC's new Northern base. Its main concert series will continue at the Bridgewater Hall in Manchester. The Chief Conductor is Juanjo Mena, who succeeds the Conductor Laureate Gianandrea Noseda, who led the orchestra for nearly ten years. The orchestra is regularly invited to major European cities and has in recent years performed in Prague, Vienna and Budapest, with tours also to Japan and China, the last under the

now Conductor Emeritus, Vassily Sinaisky. In 1991 Sir Peter Maxwell Davies became the BBC Philharmonic's first Composer/Conductor and was succeeded in 2000 by James MacMillan, followed in September 2009 by the Austrian composer HK Gruber. The BBC Philharmonic has made a number of recordings, including over 200 with Chandos Records. Most concerts are broadcast live or recorded for BBC Radio 3.

bbc.co.uk/philharmonic

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

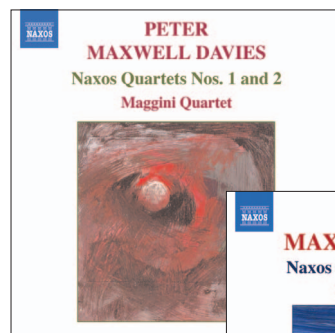
Blood!). His huge output of orchestral work comprises numerous symphonies and concerti, and light orchestral works such as *An Orkney Wedding, with Sunrise* and *Mavis in Las Vegas*. His substantial chamber and instrumental catalogue includes the landmark cycle of ten string quartets, the *Naxos Quartets*, 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.

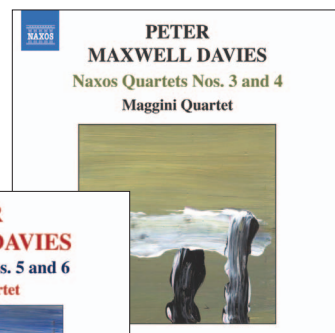
Maxwell Davies was knighted in 1987 and appointed Master of the Queen's Music in 2004, in which rôle he seeks to raise the profile of music in Great Britain, as well as writing many works for Her Majesty the Queen and for royal occasions.

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www.intermusica.co.uk/maxwelldavies

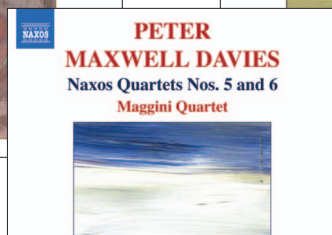
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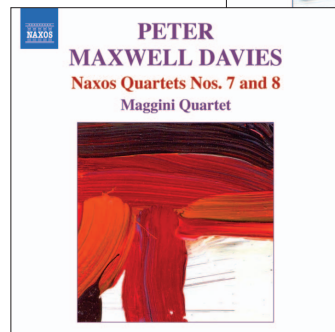
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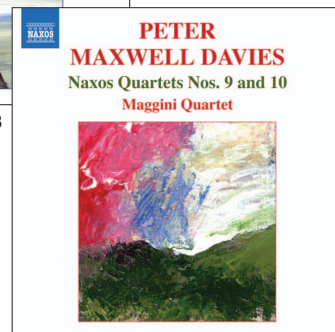
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Peter Maxwell Davies's visionary music has gained him a knighthood, the prestigious position of Master of the Queen's Music and a leading position among the foremost composers of our time. The two works on this disc, authoritatively conducted by the composer, show two sides of his remarkable musical imagination. The *First Symphony* is permeated by the presence of the sea and the haunting landscape of his home in the Orkney Islands, while the vibrant theme and variations *Mavis in Las Vegas* is an exuberant 'tribute' to the glitzy gambling capital of the world, in all its hyper-reality.

Sir Peter
MAXWELL DAVIES
(b. 1934)

Symphony No. 1 • Mavis in Las Vegas

Symphony No. 1 (1976) 54:54

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|-----------------------|-------|
| ① I. Presto | 16:44 |
| ② II. Lento – Allegro | 10:14 |
| ③ III. Adagio | 14:57 |
| ④ IV. Presto | 12:59 |

⑤ **Mavis in Las Vegas (1997) 13:09**

BBC Philharmonic • Maxwell Davies

Previously released on Collins Classics in 1995 and 1998

Recorded at Studio 7, New Broadcasting House, Manchester, UK,
on 8th and 9th December, 1994 (tracks 1-4), and on 10th July, 1997 (track 5)

Producers: Veronica Slater (tracks 1-4), Brian Pidgeon (track 5)

Engineers: John Timperley (tracks 1-4), Don Hartridge (track 5)

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