

NAXOS

Peter
MAXWELL DAVIES

Symphony No. 3

Cross Lane Fair

BBC Philharmonic • Maxwell Davies



Peter Maxwell Davies (b. 1934)
Symphony No. 3 • Cross Lane Fair

When I wrote this symphony I thought of it in terms of purely abstract music, and involved myself with problems of largescale articulation – that is, with musical architecture, particularly as a framework for long-range harmonic planning. It was only in the course of rehearsal and performance that I realised that the score was also my most dynamic seascape to date, and that the architectural proportional devices – particularly the Fibonacci series used in direct imitation of Brunelleschi's renaissance church plans – related at least as directly to the spiralling mollusk shells on my desk, collected along the shore below my house, and to the spirallings of the huge breakers crashing in from the Atlantic on that same shore. All of these reflect basic universal design shapes common to all of nature and to many human artifacts. Indeed, I like to see these structural principles as archetypes, making the very act of creation and of perception – possible.

The thing that will strike the first-time listener most strongly may be the presence, through the whole work, of the sea reflecting the circumstances of its composition, at home in a tiny isolated cottage on a remote island off the north coast of Scotland, on a clifftop overlooking the meeting of the Atlantic Ocean and the North Sea. Here the sound, sight, and mood of the sea influences your whole existence, all your perceptions, and – particularly in winter, shudders right through the stones of the house, and indeed through your very bones.

It would be misleading, however, to hear the work only as a tone-painting. The chief compositional concern was the clarification of tonal-modal progression, borrowing from renaissance architectural practice regarding "vanishing points" in the planning of perspective. Here the progression governs not only all rhythmic articulation on both a large and small scale, but also all tonality – defining harmonic design, over the largest of timespans down to the smallest filigree detail.

It is just this necessity of making harmonic sense through a large slice of time that attracts me to symphonic

writing. This is also probably the toughest problem of composition today, the solution of which can only be found through experiment, trial, and error. There are no short cuts or rules of thumb, and the eventual successful outcome also implies a bridging of the gulf between so much contemporary music and the informed and well-disposed general music public – but without compromise, and at the most intense physical, emotional, and spiritual levels.

The symphony's first movement starts quietly and slowly, stating the basic tonality of D, with the flutes borrowing a plainsong – one of the early medieval Roman church chants – addressed to the Archangel Michael. (This is one of my favourite chants, quite apart from its liturgical connections with the Angel who weighs our souls for judgement after death; it is used in all sorts of guises throughout the symphony.) The pace accelerates to a dramatic *alla breve* where I hope first time listeners won't get too seasick, though they must take quite a buffeting. After a violent return to the opening material and tonality, the music is blown right away, as if it were on scurrying air-currents.

There follows a pair of scherzos. In the first of these, the ear traces an experience analogous to the eye's perception in a Brunelleschi church nave, with a steady progress towards the altar from a fixed central point along a clear, straight line, revealing all the symmetries and proportions correctly. In the third movement, the experience is distorted, all the proportions becoming slightly "skew-whiff", off-centre, as if we experience the same nave from one side.

I would like to point out two additional features of the symphony: the first is in the second movement, where the pace slackens and we are left with an isolated high B on tremolo strings and piccolo. In the following section, through to the end of the movement, the physical inspiration was a towering cliff-face full of nesting seabirds, whirling and calling (spirals again), where the whole world was filled with the beat of wings and

echoings of haunting, eerie sounds. The second feature is in the third movement, in which I borrowed a device from the *Burlesque* of Mahler's *Ninth Symphony*, where the tumult stops and the composer lets in "windows", through which we catch glimpses of music from the next movement. In both Mahler's and my case, we catch the slow strains of an adagio finale.

This brooding, final movement takes material from the first, giving it time to breathe and expand, and to develop its full expressive, harmonic potential. The ending recalls the close of the first movement, but here the music floats away in exaggerated slow motion, as if time has stood still.

Peter Maxwell Davies

Lighter pieces have been prominent in Davies' output over the past quarter-century. One such is *Cross Lane Fair*, composed in 1994 and first performed on 18 June that year at St Magnus Cathedral, Kirkwall by Mark Jordan on Northumbrian pipes (an instrument which Davies has utilized in several later works), Rob Lea on *bodhran* (a traditional Irish drum) and the BBC Philharmonic conducted by the composer. Its nine continuous sections were inspired by the memories of a fairground near Salford which Davies visited several times with his parents during the 1930s, evoking the sights and

sounds he encountered there before, in his own words "I, as a small child, fell asleep in my father's arms, to be carried home, down Cross Lane, to 55 Trafford Road".

Introduction opens with ruminative writing for strings which accords well with that for the pipes that soon assumes the foreground. Brass then woodwind sound an ambivalent note before activity mounts going into *Fairground* with its march-like processional, presently finding contrast in *Ghost Train* in which the pipes remain thoughtfully in the background while various percussion enhance the bizarre setting. A fanfare-like *Transition* soon subsides, making way for *The Bearded Lady and the Five-Legged Sheep* with the pipes at their most song-like against a steady percussive rhythm while the harmonies become more dissonant. A further *Transition* features a nonchalant trumpet theme against antagonistic brass, then *The Juggler* focusses on animated woodwind accompanied by suitably dexterous percussion and soon taking in a lively solo from the bodhran, much to the appreciation of all those present. A final *Transition* features atmospheric writing for percussion and muted brass, before *The Roundabout* sees the return of the pipes along with allusions to earlier ideas in a stealthy recessional, with a plaintive *cadenza* for pipes bringing about the haunting close.

Richard Whitehouse

BBC Philharmonic



Photo: Sussie Ahlburg

The BBC Philharmonic is part of the BBC's family of six performing groups, and tours widely in the United Kingdom and internationally. Most concerts are broadcast live or recorded for BBC Radio 3. The BBC Philharmonic was founded in 1934 as the BBC Northern Orchestra, and changed its name to the BBC Philharmonic in 1982. It has recently moved from Manchester to nearby MediaCityUK in Salford Quays, joining other programme departments at the BBC's new Northern base. Its main concert series continues at The Bridgewater Hall in Manchester. Juanjo Mena took up the post of Chief Conductor at the start of the 2011/12 season, succeeding

Gianandrea Noseda who led the orchestra for nearly ten years and is now Conductor Laureate. John Storgårds is now the orchestra's Principal Guest Conductor, and the distinguished Austrian composer H.K. Gruber is the orchestra's Composer/Conductor. The BBC Philharmonic has made over 200 recordings with Chandos Records. The orchestra is supported by Salford City Council, enabling it to build active links in the area through a busy learning and community programme. bbc.co.uk/philharmonic Twitter @bbcphilharmonic

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 *Kommiltonen!* (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 www.intermusica.co.uk/maxwelldavies

Peter Maxwell Davies's *Symphony No. 3* is the product of symmetry and proportion based on the principles of Renaissance architecture. It is also a dynamic and thrilling seascape, one that both invokes medieval chant and summons up the violent buffeting of the waves, and the stirring cliff-face full of nesting birds. The dual inspirations of proportion and the natural world are seamlessly coalesced, and the *Symphony* teems with evocative sounds and brooding passages both expansive and time-defying in their beauty. *Cross Lane Fair* is a lighter work, scored for Northumbrian pipes, *bodhran* (an Irish drum) and chamber orchestra, inspired by the memories of a fairground that Maxwell Davies visited as a child.

Sir Peter MAXWELL DAVIES (b. 1934)

Symphony No. 3 (1984)

57:48

- 1 I. Lento – Adagio – Andante – Moderato – Allegretto – Allegro moderato – Allegro – Allegro alla breve 18:50
- 2 II. Allegro 9:04
- 3 III. Allegro vivace: scorrevole e bisbigliando 7:45
- 4 IV. Lento – Adagio flessibile 22:09

Cross Lane Fair (1994)*

14:52

- 5 Introduction – 2:15
- 6 Fairground – 1:04
- 7 Ghost Train – 1:58
- 8 Transition – 0:45
- 9 The Bearded Lady and the Five-Legged Sheep – 1:40
- 10 Transition – 0:29
- 11 The Juggler – 2:34
- 12 Transition – 0:51
- 13 The Roundabout 3:16

Mark Jordan, Northumbrian Pipes* • Rob Lea, Bodhran*
BBC Philharmonic • Maxwell Davies

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