



**PETER DICKINSON** PIANOS VOICES AND BRASS

ELISABETH SÖDERSTRÖM SOLNA BRASS THE KING'S SINGERS  
ERIC PARKIN PETER DICKINSON



## PETER DICKINSON

### PIANOS VOICES AND BRASS

[1] BACH IN BLUE (2004) piano 6:20  
Peter Dickinson, piano

[2] WINTER AFTERNOONS [Emily Dickinson] (1971) 10:56  
The King's Singers  
Nigel Perrin, counter-tenor • Alastair Hume, counter-tenor  
Alastair Thompson, tenor • Simon Carrington, baritone  
Brian Kay, bass • with Rodney Slatford, double bass

FIVE DIVERSIONS (1963) 10:16  
[3] Amiable 1:31  
[4] Lyrical 2:23  
[5] Gently jazzy 2:09  
[6] Quiet and dreamy 2:27  
[7] Lively and brash 1:46  
Peter Dickinson, piano

SONATAS FOR PIANO WITH TAPE PLAYBACK (1987) 19:50  
[8] Prelude 4:22  
[9] Trance 8:53  
[10] Confrontations 2:49  
[11] Epilogue 3:46  
Eric Parkin, piano

FOUR EASY PIECES (1962) 5:37  
[12] Mostly Fifths 1:15  
[13] Judas Tree Blues 1:36  
[14] Just a Tune 1:49  
[15] Black and White 0:57  
Peter Dickinson, piano

EIGHT VERY EASY PIECES (1979) 5:14  
[16] For Erik Satie 0:44  
[17] Bells 0:38  
[18] A Bit of Syncopation 0:45  
[19] A Bit of Syncopation inverted 0:44  
[20] Quintuple 0:44  
[21] Lochrian Mode 0:37  
[22] Exchanges 0:39  
[23] Just a Waltz 1:23

THE UNICORNS (1982) 15:08  
[24] Fanfares and Choruses 2:38  
[25] Lullaby [John Heath-Stubbs] 3:44  
[26] Dance 2:27  
[27] Interrupted Love Song [John Heath-Stubbs] 3:02  
[28] A Celebration Fugue 2:51  
[29] The Ballad of St. Brendan [John Heath-Stubbs] 3:48

The British composer, Peter Dickinson, was born at Lytham St Annes, Lancashire, on 15 November 1934. His musical personality ranges widely from the three substantial concertos for organ, piano and violin (the first two on Albany Records TROY360) to the witty *Rags, Blues and Parodies* collection (TROY369). *The Song Cycles* CD (TROY365) shows Dickinson responding to major poets such as Auden, e.e.cummings and Dylan Thomas and the vocal works here expand the picture of his literary interests with settings of Emily Dickinson and the British poet John Heath-Stubbs.

Dickinson has worked with some of the leading international performers on this CD: *Winter Afternoons* was commissioned by The King's Singers; *The Unicorns* by Solna Brass for them and Elisabeth Söderström; and *Sonatas*, Dickinson's most complex work with tape-playback, by Eric Parkin. At the other extreme this collection includes precisely tailored works for beginning pianists as well as the set of *Five*

48 Preludes and Fugues. I have often felt that there must also be a blues lurking somewhere beneath Bach's chords so *Bach in Blue* is a tribute to Lennox Berkeley, whose music shows the influence of both Bach and the blues, as well as to his son Michael — and to the incomparable Johann Sebastian himself. (See: *The Music of Lennox Berkeley* by Peter Dickinson, Boydell, 2002)

## [2] WINTER AFTERNOONS (1971)

*Winter Afternoons* was commissioned by The King's Singers with funds from the Vaughan Williams Trust and premiered at the Queen Elizabeth Hall, London, on 19 January 1971, with John Gray, double bass. It was later made the basis of a TV film on BBC 2 directed by William Fitzwater; produced by John Amis and shown on 16 July 1972.

The work is a sombre cantata based on three poems from *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson* (1830-1886), edited by Thomas H. Johnson (Faber & Faber, 1970). One of her major themes is death, treated in finely polished stanzas owing much to the metre of hymns. The King's Singers often used a double bass in their lighter numbers so a serious use of a virtuoso player seemed appropriate, possibly as a symbol of death with the instrument's characteristic baleful sound. The bass player is the accompanist, although there are solo interludes, and the main material of the piece is derived from the series of bell-like two-part chords in harmonics heard just before the voices enter:

The first poem, 'One dignity delays for all', deals with the ceremonial of funeral rituals; the second, 'There's a certain slant of light', introduces a hymn-tune (*North Coates* by T. R. Matthews, 1826-1910) in canon between the high double-bass and the three lower voices; finally 'Departed — to the judgement' opens with some hysteria

## FIVE DIVERSIONS (1963)

[3] *Amiable* - [4] *Lyrical* - [5] *Gently jazzy* - [6] *Quiet and dreamy* - [7] *Lively and brash*

*The Five Diversions*, dedicated to my wife Bridget, were composed shortly after I acquired a Hugh Gough single-strung clavichord. I performed them soon afterwards on the harpsichord, made a version for small orchestra in 1970 and played them on BBC Radio 3 on the clavichord in 1989. To indicate this flexibility they were published as 'for keyboard instruments' in 1966.

## SONATAS FOR PIANO WITH TAPE PLAYBACK (1987)

[8] *Prelude* - [9] *Trance* - [10] *Confrontations* - [11] *Epilogue*

*Sonatas* was commissioned by Eric Parkin with funds from Greater London Arts and he gave the premiere at the Wigmore Hall, London, on 26 July 1987 with the first broadcast on BBC Radio 3 on 13 March 1989, which is the recording used here.

In Charles Ives' Postface to *114 Songs* he envisages:

'The instinctive and progressive interest of every man in art...until the day will come when every man while digging his own potatoes will breathe his own epics; and as he sits of an evening in his backyard... watching his brave children in their fun of building their themes and their sonatas of their life, he will hear the transcendental strains of the day's symphony resounding in their many choirs...'

*Sonatas* is about memories both recent and distant. Like a few of my other pieces, such as *Surrealist Landscape* (on TROY365), it requires the playing back of tapes recorded by the performer beforehand.

In the *Prelude* the live pianist is closely echoed in the two channels of tape, leading directly to the longest section called *Trance*. Here, self-contained pieces of music filter in through the speakers — first a low sustained *Dirge* (the second of four short piano pieces from 1955), then — high up — a

## TEXTS

### [2] WINTER AFTERNOONS (Emily Dickinson)

98  
One dignity delays for all —  
One mitred Afternoon —  
None can avoid this purple —  
None evade this crown!  
Coach, it insures, and footmen —  
Chamber, and state, and throng —  
Bells, also, in the village  
As we ride grand along!  
What dignified Attendants!  
What service when we pause!  
How loyally at parting  
Their hundred hats they raise!  
How pomp surpassing ermine  
When simple You, and I,  
Present our meek escutcheon  
And claim the rank to die!

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There's a certain Slant of light,  
Winter Afternoons —  
That oppresses, like the Heft  
Of Cathedral Tunes —  
Heavenly Hurt, it gives us —  
We can find no scar,  
But internal difference,  
Where the Meanings, are —  
None may teach it — Any  
'Tis the Seal Despair —  
An imperial affliction  
Sent us of the Air —  
When it comes, the Landscape  
listens —  
Shadows — hold their breath —  
When it goes, 'tis like the Distance  
On the look of Death —

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Departed — to the Judgement —  
A Mighty Afternoon —  
Great Clouds — like Ushers —  
    leaning —  
Creation — looking on —  
The Flesh — Surrendered —  
    Cancelled —  
The Bodiless — begun —  
Two Worlds — like Audiences —  
    disperse —  
And leave the Soul — alone —

### [24]-[29] THE UNICORNS

(John Heath-Stubbs)

### [24] FANFARES AND CHORUSES

(band alone)

The rival expeditions go off in  
search of unicorns.

### [25] LULLABY

Lullaby, sing lullaby,  
Lullaby for a Unicorn.  
Come gentle beast with limpid eyes,  
Here your peace and pleasure lies.  
Lay your wrathful rage aside.  
Mitigate your burning pride.  
Lay your dangerous horn to rest,  
On the ivory of my breast.  
Lullaby, sing lullaby,  
Lullaby for a Unicorn.

### [26] DANCE (band alone)

The Eastland dancer tricks a  
unicorn into capture.

### [27] INTERRUPTED LOVE SONG

Gladly would I wander  
In these woods with you.  
Never need we sunder  
If wild dreams were true.

Not for us such choice is:  
Dreams must fade with day -  
I hear other voices  
Calling me away.  
Dreams are quickly broken  
In the light of morning:  
I by that same token  
Hear the summoning horn.  
Farewell. Perhaps we meet again.

### [28] A CELEBRATION FUGUE (band alone)

Both teams celebrate the capture  
of a unicorn.

### [29] THE BALLAD OF ST BRENDAN

A thousand years ago and more  
Holy Brendan sailed away,  
Launched his boat from the  
Irish shore,  
Through the mist and the  
driving spray.  
He sailed far off on the wavering  
wind,  
Where the mackerel and the dolphins  
play,  
Leaving the world of men behind,  
By the gannet's bath and the whale's  
way.  
At last he came to an unknown land,  
Far apart in the distant west,  
Where the waves lap gently on the  
yellow strand  
And the crimson sun goes down  
to his rest.  
And there till time runs on to its end,  
Keeping watch he still remains  
The beasts' friend and the birds'  
friend  
Guarding them on those happy plains.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*Bach in Blue, Five Diversions, Four Easy Pieces* and *Eight Very Easy Pieces* were recorded by Peter Dickinson on a Steinway piano at Potton Hall, Suffolk, on 9 November 2004. The producer and engineer was Trygvi Tryggvason and the piano technician John Eastoe.

*Winter Afternoons* was recorded by The King's Singers with Rodney Slatford (double bass) on EMI in 1974: producer Christopher Bishop. Thanks to EMI, The King's Singers and Rodney Slatford for permission to reissue.

*Sonatas* was recorded by Eric Parkin for BBC Radio 3 at St George's, Brandon Hill, Bristol on 4 October 1988: producer Jillian White. Thanks to Eric Parkin and to the BBC.

*The Unicorns* was recorded at Swedish Radio on 1 and 29 November 1982 and originally released on Bluebell LP BELL 153. Thanks to Mrs Frank Hedman, Bluebell Records, for permission to reissue.

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