



David **MATTHEWS**

Complete String Quartets **Volume One**

String Quartet
No. 4, Op. 27

String Quartet
No. 6, Op. 56

String Quartet
No. 10, Op. 84

Adagio, Op. 56a

Kreutzer Quartet

FIRST RECORDINGS

AN AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL OUTLINE

by David Matthews

I am a Londoner, born on 9 March 1943 in Walthamstow and brought up in nearby Leytonstone. I have lived in London for most of my life. Being near to Epping Forest as a child gave me a sense of closeness to the Essex countryside, and in my early teens I developed an intense interest in natural history. Nature and landscape have since become important influences on my music; also painting – I draw and paint in an amateur way – and literature: my main recreation is reading. Recent pieces have been based on texts by Nietzsche, Baudelaire, Edwin Muir, Homer and Shakespeare.

I began to compose when I was sixteen, at the same time as my brother Colin, and for a number of years we were each other's only teachers, as there was no music at our school. I read Classics at Nottingham University, but I was determined to become a professional composer, and after leaving university I was helped by Deryck Cooke, whom Colin and I had met through our interest in Cooke's performing version of Mahler's Tenth Symphony (we both helped with the final orchestration). I started working for Faber Music, who are now my publishers, and became an assistant to Benjamin Britten for four years. At the same time I had composition lessons with Anthony Milner, and unofficial ones with Nicholas Maw; later I was much helped by the Australian composer Peter Sculthorpe. I have managed to pursue a freelance career without teaching full-time, though I supplement my income by editing, orchestrating film music, making arrangements, and writing programme notes and reviews. I have also written short books on Tippett and Britten. I was artistic director of the Deal Music Festival for fifteen years, from 1989 to 2003.

As a composer I have continued along a path similar to that taken by Tippett and Britten: one rooted in the Viennese Classics – Beethoven above all – and also in Mahler, Sibelius and the early twentieth-century modernists. I have always been a tonal composer, attempting to integrate the musical language of the present with the

past, and to explore the rich traditional forms. I retain a firm commitment to a music that is grounded in song and dance, and is connected to the vernacular.

I have now written over 100 works, in almost all musical media except opera – a genre I hope to turn to. My interest in traditional forms has led to my composing seven symphonies, four symphonic poems, four concertos and eleven string quartets (with a twelfth in progress). I enjoy close working relationships with a number of prominent musicians, in particular with the leader of the Kreutzer Quartet, Peter Sheppard Skærved, for whom I have written many solo pieces, including a cycle of fifteen fugues.

THE LURE OF THE STRING QUARTET

by David Matthews

As a composer I have always been particularly drawn to two Classical forms, the symphony and the string quartet. In my late teens I wrote two symphonies before trying to write a quartet: the *Adagio* from that initial attempt was the first music of mine to be performed, by a student quartet at Nottingham University, where I was a student. When I left university in 1965, I wrote another quartet which I sent to the BBC reading panel (an opportunity that sadly no longer exists for the young composer today) which, to my delight, passed it. It was eventually played and broadcast by the Dartington Quartet. I wrote two more quartets in the next few years but eventually discarded all these early attempts, and in 1970 began my First Quartet proper. Since then I have written another ten.

The main influences on these early quartets were Beethoven, whose quartets I began to hear as a teenager; the late quartets in particular obsessed me in my twenties, especially when I discovered the recordings by the Busch Quartet. Next, Bartók: I remember going to hear a complete cycle of his quartets played by the Vegh Quartet in, I think, 1966, which knocked me out, and encouraged me to be more adventurous in my writing for strings. I am not a string-player, but have learned a good deal about string technique from the many players I have worked with over the years. Tippett's Second and Third Quartets were

also important to me at this time, and Berg's *Lyric Suite*, but above all Schoenberg's great First Quartet, the first, I think, to have thoroughly absorbed all the innovations in the late Beethoven quartets and to have moved them on a stage further.

My Fourth Quartet, which I composed for the Endellion Quartet to a commission from the Portsmouth Festival in the spring of 1981, is the closest I have come to the Classical archetype: it has four movements in a traditional order, and a more thorough use of tonality than in any piece I had written up till then. There is, in fact, a specific formal resemblance to Beethoven's A major Piano Sonata, Op. 101, though this only occurred to me after I had finished the piece.

Although the short first movement is in sonata form, it is an *Andante* rather than an *Allegro*, as in Beethoven's Op. 101, with an introduction on natural harmonics and a dramatic central episode in place of a development. The second movement is a scherzo with two trios; there are many shifts of mood, but the music is always good-natured and frequently playful. A song-like slow movement follows, which towards its end has a sudden quickening of pace into another scherzo-like section, where all the material heard so far is sped through, as if in a dream. The finale, by far the longest movement, begins with a cadenza for each instrument in turn (second violin, first violin, cello, viola), leading to an extended sonata-allegro, the climax of which is the return of the dramatic episode from the first movement. A slow, quiet coda closes the Quartet securely in D major: this was the first time that I had ended a piece on a triad.

When the writer and art critic Peter Fuller, whom I had just got to know and whose insights into art I admired deeply, was killed in a car accident in April 1990, I composed an *Adagio* for string quartet in his memory, which was played at his memorial service later that year by the Brodsky Quartet. This short piece formed the basis of the central slow movement of my Sixth Quartet, which was composed in 1991 for the Brindisi Quartet to a commission from the Little Missenden Festival. The original piece is divided into sections and enclosed within a rhetorical frame. At two points I introduced new developmental material, where a fragment of music is closely examined, as if under a microscope.

The outer movements both derive their thematic material from the slow movement. Both are in sonata form. Much of the first movement is contemplative in character, though its second subject is a fierce chordal passage. In the last movement the main contrast is between the energy of the opening and the overt lyricism of the second group. The development precipitates a crisis, where a theme from the slow movement returns, high on the cello. The ending is, I hope, a reaffirmation of vitality.

The Tenth Quartet was commissioned by my friend the wine-merchant and writer Frank Ward, with whom I share a love of fine wine. It was first performed by the Kreutzer Quartet in March 2001. I began writing it on a visit to Australia in September 2000. While staying with friends near Canberra, I wrote down the song of their resident magpie, which they had named Munro. Australian magpies, unlike their British counterparts, have melodious, often diatonic songs, and Munro's was outstanding. When a few weeks later I was staying with some other friends at Nimbin in northern New South Wales, I noted down three more songs, two of them distinctively melodic. The Koel, an Australian cuckoo, sings a major third like the European cuckoo, but rising instead of falling. Koels usually begin with a minor third, rising to the major, then a fourth and sometimes higher. The Pied Butcherbird sings three notes, typically a falling major second followed, most unusually, by a rising augmented fourth. Lastly, the Eastern Whipbird has a crescendoing high note followed by a whip-crack – an extraordinary sound. I incorporated these four birdsongs into a solo violin piece for Peter Sheppard Skærved called *Munro's Song*. I rewrote this piece as the first movement of the Tenth Quartet, which was conceived as a little dawn chorus. The first eight notes of the initial long violin melody are Munro's actual song, the remainder a development of it. Then come the three other birdsongs, followed by a more elaborate reprise of the violin melody on solo cello. All the instruments use metal practice mutes so the sounds are as if overheard from a distance. Another feature of this movement is that the lowest, C string on the cello, is tuned down to B.

There follows a dance for the morning, introduced by the Koel's song, the other birds joining in later. The dance subsides into a section marked *tranquillo*, based on the Munro

violin melody, which reaches an expressive climax. The coda returns to the tempo of the opening, and after a partial reprise of Munro's song there is a final quiet dance in triple time, ending with the familiar falling third of the European cuckoo call, bringing the music back to this side of the world.



David Matthews' collaborators on the material of the Tenth Quartet: the Australian Magpie, Koel, Pied Butcherbird and Eastern Whipbird (photographs courtesy of Frank Wouters, Tad Boniecki, Glen Fergus and Neil Fifer)

The **Kreutzer Quartet** – **Peter Sheppard Skærvæd** and **Mihailo Trandafilovski** (violins), **Morgan Goff** (viola) and **Neil Heyde** (cello) – has forged an enviable reputation as one of Europe's most dynamic and innovative string quartets. They are the dedicatees of numerous works, and over many years have forged creative partnerships with composers including Sir Michael Tippett, David Matthews, Michael Finnissy, Judith Weir and Haflidi Hallgrímsson. They have a particularly strong relationship to a cross-section of leading American composers, having collaborated intensively with the great George Rochberg in the last few years of his life, as well as working closely with such figures as Elliott Schwartz, and the prolific symphonist Gloria Coates. They are Artists in Association at Quartet at York University and at Wiltons Music Hall in London. Their work in collaboration with art galleries has garnered much attention and large audiences, particularly through their annual residency at the Tate Gallery, St Ives.



In the words of his friend the violist and conductor Yuri Bashmet, the composer-pianist Igor Raykhelson, born in Leningrad in 1961 and now resident in New York, 'possesses a superb mastery of both classical and jazz idioms'.

TOCC0055

'The *Jazz Suite*, featuring the distinctive talents of saxophonist Igor Butman and charismatic violist Yuri Bashmet, must be regarded as one of the most exhilarating and inventive works of its kind.'

Evening Standard CD of the Week:

'Raykhelson is the latest discovery on Toccata Classics, a British label devoted to neglected composers. He won't be ignored much longer.'



These three works, composed consecutively between 1993 and 1996, demonstrate Taylor's concern with the essentials of symphonic thought in the long-term generation and deployment of energy.

TOCC0015

'a composer of integrity and intelligence. [...] music of quality and genuine staying power. I'm happy to report that performances and recordings [...] are uniformly admirable, as is the presentation (Taylor himself provides the helpful listening notes). Well worth exploring.'

Andrew Achenbach, *Gramophone*



The Estonian composer Vello Tormis (born in 1930) has carved a unique position for himself in contemporary music.

TOCC0073

'Beautifully performed. I can only recommend this disc very highly.'

Patric Standford, *CD Spotlight*

'Make no mistake, this is imaginatively composed and highly communicative music. The performances on this album are well blended, intonationally razor sharp, and rhythmically precise.'

Barry Brenesal, *Fanfare*

'The 20 singers of this Swedish choir yield to no one in virtuoso technique and musicianship, and their sound is lovely, youthful, and vibrant. [...] First-rate sound and Tormis' personal notes on the music ensure the highest recommendation for this compelling, essential release'

Artistic Quality 10 Sound Quality 10

David Vernier, *Classics Today*



Vuori has expertly married his modernist's palette of colours with an awareness of symphonic architecture to create two very different works.

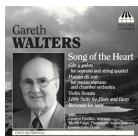
TOCC0087

'colourful, muscular language, full of spectacular orchestral effects',

Andrew Clements, *The Guardian*

'thrillingly rich music [...] stunningly recorded [...] the sound seems literally to reach out of your speakers or headphones',

Rob Barnett, *Music on the Web*



The Welsh composer Gareth Walters (b. 1928) studied with Jean Rivier and Olivier Messiaen in Paris in the early 1950s, inheriting a formal elegance which has characterised his music ever since.

The two song-cycles on this disc share the song-writing clarity of Britten, whose early encouragement galvanised Walters' career as a composer. They enclose the buoyant, Celtic-coloured *Little Suite for Flute and Harp*, the expansive Violin Sonata and the gentle *Berceuse* for harp.

TOCC0090

'Carolyn Foulkes [...] brings a voice pure in tone, even in emission, well suited to these mostly tender, meditative settings. [...] The Violin Sonata [...] is played with due feeling for both lyrical warmth and rhythmic vitality. Sally Pryce is the excellent harpist, Adam Walker the resourceful flautist. The London Concertante, under Gregory Rose, play as though [...] they had lately taken a special liking to the music of Gareth Walters.'

John Steane, *Gramophone*



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Producer: Michael Csányi-Wills

Engineer: Jonathan Haskell, Amazing Sounds

Booklet notes: David Matthews

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To date David Matthews (b. 1943) has written seven symphonies and eleven string quartets. 'I have continued', he explains, 'along a path similar to that taken by Tippett and Britten: one rooted in the Viennese Classics – Beethoven above all – and also in Mahler, Sibelius and the early twentieth-century modernists. I have always been a tonal composer, attempting to integrate the musical language of the present with the past, and to explore the rich traditional forms.' This first volume of his complete string quartets presents works written between 1981 and 2001.



DAVID MATTHEWS Complete String Quartets, Volume One

String Quartet No. 4, Op. 27

- | | | |
|----------|---|--------------|
| 1 | I. <i>Poco Lento – Andante con moto</i> | 4:08 |
| 2 | II. <i>Molto vivace</i> | 5:52 |
| 3 | III. <i>Adagio sostenuto</i> | 7:28 |
| 4 | IV. <i>Allegro</i> | 13:27 |

5 *Adagio* for String Quartet, Op. 56a **4:00**

30:55

String Quartet No. 6, Op. 56

- | | | |
|----------|---|-------------|
| 6 | I. <i>Allegro moderato e flessibile</i> | 4:09 |
| 7 | II. <i>Adagio</i> | 7:49 |
| 8 | III. <i>Allegro energico</i> | 4:21 |

String Quartet No. 10, Op. 84

- | | | |
|-----------|-------------------|-------------|
| 9 | I. <i>Lontano</i> | 5:01 |
| 10 | II. <i>Vivace</i> | 7:51 |

16:19

TT 64:03

Kreutzer Quartet

Peter Sheppard Skærvæd and Mihailo Trandafilovski, violins;
Morgan Goff, viola; Neil Heyde, cello

FIRST RECORDINGS, MADE IN
THE PRESENCE OF THE COMPOSER

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