

Ave Maris Stella



chamber music by
Sir Peter Maxwell Davies

Psalm 124
Dove, Star-Folded
Economies of Scale

Gemini

Sir Peter Maxwell Davies (1934-2016) – chamber music
performed by Gemini director: Ian Mitchell

1	Psalm 124	[8.44]	Flute/alto flute Bass clarinet Glockenspiel Marimba Violin/viola Cello Guitar	Ileana Ruhemann Ian Mitchell Clive Williamson Joby Burgess Caroline Balding Robin Michael Stephen Goss
2	Dove, Star-Folded	[8.21]	Violin Viola Cello	Caroline Balding Yuko Inoue Robin Michael
3	Economies of Scale	[7.12]	Clarinet Piano Violin Cello	Ian Mitchell Clive Williamson Caroline Balding Robin Michael
	Ave Maris Stella	[28.34]		
4	I	[2.51]	Flute/alto flute	Ileana Ruhemann
5	II	[2.59]	Clarinet	Ian Mitchell
6	III	[1.53]	Marimba	Joby Burgess
7	IV	[0.57]	Piano	Clive Williamson
8	V	[1.20]	Viola	Caroline Balding
9	VI	[6.36]	Cello	Robin Michael
10	VII	[1.34]		
11	VIII	[2.20]		
12	IX	[8.07]		

Total CD duration

[53.04]

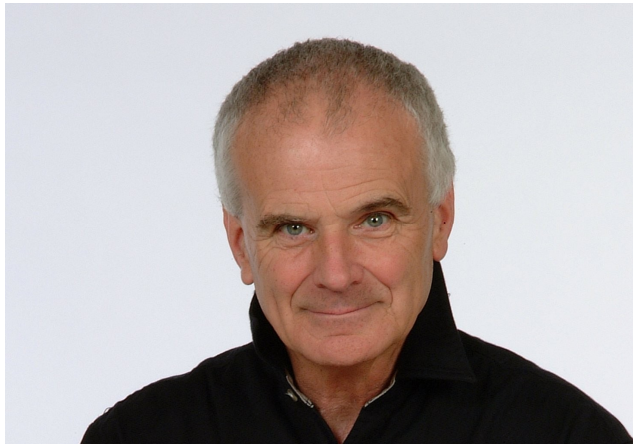
THE COMPOSER

Sir Peter Maxwell Davies lived in the Orkney Islands off the north coast of Scotland where he wrote most of his music. He has written across the widest gamut of musical genre, and in many styles. The power to communicate forcefully and directly with his audiences manifests itself whether it be in his profoundly argued symphonic works, the delightful music-theatre works written to be performed by non-specialist children or his sometimes outrageous witty light orchestral works.

As the critic in the Wiener Zeitung wrote following a concert of all Maxwell Davies works at the Musikverein in Vienna "A great and significant occasion on the Vienna concert scene and the public took full advantage of it: the Musikverein was almost fully booked and scarcely anyone left in the interval. I know of no other living composer who could bring that off with a programme consisting entirely of his own works".

His major theatrical works include the operas *Taverner*, *Resurrection*, *The Lighthouse* and *The Doctor of Myddfai*; the full-length ballets *Salome* and *Caroline Mathilde*, and the music-theatre works *Eight Songs for a Mad King* and *Miss Donnithorne's Maggot*. His huge output of orchestral works includes eight symphonies, hailed by The Times as being 'the most important symphonic cycle since Shostakovich', fourteen concertos, several light orchestral works, including *An Orkney Wedding*, with *Sunrise* and *Mavis in Las Vegas*, and five large-scale works for chorus, including the oratorio *Job*.

Maxwell Davies was also active as a conductor and recently finished ten years as Conductor/Composer of the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra in London, also having held the position of Composer/Conductor of the BBC Philharmonic in Manchester until 2000, and is the Composer Laureate of the Scottish Chamber Orchestra. He guest-conducted orchestras both in Europe and in the United States including the Cleveland Orchestra, the Boston Symphony Orchestra, the San Francisco Symphony, the Leipzig Gewandhaus, the Russian National Orchestra, the Oslo Philharmonic and the Philharmonia.



Sir Peter Maxwell Davies

In recent times Maxwell Davies concentrated his compositional efforts on chamber music, including the landmark cycle of ten string quartets commissioned by Naxos (called the Naxos Quartets), the entire cycle being performed at the Wigmore Hall in London by the Maggini Quartet between 2002 and 2007.

Sir Peter Maxwell Davies was appointed Master of the Queen's Music in March 2004. He was represented by Intermusica.

THE MUSIC

Ave Maris Stella, the major work on this disc, was composed and first performed in 1975. Consisting of nine sections played without a break, the sextet was dedicated to the memory of Hans Juda, honorary treasurer of the group for which it was written, The Fires of London, which Peter Maxwell Davies founded with Harrison Birtwistle under its original name The Pierrot Players in 1967. The work is highly virtuosic, making great demands on the players, all the more so since it is to be performed without a conductor (it is genuinely a piece of chamber music). The work also demonstrates a virtuosic compositional technique. It was the first of Davies's works to make use of a magic square to transform his material (which in this case is the *Ave Maris Stella* plainsong) into a pitch/duration matrix that then forms the basis of the music. The magic square in question is the 9 x 9 square of the moon (*Ave Maris Stella* translates as 'Hail, Star of the Sea', and the star of the sea is the moon). The means by which Davies arrives at his matrix are complicated, and likely to be of little concern to anyone but the composer and those who concern themselves professionally with such matters, but it might be useful for the listener to know something of how the matrix is used in the work.

The matrix consists of rows and columns of pitches, each of which is associated with a durational value between one and nine derived from the magic square. Each of the nine sections of the work has a main line (similar to a *cantus firmus* in mediaeval and early renaissance music) around which the others are weaved. Each line represents a journey through the matrix tracing one of a variety of possible patterns—e.g. row by row starting at the top left corner; row by row starting alternately at the left, then the right; column by column; spiralling in towards the centre from the top left corner; etc (there are many possibilities, not all of which does Davies use). It could be argued, though, that the main means of providing the powerful sense of coherence that the work exudes lies in the subsidiary lines and the harmony drawn from contiguous elements in the matrix: as in all the best serial music, it is the forging of connections and development of ideas in the moment of composition rather than the rigid working out of pre-conceived mechanisms that creates the musical life.

The main line is not always immediately obvious in every section, but it certainly is in the first, where it is taken by the first instrument to be heard, the cello. The music of the other instruments is clearly derived from it: the marimba picks out certain of the cello's notes to form a haze of third- and sixth-dominated harmony; the alto flute plays segments of the matrix emerging out of and folding back into the main line; while the viola and piano form a mensuration canon with the cello—i.e. they both play the complete cello line (in reverse in this case), starting later and at different times but finishing together.

The first section is essentially contemplative. With the entry at the beginning of Section II of the clarinet (the only instrument not heard to that point, and the one that now takes the main line), the music becomes more dynamic, with crescendoing long notes in the clarinet and chordal outbursts in the piano. If the increased impetus suggests the onset of some kind of development process, the increasing fragmentation of the main line across sections III and IV (it's divided between marimba and clarinet in section III, and between cello, viola, and clarinet in section IV) might reinforce this. The process culminates in the most complex section texturally thus far (section V, marked *allegro*), the first time (apart from a very brief moment towards the end of the third section where the marimba 'hands over' to the piano) in which all the instruments play together.

Two highly contrasted sections ensue: a long and remarkably intense cadenza for the marimba (Section VI), joined in the later stages by the other instruments sustaining notes from its line in a big crescendo to the beginning of section VII. This section is the peak of the fragmentation process: a kaleidoscope of fragments that ends again with a crescendo—though this time one so forceful that the instruments seem to be being played almost to breaking point. This provides an upbeat to the re-orchestrated and varied reprise of the first section that forms the eighth. The concluding ninth section maintains the luminous intensity, beginning with the marimba and thus making an overt connection with section VI. It is a remarkable stretch of music which, through the overlaying of the variable pulsing of the marimba and the apparently pulse-less lines of the other parts, seems to deconstruct and transcend time, the very fabric of music. After a quotation of the 'Ave Maris Stella' plainsong (in the alto flute) and a brief fermata the texture coalesces into homophony, but with each instrument following a different pulse. The final climax is reached and the marimba pulses tick into eternity.

If the latter description suggests an affinity with Messiaen, there is little in the actual sound that calls him directly to mind. But in the most recent work on this disc, ***Economies of Scale*** (commissioned for Sir James Mirrlees, Scottish Economist and Nobel Laureate, in the centenary year of the Nobel Prizes, and given its first performance on 25 May 2002) the listener may well be reminded of the Frenchman, if only because the forces employed (clarinet, violin, cello, and piano) are the same as those for the *Quartet for the End of Time* (1940–41). There are, though, moments when the piano harmony does indeed sound like Messiaen at his most astringent, and, near the beginning, the cello harmonics might momentarily remind the listener of the opening movement of the *Quartet*. The dance-like passages in asymmetrical metres reinforce the connection, as does the block-like form favoured by both composers. But the differences are more important, not least the way in which Davies is constantly transforming his basic material, ‘a sometimes disjunct scale from a String Quartet I wrote in 1961 dedicated to Alexander Goehr’ (as the composer says in a programme note on his website). The feature that the listener is perhaps most likely to take away from the work is the beautifully poised ending, even if it is debatable whether the harmonies that the composer says are crystallized here are quite so obviously in a B major that was implicit from the start of the work.

The ending of ***Dove, Star-Folded***, for string trio, has a similar effect. Here, though, there is a direct extra-musical purpose: the work (which was composed at Christmas 2000 and first performed in January 2001) is a memorial for Sir Steven Runciman, ‘based on a Greek Byzantine hymn, in recognition of Sir Steven’s researches into Byzantine history’. Its intensity is more reflective than that of *Ave Maris Stella*, but the parallels with late Beethoven quartets that some commentators have made with the earlier work are if anything more noticeable, at least in terms of mood: the alternations of inward-looking slow music and dance-like quick music might remind some of the third movement of op. 132, for instance.

Psalm 124, subtitled as a ‘Motet for Instrumental Ensemble after David Peebles, John Fethy and an Anonymous Scottish Source’, is the earliest work on this disc, receiving its first performance in July 1974. It is one of several reworkings of mediaeval/renaissance originals that Davies has completed, highly imaginative in its orchestration and deployment of superimposed transformed material. The three sections are linked by recitatives for solo guitar.



The composer in Orkney . Photo: Gunnie Moberg

Gemini celebrated its thirtieth season in 2004-05. The ensemble has performed extensively throughout the UK and abroad (Australia, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Oman, Taiwan); given frequent radio and television broadcasts; has recorded music by Nicola LeFanu (Chandos), David Lumsdaine (NMC), John White - *Fashion Music (our tribute to Tchaikovsky Year '93)* - on the Austrian label LondonHall, nominated by *BBC Music Magazine* as a Top Forty CD of the Year, Geoffrey Poole (Metier), Philip Grange (Black Box) chosen as a CD of the Year by *Gramophone* magazine, Lindsay Cooper (Impetus), Howard Skempton (Unknown Public), Stephen Goss (Cadenza), Camden Reeves (Cadenza); and recorded Douglas Young's music for the video of Beatrix Potter's *The Tailor of Gloucester* (Vision Venture), which has been shown worldwide on television.

The ensemble is a prizewinner in the music category of the Prudential Awards for the Arts, and has been the recipient of an Arts Council Incentive Award. Festival appearances have included Aldeburgh, Bath, Brighton, Chester, Guildford, Huddersfield, King's Lynn, St Magnus, Spitalfields, Warwick & Leamington and other festivals, plus concerts and workshops abroad for the British Council and others.

Since its formation in 1974 Gemini has presented a richly varied repertoire, incorporating standard eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth century chamber music, new music, music theatre, music and dance and improvisation, plus much music by women and other neglected composers, and works inspired by, or influenced by, music outside the Western European tradition. Community and school concerts feature music from the eleventh to the twenty-first century; folk music from around the world, music by children and young people as well as more standard fare. An ongoing series of commissions is developing the use of the bass clarinet in small chamber ensembles.

Gemini was one of the instigators of the festival *Hidden Sounds* - a celebration of women's music - in London, out of which grew the influential organization *Women in Music*.

A pioneer in the field of professional performers in education, with the twin activities of performance and education having developed hand in hand, the ensemble is regularly engaged for residencies combining the two. During these the ensemble helps students and pupils to compose their own music for performance by them and/or Gemini as part of a public concert.

Gemini is Ensemble-in-Residence at the University of Surrey and at the University of Bristol; was Ensemble-in-Residence at the University of London, Goldsmiths College 1998-2000, and Ensemble-in-Association with the Department of Music at the University of Exeter (1996-2007). The ensemble also has a close association with the departments of music at Southampton and Aberdeen universities.

All items were recorded in PATS Studio 1 in the Department of Music & Sound Recording at Surrey University:

Psalm 124, Dove, Star-Folded and *Economies of Scale* on 23rd December 2005

Ave Maris Stella on 8th October 2006

Producer and sound engineer: David Lefeber (Metier Sound & Vision)

Programme notes: Christopher Mark

Design: Stephen Sutton (Divine Art)

Cover photo: Standing Stones of Stenness © C. Simpson with thanks to VisitOrkney

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Gemini wishes to thank the following for their generous support of this project:

Department of Music & Sound Recording, University of Surrey

Boosey & Hawkes Music Publishers, London

Ave Maris Stella and *Psalm 124* (from *Four Instrumental Motets*) are published by Boosey & Hawkes; *Dove, Star-Folded* and *Economies of Scale* are published by Chester Music.

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