

intangible classics

String Quartets Nos. 1, 2 & 6 | GAD for solo violin



String Quartet 2.

'Crystal Dances'

1963-1975 Edward Cowie.

KREUTZER QUARTET

EDWARD COWIE

THREE QUARTETS & A SOLO



métier

# EDWARD COWIE

## THREE QUARTETS AND A SOLO

1	String Quartet No. 1 'Dungeness Nocturnes' (1969) <i>in one movement</i>	14:17
2	String Quartet No. 2 'Crystal Dances' (1977) <i>in one movement</i>	17:48
3	GAD (2017) for solo violin	16:37
	String Quartet No. 6 'The Four Winds' (2012)	22:50
4	I West Wind – Autumn	6:46
5	II North Wind – Winter	5:02
6	III East Wind – Spring	5:36
7	IV South Wind – Summer	5:25
Total playing time		71:32

## KREUTZER QUARTET

Peter Sheppard Skærved *violin*

Mihailo Trandafilovski *violin*

Clifton Harrison *viola*

Neil Heyde *'cello*

Track 3: Peter Sheppard Skærved *solo violin*



# HIGHLY STRUNG MUSIC

This album represents several of my own special (perhaps unique) views and thoughts about being a composer. They could be summarised as follows, namely that:-

Music is a biological phenomenon and thus a form of 'behaviour';

- Music is just **one** part of a vast interconnecting formal and cosmic dynamic;
- Music is an expression of both conscious and unconscious sensitivities to **sound**;
- I am more inspired by **natural history** than **musical history**;
- Sound, colour, order, disorder, shape, pattern, form are all connected in a kind of **grand unification**.
- **Seeing before hearing – drawing before composing** – helps me to find my way to a personal vista on sound and music.

After many decades of acting on those beliefs and impulses, I continue to encounter opposition or total incomprehension to or of my music. This is **not** true of an increasing number of wonderful musicians who clearly love the same kinds of journeying as I do and of a burgeoning audience who seem to understand that my music is both natural and of **nature**.

Stringed instruments – the violin in particular – are probably my favourite instruments after the human voice. The violin was, after all, my real *first instrument*. Being able to play it **quite** well enabled me to – literally (as second violinist usually) – get inside great string quartets by Haydn (whom I love most in the medium), Mozart and Beethoven. But it also allowed me to achieve deep states of inward discovery when I had to learn great solo pieces in a **state of being alone**.

The three quartets and one solo-violin work presented here represent a period of **fifty years** of thinking and imagining – a number of years I find truly mind-boggling! But even in 1969, I was struggling to escape the enchainment (as I felt it at the time) of **serialism** and other purely musical forms of formalism and systematisation.

So I'm delighted that the works in this recording illustrate and exemplify the six-point mind-sense-map of my musical journey beginning with the first 'breakaway' piece (the **1<sup>st</sup> quartet**), that emancipates dissonance with consonance in an entirely egalitarian way. This moves through music (the **2<sup>nd</sup> quartet**), that delves deeply into ultra-structures in states of growth and change- to an even more mercurial yet powerful fusion (the **6<sup>th</sup> quartet**), between **sensing** something (the four winds), and reflecting on the physical as well as metaphysical properties of nature in action.

As to the solo work, GAD – it's autobiographical! I've been a sufferer from and with General Health Anxiety since I was 15 years old. The brilliant Peter Sheppard Skærved (he **does** understand my 6-point trajectory



through and into music!), asked me to write a major solo violin piece for him – perhaps to couple with one of the great Bach Partitas. I began work and immediately, (coincidentally I think), sank into the maze/labyrinth of a series of Panic Attacks, dark-haze/phase depression. But unlike previous GAD episodes, I decided to work **during** and **in** such states and this GAD piece came into being. GAD can produce extraordinary shifts in perception and a sense of irrationality. It's almost like being transported into another mind and body – one vulnerable, afraid, lonely, threatened and close to being totally overwhelmed. But in this state I discovered beautiful if sometimes terrifying forms, textures and musical colours. No amount of therapy could have been better for me than to have composed this work under those circumstances. And no composer could ever be served, illuminated and translated by better or more brilliantly insightful players than Peter, Mihailo, Clifton and Neil of the Kreutzer Quartet!

*Edward Cowie, Cumbria, November 2019.*

## PLAYING EDWARD COWIE

a player-collaborator's point of view

Every collaboration with every composer is different. Each time I am fortunate enough to be in this position, I notice the balances, the natures of relative contributions to scores and performances, seen from each side (composer and performer), are subtly changed. This observation is not confined to the interchange with performer to composer, but within each discrete collaborative 'duo', the gyre-like mechanisms of what one might style 'mutual interferences' which alter piece to piece as they are essayed, changing the relationships.

I have worked closely with Edward Cowie over the past 7 years. Although I knew and admired his music from early in my playing life, the opportunity to work together did not present itself until the Kreutzers premiered his revised 3<sup>rd</sup> *Quartet* in 2013. This led to extensive collaboration and recording of that work, with the 4<sup>th</sup> & 5<sup>th</sup> *Quartets* for an NMC album released in 2016.

By that point, a dialogue had built up, both in the rehearsal room, in the 'composer's workshop' if I can call it that, and about and around our many shared interests. It soon became clear that both Ed (if I may) and I were in the same, somewhat unusual position of having much of our work rooted in our respective practices as visual artists. As will be clear from this booklet, many although not all of this composer's compositions begin life in exquisite sketches and drawings, (nearly always marked out by a gem-like precision of colour and extreme sensitivity to texture). Such a procedure has been fundamental to my own work at the violin, since my teens. In both our cases, one cannot necessarily put a divide between the respective 'hemispheres' of work, but at the same time, we are unwilling to say that one is merely supportive or preparatory of the other. Rather, we have



discovered that we both felt that our respective practices, with instrument, score, drawing pad or pencil in hand, are all at once both self-contained and integral to the others. This was, and remains a vital point of contact in our work together.

The next element in this collaboration revolves around our relationship to the instrument, the violin itself. Ed was a violinist himself for many years, which means that whatever the manifold technical challenges of his music, (whether writing for violin, viola or 'cello), there's always a profound sense that it grows from, or even alights upon the instruments in the most *natural* manner. This *naturalness* extends to his understanding of chamber music. Appropriately enough, in the many conversations we have about music, the composer who comes up most frequently is Joseph Haydn. Indeed, talking with Cowie about the impact, on both of us, of playing and studying Haydn's quartets and particularly his piano trios, as young musicians gave me a window into Ed's expectations of what it is that he expects his music to 'do'.

It is this sense of the 'natural', or perhaps I should say *Nature*, (with a capital 'N'), which underpins every aspect of Cowie's music, and what he expects of his performers. Cowie began his life in the field of maths and science: his understanding of these areas stretches to where I cannot follow. However, I can embrace his sense of the importance of *observation*: the understanding that we need to look at, listen to, touch, taste and smell, every aspect of the natural world, and be constantly sentient of our impact, both negative, and occasionally, positive on it. This is indistinguishable, in my understanding of his worldview, from the obligation of the artist. So, I can say that my understanding of what he hopes, and let's be honest, demands of me as a performer, is conditioned just as much by birdwatching with him from a hide on the Cumbrian nature reserve which he helps to manage, as the discussions of up-bows and down-bows in the workroom. They both if you like, inhabit the same space.

'Habitat' is a word which Cowie uses frequently about his music. In the case of the 6<sup>th</sup> *Quartet* heard on this disc, he asked each of us in the quartet, to consider their place in the ensemble, in the score, and in our placement on the stage, as habitat, a place to live, to sing, to work, to be born and maybe, to die. As I write this, I can hear the birds outside my window: there's a family group of Wrens who lurk in the laurel bush directly below where I am writing, whilst a pair of Dunnock chatter away in the Blackthorn tree level with my desk. At any given time of day, this tree is visited by raucous Parakeets (usually at about 9 am), a family of five Magpies who use the tree to wash, and as a jumping-off-point to peck grubs from the wall of the building opposite, and a Robin who this afternoon, has just begun energetic discussion (which I suspect is less benign than I hear it), with a fellow *Erithacus rubecula* in the birch trees 50 metres away. For all of these birds, this clump of trees offers different definition of 'habitat', and at various times, their singing, and doing stuff, if you like, counterpoints, co-exists, in a way, which I certainly hear (or mis-hear) as harmonious, or concerted, for sure. This is analogous to how Edward Cowie has encouraged me, and the Quartet, to view, to 'inhabit' his quartets. This view has been, and continues to be, liberating and enlightening. His ideal of how our ensemble might work, might live, on stage, in the ear and in the imagination, continues to inspire our work across the literature.

Peter Sheppard Skærved





# THE COMPOSER

*'Considered by many to be the greatest living composer directly inspired by the Natural World'*

Edward Cowie's first Prom commission was *Leviathan*; a large scale orchestral work premiered by the BBC Symphony Orchestra in 1975. It marked the first major event in a career that was to gain him national and international recognition for a new kind of 'voice' in the music world. Its title, arising from a conjunction between the mighty whale and a book by Hobbes with the same name can be seen as a signal of a composer whose imagination is deeply embedded in and inspired by the forces of nature. Throughout the 1970s and beyond, a stream of works inspired by wild places on this planet flowed into being, works like his sumptuous *Gesangbuch* (1975/6), (just released on Signum Classics), the *American Symphony* (1984), *Mount Keira Duets* (1985), and his powerful *Choral Symphony*, '*Symphonies of Rain, Steam and Speed*'. This immersion in the study of nature was born of a childhood spent in rural Suffolk and the Cotswolds and continues to form the core of his fertile imagination today.

But two further strands underpin and inspire Cowie's musical practice and ideas. His undergraduate studies in Physics and practical studies in Painting have been integrated into a kind of 'fusion-world' of ideas where science, the visual arts and music coalesce in a kind of creative continuum. In recent years, he has increasingly worked towards his music by means of '*field studies*', theoretical research and painting-drawing. Studies and collaborations with leading physicists, for example, have not only seen exhibitions of his pre-compositional drawings, but have added a body of new music that directly translates scientific theory and experiment into music. His monumental solo piano series *Rutherford's Lights* was inspired by a study of the relationships between theories of light and colour, and his more recent *Particle Partita* for two violins – with a sonic time-line of the history of particle physics.

These 'fusions' of disciplines, the bridges between study and practice are an essential part of the composer's quest for new ways of forming. Parallels can be found between the linear and pointillist textures, forms, and motifs in his music with the writings and paintings of Klee and Kandinsky. During his period as first Composer in Association with the BBC Singers (2002-5), Cowie produced a string of large and small-scale pieces that moved through landscapes and natural habitats all over the world. *Gaia*, *INhabitAT*, *Lyre Bird Motet*, *Bell Bird Motet* are classic examples of a music that engages with all of the senses in a profound respect for the power that nature has to move us.

Cowie was the first Granada Composer/Conductor with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra between 1982/4. This led to many conducting dates with other orchestras including the BBC Northern Symphony Orchestra; the BBC Singers, ABC symphony orchestras of Sydney, Adelaide, Queensland and Tasmania and the

Seymour Group and the Australia Ensemble. He was the first Composer in Association with the BBC Singers between 2003/5 and first Artist in Residence with The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) for the same period. His work for television has included a major film on Edward Lear for Granada TV and his acclaimed BBCTV2 film *Leonardo* of 1986. He has also written and presented major radio series commissioned by ABC FM Australia as well as for BBC Radio 3 and 4.

Major public lectures include the Gertrude Langer Memorial Lectures in Australia, and the Kate Springett Memorial Lecture in London as well as a Ruskin Lecture at Oxford. He has been invited to give keynote lectures and recitals all over the world. As a visual artist he has had over 40 one-man shows in important galleries in the UK, Germany, USA, Australia and New Zealand and his paintings and drawings are in public and private collections in 19 countries.

Other musical honours have included a Gulbenkian Award to study at The Royal Ballet; The Radcliffe International Composer's Prize and a Chopin Fellowship to study with Lutoslawski in Poland. Cowie acknowledges Alexander Goehr as a major influence (as Cowie's professor and teacher) on his life and work- an acknowledgement that continues in a warm and ongoing friendship.

As an academic, Cowie has held major professorships in two Australian and one British University as well as Visiting Professorships in Germany and the USA. He has two doctorates- a PhD which includes studies in physics, mathematics, music and fine arts and was awarded the first Doctorate in Music (DMus) from the University of Southampton for his work as a composer. He was awarded a Leverhulme Emeritus Fellowship for inspirational visits to Africa and California, both leading to major compositional outcomes concerned with bringing music to the world that *'warns of the dangers to the wild and living world through the continuing destruction of it at the hands of humanity'*.

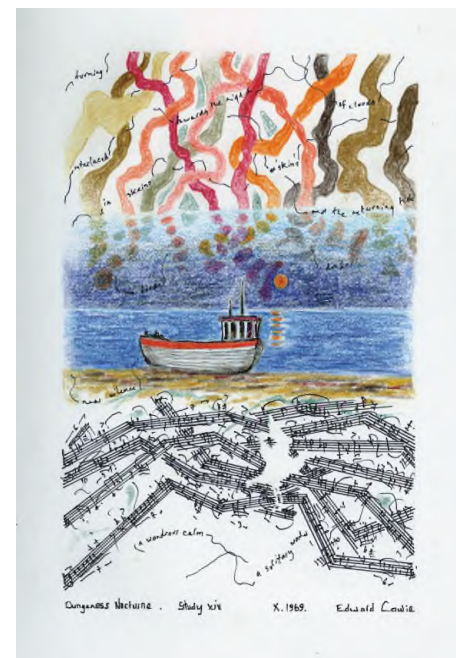
Cowie's reputation continues to grow world-wide, and new recordings emerge with high praise and appreciation. His collaborations with major soloists and chamber groups are also enlarging and deepening. He still regards the human voice and the chamber-music mediums as the *'the most fabulously rich and varied palette of possibility in the expression of emotion and sensation'*.

He lives and works – harder than ever – in south Cumbria with his visual artist wife, Heather Cowie.



Edward Cowie  
Birdwatching  
(Farne Islands)

Preparatory drawings for Quartet No. 1  
by Edward Cowie





## Preparatory drawings for Quartet No. 6



Quartet No. 1 recorded at All Saints' Church, Finchley London 24.11.2017  
 Other works recorded at St Michael's Church, Highbury, London:  
 Quartet No. 2: 16.02.2018 GAD: 13.01.2019 Quartet No. 6: 26.03.2019  
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 Producer: Peter Sheppard Skærved  
 Musical supervision: Edward Cowie  
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# KREUTZER QUARTET

Peter Sheppard Skærved & Mihailo Trandafilovski – Violins  
Clifton Harrison – Viola | Neil Heyde – Cello

The Kreutzer Quartet is proud to have worked with Métier/Divine Art for many years. The ensemble is acclaimed for its adventurous performances and recordings of works from our time and from the great quartet literature. The quartet's fascination with musical exploration has resulted in cyclic performances and recordings of works ranging from Anton Reicha and David Matthews to Michael Tippett and Roberto Gerhard, on the Chandos, Naxos, NMC, Métier, Toccata, New Focus, Tadzik, Move, Lorelt, Innova, Parma and Guild labels.

Composers who have written ,or are writing, for the group include Gloria Coates, Robert Saxton, Simon Bainbridge, John McCabe, Laurie Bamon, Elliott Schwartz, Jeremy Dale Roberts, David Horne, Michael Hersch, Gary Carpenter, Sadie Harrison, Evis Sammouris, David Matthews, Paul Pellay, Rosalind Page, Jeremy Thurlow, Hans Werner Henze, Michael Finnissy, Roger Steptoe, Haflidi Hallgrímsson, Poul Ruders, George Holloway, Peter Dickinson, Jim Aitchison, David Gorton, Edward Cowie, Jörg Widmann, and George Rochberg, to name just a few.

The Quartet has held residencies at York University, and Goldsmiths University of London, giving hundreds of workshops for young composers. The Quartet has a truly international career, playing at venues ranging from the Concertgebouw Amsterdam, the Bergen Festpillerne, Venice Biennale, the Concertgebouw, to Wilton's Music Hall, the ensemble's London 'home', where it has given a pioneering series of concerts over the past ten years, putting new music into the context of cycles of Beethoven, Mozart, Grieg and Fauré.



Recording Quartet No. 6  
(l-r)  
Mihailo Trandafilovski  
Clifton Harrison  
Peter Sheppard Skærved  
Edward Cowie  
Neil Heyde



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