

Peter DICKINSON

CHAMBER AND INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC

STRING QUARTETS NOS. 1 AND 2
SONATA FOR VIOLIN AND PIANO
FOUR WORKS FOR SOLO VIOLIN
LULLABY FROM THE UNICORNS
TRANQUILLO

Peter Sheppard Skærved, violin
Roderick Chadwick, piano
Kreutzer Quartet

SOME NOTES ON MY NOTES

by Peter Dickinson

I should perhaps begin with an introductory paragraph or two. I was born in Lytham St Annes, Lancashire, on 15 November 1934, went to Cambridge as Organ Scholar of Queens' College, and then spent three formative years in New York, initially as a graduate student at the Juilliard School.

On returning from the USA, I taught at the College of St Mark and St John, then in Chelsea, and after that at Birmingham University. In 1974 I started the Music Department at Keele University (now closed) and am an Emeritus Professor of the Universities of Keele and London, where I had the chair at Goldsmiths College and was then Head of Music at the Institute of United States Studies until 2004.

The BBC marked my 80th birthday by recording my Violin Concerto with Chloë Hanslip and the BBC National Orchestra of Wales, conducted by Clark Rundell. Most of my music is published by Novello.

As a pianist I had a 25-year partnership with my sister, the mezzo-soprano Meriel Dickinson, who studied at what was then the Royal Manchester College of Music and in Vienna, and I made quite a number of recordings with her, as also with the violinist Ralph Holmes and the oboist Sarah Francis. My books include studies of Samuel Barber, Lennox Berkeley (two), Lord Berners, John Cage, Aaron Copland and Billy Mayerl,¹ and I am chair of the Rainbow Dickinson Trust, which has a long tradition of supporting music-education projects of various kinds.

¹ *Samuel Barber Remembered: A Centenary Tribute* (2010), *The Music of Lennox Berkeley* (2003), *Lennox Berkeley and Friends: Writings, Letters and Interviews* (2012), *Lord Berners: Composer – Writer – Painter* (2008), *CageTalk: Dialogues with and about John Cage* (2006) and *Copland Connotations: Studies and Interviews* (2002) were all published by Boydell & Brewer, The Boydell Press and/or The University of Rochester Press, Woodbridge and Rochester; *Marigold: The Music of Billy Mayerl* (1999) was published by The University of Oxford Press, Oxford and London.

As a composer, the core of my output is a set of three concertos for organ, piano and violin, all recorded. There is a whole album of piano music, including rags and blues, another of organ music, and there are many songs, choral works and other pieces, mostly recorded.

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Sonata for Violin and Piano (1961)

This Sonata was written in Orange, New Jersey, where I was organist of Hillside Presbyterian Church. It was completed early in 1961, which had witnessed the worst winter since the American Civil War. Manhattan was closed for three days; snow was piled up on the pavements for months. I had ideal working conditions for the piece in almost total winter isolation.

The Sonata is the last work of my American period (1958–61), which contains some pieces which are challenging for performers and, perhaps, listeners. Initially, I was a graduate student at the Juilliard School in New York, studying with Bernard Wagenaar. Then I worked as a pianist, including a spell on the staff of New York City Ballet, as a critic for the weekly music-magazine *Musical Courier* and finally as a university lecturer, teaching music and English at Fairleigh Dickinson University in New Jersey.

The first movement of the Sonata, 'Fast' [1], in a loosely serial idiom with rhythmic manipulations, focuses on disagreements between the two players, often violent. In the second movement, 'Slow' [2], the violin opens with a version of 'Greensleeves' in octave displacements. The final movement, again 'Fast' [3], starts with scalic passages in the violin and then presents a variety of textures, fast and slow, loud and soft, and ends with a fugato.

The first performance was given on 23 March 1961 by the Greek-American violinist and composer Dinos Constantinides, with me at the piano, in what was then the Carnegie Recital Hall; the first British performance was given by Christopher Rowlands and Jan Kapp at Lancaster University on 27 February 1973, and the first London performance by Diana Cummings and me on 4 October 1984.

Two Solo Pieces: *Air* (1959) and *Metamorphosis* (1955, rev. 1971)

These two pieces were originally written and published for flute. The *Air* [4] was composed, in 1959, for Betty Mills, who played it frequently. *Metamorphosis* [5] transforms a diatonic melody into a hectic cadenza, which reappears in a later work, *Translations* (1971) for recorder, gamba and harpsichord, written for David Munrow, Oliver Brooks and Christopher Hogwood. The *Air* also has connections with the recorder, since an adapted version appears in *Recorder Music* (1973), also written for Munrow. The first performance of these pieces with violin was given by Peter Sheppard Skaerved at the launch of my book, *Words and Music*,² at the Enitharmon Press, London, on 9 March 2016.

String Quartet No. 1 (1958, rev. 2010)

This Quartet was written shortly after my arrival in New York. It was played at Juilliard, but it gained a professional performance of some prominence when it was played by the Phoenix Quartet at a Composers' Forum concert in New York on 16 January 1961. Some New York critics regarded it as aggressively modern. The British premiere was given by the Dorian Quartet in Birmingham on 21 February 1972, but I revised the work in 2010 and the Kreutzer Quartet gave the premiere at Wilton's Music Hall, near the Tower of London, on 19 June 2011.

The initial figure in the first violin dominates the *Allegro molto* first movement [6], where tensions are not resolved. The *Lento* second movement opens [7] with a serene violin solo, with weird *col legno* sounds in a central section, which climaxes to a cello solo related to what the first violin had to begin with. The *Allegro misterioso* finale [8], with some references to earlier material, is based on quiet snippets until a fully scored final section which reaches a climax, but the ending remains indistinct and uncertain.

***Fantasia* for Solo Violin (1959)**

This demanding *Fantasia* [9] was written for Dinos Constantinides when we were both graduate students at the Juilliard School. He gave the first performance in an

² Boydell Press, Woodbridge, 2016.

all-Dickinson concert at International House, Riverside Drive, New York, on 3 May 1959. The writing is saturated with major sevenths and minor ninths. Its opening declamation reaches up, mirroring New York skyscrapers. The piece uses the widest range of compass, tempo and texture and finally evaporates skywards.

Lullaby from The Unicorns for Violin and Piano (1967)

This *Lullaby* [10] comes from sketches for *The Unicorns*, an opera planned but never finished. The libretto was by the poet John Heath-Stubbs (1918–2006) and is based on a story where two unicorns are discovered in Africa. Competing expeditions aim to secure a specimen; one of the techniques used is to lure a unicorn with a beautiful young girl singing a song – and this is the song.

Many different pieces have stemmed from *The Unicorns*. Elisabeth Söderström sang three songs contained in the six-movement suite with brass-band accompaniment, premiered in Sweden on 31 October 1982; there is an orchestral suite of five movements; and the *Lullaby* is available for and recorded by various instruments and piano. Jack Brymer premiered the clarinet version aboard the *Sea Princess* in the Mediterranean on 29 September 1986.

String Quartet No. 2 (1976)

The Second Quartet [11] is one of several works of this period employing a recording juxtaposed with live players. The continuous texture is based on what I could remember of a kind of piano rag (it eventually became the *Quartet Rag* for piano), which I wrote as a student but destroyed, along with other pieces, in 1970. The Second Quartet perhaps suggests the effort of trying to remember, with the piano, in fragments, alongside the quartet playing a slowed-down version continuously and in imperturbable calm. There's an element of chance in how piano and quartet interact as the piano snippets get closer and closer together. Finally, the piano and quartet catch up with each other. Then both piano and quartet play the complete rag up to speed but comically out of synchronisation [12]. This confrontation superimposes one of the most polished forms of black music – ragtime – with Europe's most sophisticated development in chamber music – the string quartet.

The Second Quartet was premiered by the Alberni Quartet in Harlow on 26 February 1977, with the first BBC broadcast on 6 July that year.

Quintet Melody for solo violin (1956)

This melody [13] is all that survives of a five-movement quintet for violin, cello, flute, clarinet and harpsichord that I wrote at Cambridge. The first performance was given at the Cambridge University Musical Club on 27 October 1956, but I later destroyed it. I found this theme on the back of a manuscript page; later I inscribed it to the American composer Elliott Schwartz (1936–2016); and Peter Sheppard Skærved played it at the Royal Academy of Music in 2006.

Tranquillo for violin and piano (1986, rev. 2018)

My Violin Concerto was a BBC commission, written in memory of the great British violinist Ralph Holmes (1937–84), with whom I gave recitals. The first performance was given by Ernst Kovacic, with the BBC Philharmonic conducted by Bryden Thomson, at Leeds Town Hall on 31 January 1986, and the work was recorded by Chloë Hanslip and the BBC National Orchestra of Wales under Clark Rundell in 2014. The central section of the work consists of four adagios; this *Tranquillo* [14] is the third one and an elaborate orchestral texture had to be recast considerably. The melody is a version of the opening theme of Beethoven's 'Spring' Sonata turned into a 1930s popular song. I had performed the Beethoven with Ralph.

Peter Sheppard Skærved is known for his pioneering approach to the music of our own time and of the past. Over 400 works have been written for him, by composers including Laurie Bamon, Judith Bingham, Nigel Clarke, Edward Cowie, Jeremy Dale Roberts, Peter Dickinson, Michael Finnis, Elena Firsova, David Gorton, Naji Hakim, Sadie Harrison, Hans Werner Henze, Sídika Özdi, Rosalind Page, George Rochberg, Gregory Rose, Michael Alec Rose, Poul Ruders, Volodmyr Runchak, Evis Sammouris, Elliott Schwartz, Peter Sculthorpe, Howard Skempton, Dmitri Smirnov, Jeremy Thurlow, Mihailo Trandafilovski, Judith Weir, Jörg Widmann, Ian Wilson, John Woolrich and Douglas Young. Peter's pioneering work on music for violin alone has resulted in research, performances and recordings of cycles by Bach, de Bériot, Tartini,

Telemann, and, most recently, his project, 'Preludes and Vollerteries', which brings together 200 unknown works from the seventeenth century, from composers including Colombi, Lonati, Marini and Matteis, with the Wren and Hawksmoor churches in London's Square Mile. His work with museums has resulted in long-term projects at institutions including the National Gallery of Art, Washington DC, the Metropolitan Museum, New York City, the Victoria and Albert Museum, the British Museum, Galeria Rufino Tamayo in Mexico City, and the exhibition 'Only Connect', which he curated at the National Portrait Gallery, London. Most recently, his 'Tegner', commissioned by the Bergen International Festival, is a close collaboration with the major Norwegian abstract artist, Jan Groth, resulting in a set of solo Caprices, premiered in the Kunsthallen, Bergen, and travelling to galleries in Denmark, the UK and even Svalbard/Spitzbergen. Peter is the only living violinist to have performed on the violins of Ole Bull, Joachim, Paganini and Viotti. As a writer, he has published a monograph on the Victorian artist/musician John Orlando Parry, many articles in journals worldwide, and most recently, *Practice: Walk*, part of the Camberwell Press 'Walking Cities: London' series. Peter is the founder and leader of the Kreutzer Quartet and the artistic director of the ensemble Longbow. Viotti Lecturer at the Royal Academy of Music, he was elected Fellow there in 2013. He is married to the Danish writer Malene Skærvæd and they live in Wapping.

His many recordings include a number for Toccata Classics, not least two albums for music for solo violin by David Matthews (tocc 0152 and 0309) and the complete *Sonate piccole* of Giuseppe Tartini in five volumes (tocc 0146, 0208, 0297, 0363 and 0454).



Roderick Chadwick is a pianist, teacher and writer on music. His recent projects have included recordings of Henze violin and viola sonatas with Peter Sheppard Skærved. Other recordings to date include Stockhausen's *Mantra* with Mark Knopfler and Newton Armstrong – which was described as 'a real contender' by *Gramophone* magazine – and music by Gloria Coates, Michael Finnissy, Leopold Godowsky, Sadie Harrison, Alex Hills and Mihailo Trandafilovski. He is a member of the ensembles Plus-Minus and Chroma, and in 2017 he had a book on the genesis of Messiaen's *Catalogue d'oiseaux*, with Peter Hill, published by Cambridge University Press.

Indeed, he is a frequent performer of Messiaen's piano works and played the entire *Catalogue d'oiseaux* and *La Fauvette des jardins* in concert in 2014. In 2008 he was artistic adviser to the Royal Academy of Music for their part in the Southbank Centre Messiaen centenary festival.

He attended Chetham's School in Manchester in the 1980s, studying with the late Heather Slade-Lipkin, and later moved to London to study with Hamish Milne. He lives in South London and is Reader in Music at the Royal Academy of Music.

On Toccata Classics he can be heard in Jeremy Dale Roberts' *Tombeau* for solo piano and, with Peter Sheppard Skærved, his *Capriccio*, on TOCC 0487.





Photograph: Malene Skærved

The Kreutzer Quartet – Peter Sheppard Skærved and Mihailo Trandafilovski (violins) Clifton Harrison (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 a large number of composers, among them Michael Finnissy, David Matthews, John McCabe and Sir Michael Tippett. In recent months, they have given premieres of major works by Gloria Coates, Edward Cowie, Jeremy Dale Roberts, Robin Holloway, Roger Redgate, Robert Saxton and Mihailo Trandafilovski. They are currently Artists in Residence at Goldsmiths College, University of London, and at Wilton's Music Hall in London. They are extremely proud of their friendship and collaboration with David Matthews, which has resulted in three major quartets, numerous smaller works,

transcriptions, and the cycle, for Toccata Classics, of Matthews' string quartets, which is at the centre of their creative work: Volume One, with Quartets Nos. 4, 6 and 10, Opp. 27, 56 and 84, and the *Adagio*, Op. 56a, can be found on tocc 0058; Volume Two has Nos. 5 and 12, Opp. 36 and 114, on tocc 0059; Volume Three presents Nos. 1, 2 and 3, Opp. 4, 16 and 18, with the early *Mirror Canon* and a Skryabin transcription on tocc 0060; Volume Four, with No. 11, Op. 118, and Matthews' complete Beethoven transcriptions for string quartet, can be found on tocc 0318; and Volume Five, with Nos. 8, 13 and 14, Opp. 75, 139 and 145, in preparation, will appear on tocc 0554. The American critic Robert Reilly wrote of Volume One that 'The Kreutzer Quartet plays this music with staggering conviction and skill'. Also for Toccata Classics, the Kreutzer Quartet is engaged in recording the string quartets of Antoine Reicha, with (so far) two volumes presenting Op. 48, Nos. 1–3, and Op. 49, No. 1, on tocc 0022 and tocc 0040. Most recently, they took part in an album of the music of Jeremy Dale Roberts, recording (with the cellist Bridget MacRae) his String Quintet on tocc 0487.



Recorded in St John the Baptist, Aldbury, Hertfordshire, on 27 July 2017
(*Air, Metamorphosis, Fantasia, Quintet Melody*), in All Saints, Finchley, London,
on 29 November 2017 (String Quartet No. 1) and in St Michael's, Highgate, London,
on 16 January 2019 (Sonata, *Lullaby, Tranquillo*) and on 26 March 2019 (String Quartet No. 2).
Engineer: Jonathan Haskell (Astounding Sounds)
Producer: Peter Sheppard Skærved

I am truly grateful to all these performers for their magnificent recordings.
Peter Dickinson

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PETER DICKINSON Chamber and Instrumental Music

Sonata for Violin and Piano (1961)	12:47
1 I Fast	3:59
2 II Slow	4:33
3 III Fast	4:15
4 Air for solo violin (1959)	3:33
5 Metamorphosis for solo violin (1955, rev. 1971)	4:19
String Quartet No. 1 (1958)	13:18
6 I <i>Allegro molto</i>	4:55
7 II <i>Lento</i>	4:28
8 III <i>Allegro misterioso</i>	3:55
9 Fantasia for solo violin (1959)	9:20
10 Lullaby from <i>The Unicorns</i> for violin and piano (1967)	3:20
String Quartet No. 2 (1976)	16:12
11 I $\text{♩} = 50/\text{♩} = \text{c. } 144$ –	14:32
12 II Rag	1:40
13 Quintet <i>Melody</i> for solo violin (1956)	2:33
14 Tranquillo for violin and piano (1986, rev. 2018)	6:01

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TT 71:26

Roderick Chadwick, piano 1–3 10 14

Kreutzer Quartet 6–8 11–12

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