

Simon BAINBRIDGE

CHAMBER MUSIC STRING QUARTETS NOS. 1 AND 2 CHELTENHAM FRAGMENTS CLARINET QUINTET

> Linda Merrick, clarinet Kreutzer Quartet

SIMON BAINBRIDGE: A PROFILE

by David Wordsworth

Simon Bainbridge was born in London in 1952. After an education at Highgate School, in North London, he studied at the Royal College of Music and became a pupil of John Lambert, whose distinguished roster of pupils also included figures as diverse as Julian Anderson, Gary Carpenter, Gabriel Jackson, Mark-Anthony Turnage and Bainbridge's lifelong friend and collaborator, Oliver Knussen.

Bainbridge first attracted serious attention when his ensemble piece *Spirogyra* (which later became one of the *Three Pieces for Chamber Ensemble*, published in 1982) was selected by the Society for the Promotion for New Music and performed at the 1971 Aldeburgh Festival. This successful premiere resulted in a commission from André Previn for a new string quartet (String Quartet No. 1), for the Yale Quartet to play at the 1972 South Bank Summer Music Festival, and an invitation from Gunther Schuller to study with him at Tanglewood in the summers of 1973 and 1974.

Study with Schuller developed Bainbridge's already flourishing obsession with all things American – the visual arts, film, the landscape, and the atmosphere and architecture of New York in particular. The diversity of music to be heard in New York at the time also had a profound effect, not least the then still relatively new world of minimalism, as exemplified in the work of Steve Reich, influencing Bainbridge's own *Voicing* (1981) and *Concertante in moto perpetuo* (1983). Contemporary jazz and what became known as the 'Third Stream' (a term coined by Gunther Schuller), a fusion of the jazz and classical worlds, also became a major source of inspiration, the results of which can be heard in works such as *For Miles* (1994) and, more recently, *Counterpoints* (2015), a *concertante* work for double-bass and chamber orchestra, written for the famous jazz bassist Eddie Gomez (well known for his long association with Bill Evans, whom Bainbridge particularly admires) and the Britten Sinfonia.

In 1997 Bainbridge became only the second British composer (after Sir Harrison Birtwistle) to win the coveted Grawemeyer Award for his *Ad ora incerta*, four songs for mezzo-soprano, bassoon and orchestra (1994), setting harrowing texts by the Italian-Jewish writer and Holocaust survivor, Primo Levi, to whose poetry Bainbridge returned in his *Four Primo Levi Settings* for mezzo-soprano, clarinet, viola and piano (1996). Other major works of the 1990s include the Clarinet Quintet (1993), the Guitar Concerto (1998), written for David Starobin, and *Eicha* (1997), written for the New London Chamber Choir and intended as a companion piece for the Stravinsky Mass.

Bainbridge's passionate interest in the visual arts (his father was a painter and his brother became a stage-designer), in architecture, the use of physical space and the possibility of exploring the way musical sounds react according to an acoustic or the way performers are placed on stage, came to the fore in two BBC commissions from the 1980s and '90s: the *Fantasia for Double Orchestra* (1983), written for the BBC Symphony Orchestra, and *Chant* (1999), based on the music of Hildegard of Bingen and commissioned for the BBC Singers and BBC Philharmonic to perform in York Minster. This use of space featured also in the horn concerto *Landscape* and *Memory* (1985), written for Michael Thompson and the London Sinfonietta, in which Bainbridge, as he says in his programme note, invites 'the listener to walk through and around musical objects'. Bainbridge later collaborated with the Polish-American architect Daniel Libeskind, in *Music, Space, Reflection* (2006), commissioned by the Trustees of the Imperial War Museum and the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, in which each instrument from a large ensemble is amplified, the music processed and spatially projected throughout the building.

The last twenty years have brought a series of works that explore standard genres, such as the Piano Trio (2008) and the String Quartet No. 2 (2016), as well as rather more unusual forces, *Voiles* (2001) for solo bassoon and strings, *Tenebrae* (2009), composed for the Hilliard Ensemble to perform with the Arditti Quartet, and *Two Trios* (2009) for two unusual ensembles of bass flute, trumpet and viola, alongside bass clarinet, cello and piano, written for the 30th birthday of the Endymion Ensemble. Works on a larger scale have included *Diptych* (2006), commissioned by the BBC Symphony Orchestra,

Concerti Grossi (2010), in effect a sequence of mini-concertos enclosed in a larger piece, for the Northern Sinfonia, and *The Garden of Earthly Delights* (2012) for voices and large ensemble, a BBC Proms commission, with a text by the artist and writer John Ross, which creates a musical journey through Hieronymus Bosch's labyrinthine triptych.

Alongside his work as a composer, Bainbridge has devoted much of his time to the teaching and encouraging of young composers, this work being recognised officially by his being awarded the first-ever British Composer Award for inspiration in 2016, in recognition of his tireless work in music education. He was Head of Composition at the Royal Academy of Music in London from 1999 to 2007 and remains a Senior Professor of Composition (he was made an Honorary Member of the RAM in 2002); in addition he has taught and lectured at the RNCM in Manchester, the Juilliard School in New York, the New England Conservatory, the University of Louisville and Yonsei University in South Korea.

David Wordsworth worked in music publishing for several years, holding senior positions at both Schott and Oxford University Press. He is now a choral conductor, pianist and writer based in London. www.davidwordsworth.co.uk

THREE QUARTETS AND A QUINTET

by Peter Sheppard Skærved

This recording explores three quartets and one quintet written from 1972 to 2016. It celebrates a major composer's extraordinary contribution to chamber music, and offers a small gesture of admiration from musicians who have been lucky enough to work closely with him, and explores these works in the detail that they deserve.

The First String Quartet (1972) was commissioned by the GLC (Greater London Council) for the that year's 'South Bank Summer Music and Workshop'; it is dedicated to André Previn, who founded the festival. Previn, very impressed by the work of this very young composer (Bainbridge was not yet twenty when he began the quartet), arranged that the premiere of this piece should be given by the Yale Quartet, whose members included the extraordinary violist Walter Trampler.¹ By the time that the score (in Bainbridge's exquisite hand) was published in 1974, Bainbridge was collaborating with Trampler on the Viola Concerto, the work that made the composer's name in 1976.

Like all the chamber works heard here, this quartet plays continuously, but it is punctuated by silences in various forms, notated both 'within the music', either using rests or through the use of *fermate* (holds/pauses), and between sections, defined either by the use of the aforementioned pauses, or with precise indications in seconds (these 'timed silences' range from two to five seconds).

Even at such an early stage in his writing, a lifelong fascination with the nature and experience of *time*, both as idea and device, is already apparent. If one thing links all of the works recorded here, it is the many and multiple ways that listeners,

¹ The other members of the Yale Quartet at that time were Broadus Erle (who previously played with Trampler in the New Music Quartet), first violin, Yoko Matsuda, second violin, and Aldo Parisot, cello.

players and composer alike all experience and manipulate time passing (or not) and the spaces in which we play with it.

Mihailo Trandafilovski, second violin in the Kreutzer Quartet and a composer himself, reminded me of how, as we explored this work, we experienced a sense of wonder that 'Every corner seemed thought-about, polished'; indeed, this quartet shows a young composer acutely sensitive to refinements of timbre.² As a quartet we found this writing delightful and challenging in equal measure: so many of the textures evince a delicate relationship, or dialogue, with the silences I have already mentioned.

Here are refinements of *pizzicato*, from 'snap-pizz' (Bartók) plucking, through to the left hand delicately 'thrumming' the strings (which, for a British musician, will recall Elgar's instruction to the orchestra in his Violin Concerto). Alongside these plucked sounds, blending in and out of them, are varied knocking sounds, beginning with 'finger-trill on belly of instrument'. These techniques also serve to 'frame' poetic pluckings – all four parts (playing delicate 'tremolo' *pizzicato*) are described as 'like a distant guitar'.

Whilst all these particulars might seem like the observation of somewhat shallow, superficial detail, relative to the piece as a whole, I see it as analogous to the use of decoration on a classical building; each floral swag or delicate frieze of acanthus leaves speaks to the essence of the architecture within.

Bainbridge's Clarinet Quintet (1993) 2 was commissioned by the Cheltenham Festival for the clarinettist Joy Farrall and the Kreutzer Quartet. For me, at that time, this piece offered a first chance to work in depth with Simon, during my first visits to his house in north London, where we could sit outside in the garden and pore over the textures, colours and layerings of this extraordinary piece. In our talks, Simon made it clear to me that he was, in some ways, putting clear water between his approach to the medium and the acclaimed quintets of Brahms and Mozart (we have played both of those works alongside this quintet at various times). The clearest manifestation of this distance is the extreme demands made on all the instruments and the tessitura

² E-mail dated 2 October 2020.

(the range of notes) used. Both Brahms and Mozart allowed the (perceived) limited range of their clarinets to delimit the top end of the notes played by all the players (in both cases, their string-writing is circumscribed as a result). In contrast, Bainbridge's quartet pushes all the players to the limits, making demands of them verging on the impossible. These demands are not simply in terms of complexity, altitude and the complex interrelationship between the parts and players, but in terms of dynamics. Time after time in this piece, the players, especially the clarinet, whose part is outrageously challenging, are not only aiming at extraordinarily narrow targets – say, for example, at the highest pitches, but these will be allied to dynamics at and beyond, achievable extremes – lapsing into silence, or playing so energetically, that the instruments cannot produce more resonance, or lactosis sets in and the music, like the players, has to collapse back to the silence, the stasis from which it emanates.

Linda Merrick, the clarinettist in this recording, writes:

Simon's clarinet quintet poses extraordinary technical challenges for the clarinettist, from high altissimo notes sustained over many bars at low dynamics, through intricate part-playing and ensemble with the quartet to the very difficult fast passage work and ostinato patterns that bring the work to a close. This is uncompromising music that stretches the player to the extremes of what is possible technically and musically and requires great stamina and concentration. To Simon's credit, in spite of these challenges, nothing he writes is tokenistic, extraneous or unidiomatic. Whilst he pushes the boundaries of what is possible, this is never at the expense of musical integrity.³

One of the most striking things about this work and about the experience of working with Bainbridge on it, in 1993 and much later, running up to this recording, is the relationship between rhythm and shape, both as compositional tools and performance instruction, in dialogue with this composer's acute sensibility to architecture, to form in time, if you like, *experienced*. The simplest way to articulate this idea is to think about the relationship between a building and the bodies (in the broadest definition of the word) which occupy it, whether moving around it, working in it, breathing in it, living

³ E-mail dated 5 October 2020.

and dying there, and so on. It does not matter how sophisticated the form might be, what the mathematics of that structure might be, whether it's a Bernini peristyle or a Zaha Hadid stadium: it's moot until people, air, light, heat and cold, move around, inside, or outside, the structure (in reality or in the imagination).

Looking for the first time at a score like this, the uninitiated might be intimidated (I certainly was) by what might seem inordinately complex demands: 'three triplet quavers in the time of two duplet quavers of seven in the time of four' is a fairly simple example. But what becomes clear, once you work with Simon, is that the result of all these sophistications is that these are the natural shapes, of inhalation/exhalation, of the movement of an arm with the body at rest, of an embrace, of rising and falling. Linda further noted that 'his intent was for a rhapsodic reading to emerge from the complexity, where different textures and timbres could intertwine in a fluid and flexible way and the music unfold in long, sweeping statements'.

Most excitingly, in our recent work with the composer, Simon revealed that, as well as the freedom that these precisely notated materials already express, he also wanted us to allow the forms to find their own life, and impressed upon us that internal and external *rubati*, on the large and small scale, should mould, refract, even elide these structures, that they should have a life, both autonomous and impacted by the most open range of influences and impressions. These influences might range from the sensibility of a given player (which might, for instance, be conditioned by that player's memory, for example, of a phrase by Richard Wagner) through to the play of light on the page, a breath of air in the room, or the activity of the instrument itself in the hand or the mouth. Everything is, and should be, 'fuel for the fire'.

Cheltenham Fragments (2004) 3 is one of twenty miniatures commissioned by the Cheltenham Festival to mark the ten years of the composer Michael Berkeley as its artistic director. It was premiered at the 2004 Festival by the Arditti Quartet. The title, 'Fragments' is a very accurate description of what listeners and players find, when they hear the work, or approach the score. Any player, or group of players, will bring their

own ideas of what such fragments might be: for me, it's the field of broken sculpture and tesserae from Francesco Colonna's *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* (1504).

Admiring these beautiful fragments with much delight and pleasure, I was still avid to search out new finds. I roamed like some animal always seeking better pasture over the heaps of ruins and the huge columns, some in pieces, others whole.⁵

It might sound obvious, but the essence of this work is that it is a collection of disparate and similar objects. They feel as if they might be the remains, broken or eroded, of a larger structure. Each musical object uses a different arrangement of players, though all four are used in every one: they group themselves in varying combinations or loyalties (1+Va/2+Vc, 1+2+Va/Vc and so on, exploring various configurations of solos, duos and trios). Although there's no exact repetition, the fragments bulk up, become less tentative, as the players become more acquainted with the material, until, about three-quarters of the way through the piece, violin and cello find themselves momentarily singing the same melody before the field of ruins is abandoned. This gesture is also found in the Quintet and the Second String Quartet – a sort of 'superlyrical instrument' of cello and violin at some few octaves distant. One might feel that it's either the very heart of the matter, or something else, like a distant vista in an early Turner landscape.

But, by the end, one is left with the sense that the elements have assembled themselves into a whole, if only in memory, like the sense of a dream fading in the morning, briefly coalescing as the work ends, then vanishing. Shakespeare noted: 'The body of your discourse is sometimes guarded with fragments.' The meaning, the lyricism of this discourse, is all the more beautiful for it.

The Kreutzer Quartet gave its first performance of Bainbridge's Second String Quartet (2014–16) in the Jacqueline du Pré Music Building, Oxford, in the summer of 2019. This concert followed a period of intense work with the composer, and indepth exploration of this extraordinary score as a group. Simon impressed upon all

⁵ Francesco Colonna, Hypnerotomachia Polipholi, transl. Joselyn Godwin, Thames & Hudson, London, 1999, p. 260.

⁶ Much Ado about Nothing, Act 1, scene 1, l. 113.

of us how this work was the direct result of his encounter with a piece of visual art. He wrote:

I have always been influenced by art, possibly because my parents were both artists, and will often go to an art gallery to find inspiration or solutions to musical problems or sticking points. The combination of colour, shape, design, texture, perspective and drama in a painting will inevitably engender a counterpart in a musical landscape in my head, which will begin to unfold given the visual impetus of a great work of art.⁷

This process of 'unfolding' is mirrored by the form and the realisation of this extraordinary piece. Like all the works heard here, it is in one continuous movement but, unlike the others, it's dominated by energetically wrought rapid material, either in 'fast music', or complex figuration moving quickly in static or slow-changing environments. This complex overlaying was very much inspired by the Ethiopian-born American artist Julie Mehretu. The composer writes:

The first time I encountered the artist Julie Mehretu's work I was irresistibly drawn into a labyrinth of radiant colours and textures, which, when seen from different perspectives, caused a musical environment to unfold in my head.8

From my point of view, reflecting on the experience of studying, collaborating, discussing (with and without the composer), rehearsing, performing, recording and producing this work, the notion that comes to mind is 'perspectivism', the idea that everything changes constantly, according to how one is viewing it at any particular point in time and space. It might be more useful, when discussing Bainbridge and Mehretu, to talk about 'points in time and space', as one thing their work demands is that listener/player/viewer imagine, find themselves on various planes, points at the same time. In the case of Simon's music, that means, for instance, that one starts to doubt one's perception of fast and slow, up and down, loud and soft – a creative slippage is integrated into every quality that might normally be experienced in a binary context.

⁷ E-mail dated 12 August 2019.

⁸ Ibid.

Mihailo Trandafilovski notes that what all the quartets have in common but is most clearly 'crystallised in the 2nd quartet' is a sense of energy, which drives the evolution of each individual piece, but it is also the basis of the development of all of Simon's music, from the early quartet to this outstanding work.

At our first performance of this quartet, in Oxford, images by Mehretu were projected behind us, increasing, for me, the sense of floating in a morphing web of texture, colour, trajectory, emotion, ideas and conversations. In such sensitised circumstances, it's inevitable that the listeners, the audience, become part of the process, that we sense that we are all 'in this together', whether in the influence of a movement seen from the stage, to the shared breathing fundamental to music shared, or in the release of applause, the celebration after the precisely notated six seconds of trilling, hovering *pianissimo* that is the *envoi* of this masterpiece. Because, from where I sit, there's no question about it, Bainbridge is a magician; no amount of study of these incredibly sophisticated scores, nor time spent at the practice desk, or in the rehearsal room, can prepare me for the spell that he casts, when they are played, heard and seen together.

Professor Linda Merrick is Principal of the Royal Northern College of Music and an internationally renowned clarinet soloist, recording artist and pedagogue. Her catalogue of over 35 solo recordings features new concertos she has commissioned from Gary Carpenter, Nigel Clarke, Martin Ellerby, John McLeod, Stephen McNeff, Edwin Roxburgh, Philip Sparke, Philip Spratley, Kit Turnbull and Guy Woolfenden for labels such as Naxos, Chandos, NMC, Guild and Métier. She has also released premiere recordings of clarinet quintets with the Navarra and Kreutzer Quartets by composers including Nigel Clarke, Robert Crawford, Michael Finnissy, Wilfred Josephs, John McCabe and Edwin Roxburgh. In addition, she has commissioned and recorded over twenty works for clarinet and electronics, and released two albums featuring works with clarinet and harpsicord by Robert Keeley.



She has performed as a concerto soloist across America, Asia, Australia, Europe, South America, the UAE and the UK, and broadcast for BBC Radio 3, Radio France, DRS1 Switzerland, CKWR Canada and Arte TV, South Korea. A founder member of the contemporary ensemble Sounds Positive, she has premiered over 80 chamber works for winds and piano by British composers, and released a further three albums.

In addition to her position as Principal of the RNCM, she is Chair of Conservatoires UK, Vice-President of the Clarinet and Saxophone Society of Great Britain and the UK Representative for Howarth Clarinets.

Peter Sheppard Skærved is known for his pioneering approach to the music of the past and of our own time. He regularly appears as soloist in over 30 countries, and has released over 70 albums, ranging from seventeenth-century solo works to many of the 400-plus works dedicated to him, by composers including Michael Finnissy, David Matthews, George Rochberg, Poul Ruders and Judith Weir. He was a Grammy nominee for his cycle of Henze concerti. In spring 2020 alone he released five new albums, of Schubert sonatas with square piano, Edward Cowie solos and quartets, Peter Dickinson sonatas, the Gregory Rose Concerto, and the first recording of the 100-movement Klagenfurt Manuscript (1685). His work with museums has resulted in long-term projects at institutions which include the National Gallery of Art, Washington DC, the Metropolitan Museum, New York City, the Victoria and Albert Museum, the British Museum, the Galeria Rufino Tamayo in Mexico City, and the exhibition



'Only Connect', which he curated at the National Portrait Gallery, London. His 'Tegner', commissioned by the Bergen International Festival, a close collaboration with the major Norwegian abstract artist, Jan Groth, was premiered at Kunsthallen, Bergen, and travelled to Denmark, the USA and even Svalbard/Spitzbergen. He is founder and leader of the Kreutzer Quartet. He is the 'Viotti Lecturer' at the Royal Academy of Music, where he was elected Fellow in 2013. He is married to the Danish writer Malene Skærved and they live in Wapping. www.peter-sheppard-skaerved.com

The Macedonian-born composer, violinist and educator Mihailo Trandafilovski is a violinist in the Kreutzer Quartet, with which he has performed and recorded extensively; he has an avid interest in the application of new music to pedagogy, for which he was awarded his doctorate at the Royal College of Music; and has led a number of shared projects in the arts, promoting contemporary artistic creativity to a wider audience.

His latest album for Métier follows portrait CDs on Innova Recordings (2015) and LORELT (2011), featuring his close collaborators Peter Sheppard Skærved, Neil Heyde, Roger Heaton, Roderick Chadwick, Odaline de la Martinez, Lontano, the Kreutzer Quartet and the New London Chamber Choir. These enduring creative relationships have been at the centre of his work as a composer and have allowed him to explore and stretch instrumental techniques



in idiomatic and often uncompromising ways. Other recent collaborations have included such leading contemporary-music specialists as the Pierrot Lunaire and Reconsil ensembles (Austria), the Ensemble Horizonte (Germany), Quatuor Diotima (France), Meitar Ensemble (Israel), Ensemble Fractales (Belgium), Moscow Contemporary Music Ensemble (Russia), mmm... (Japan), ConTempora (Macedonia) and the European Contemporary Composers Orchestra. He has been the recipient of various awards, including a British Government Chevening Scholarship and the Panče Pešev Award for best new work at the contemporary-music festival Days of Macedonian Music. Since 2019, his music has been published by United Music Publishing.

The American violist and viola d'amore player Clifton Harrison has performed as a chamber musician and recitalist, and in orchestras throughout Europe, the United States, Central America and Asia. Parallel to his quartet duties, he frequently gives master-classes and workshops and lectures worldwide. He has been invited on a number of judging panels, most recently the Royal Philharmonic Society Awards and Ivors Composer Awards. An avid freelance violist, he has worked with many UK ensembles, including the London Symphony Orchestra, London Contemporary Orchestra, Aurora Orchestra, Chineke! Orchestra, Britten Sinfonia, London Chamber Orchestra, Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, London Sinfonietta, and most of the London period-performance ensembles. He also records regularly for film and television. He has toured worldwide with countless classical ensembles as well as performed with



popular artists as wide-ranging as Eric Clapton, Björk, Laura Mvula, the James Taylor Quartet, Michael Kiwanuka, Jeff Lynne's ELO, Thom Yorke, Dermot Kennedy, Jonny Greenwood, Ellie Goulding and Mumford & Sons. He has been heard in festivals throughout the world, from the muddy fields of Glastonbury to the EFG London Jazz Festival, Ghent Festival, Lincoln Center Festival, Edinburgh International Festival and the BBC Proms.

As a researcher, he focuses on two distinct areas: seventeenth- and eighteenth-century viola d'amore music from the Germanic region, and Black, Asian and ethnically diverse classical and contemporary composers/sound artists.

He is a graduate of the Interlochen Arts Academy, the oldest and most prestigious American boarding school for the arts. He then went on to studies at the Juilliard School with Dorothy Delay (violin) and Karen Tuttle (viola) and at the Royal Academy of Music with Yuko Inoue (modern viola) and Jane Rogers (Baroque viola). In 2019 the Governing Body and the Honours Committee of the Royal Academy of Music elected Clifton Harrison Associate of the Royal Academy of Music (ARAM) – an honour awarded to a select number of former students who have made a significant contribution to the music profession.

He has recorded for a variety of labels, among them Hyperion, Métier, Navona Records, Naxos, NMC Records, Signum Classics, Sony, Universal Music and Warner Music.

Neil Heyde has been the cellist of the Kreutzer Quartet since the mid-1990s and has also performed extensively as a soloist in Europe and the UK. He has made more than 40 commercial recordings, of music ranging from the seventeenth to the 21st centuries, expanding the repertoire for both quartet and cello through exploratory collaborations with composers, and by championing music from outside the mainstream.

After success in his native Australia, he moved to London to study with William Pleeth, who had an enormous influence on his thinking as well as his playing. In exploring the possibilities that emerged, he became principal in the 1990s of some of London's leading new-music ensembles and also spent several years as an improviser working with Indian instruments and performing across Europe. Improvisation has remained an important part of his work and took centre-stage in a series of projects at Tate St Ives and at the Tate Modern



in London. Performance with electronics is an important component of his solo work and he has worked closely with Brian Ferneyhough on a film project on the *Time and Motion Study II* (1973–76) and with Jonathan Harvey on *Advaya* (1994). He is currently collaborating with the American composer Richard Beaudoin on a series of six groundbreaking cello pieces, each of which responds to an iconic recording.

He is Head of Postgraduate Programmes at the Royal Academy of Music and Visiting Professor at the Sibelius Academy in Helsinki and the Bartlett School of Architecture, University College London.



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SIMON BAINBRIDGE Chamber Music

☐ String Quartet No. 1 (1972) 2 Clarinet Quintet (1993) 18:34 3 Cheltenham Fragments (2004) 5:54

4 String Quartet No. 2 (2014-16) 21:00

Linda Merrick, clarinet 2 Kreutzer Quartet Peter Sheppard Skærved, violin Mihailo Trandafilovski, violin Clifton Harrison, viola Neil Heyde, cello

FIRST RECORDINGS

TT 56:14

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