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# David MATTHEWS

## Complete String Quartets Volume Two

Quartet No. 5, Op. 36  
Quartet No. 12, Op. 114

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 was 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.<sup>1</sup> I was artistic director of the Deal Music Festival for fifteen years, from 1989 to 2003.

<sup>1</sup> *Michael Tippett: An Introductory Study*, Faber & Faber, London, 1980; Britten, Haus Publishing, London, 2003.

The Kreutzer Quartet – Peter Sheppard Skærved 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 Hafliði 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 Wilton's 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. This is the second CD in their Toccata Classics cycle of the complete string quartets of David Matthews; of Volume One, containing the Quartets Nos. 4, 6 and 10 and the *Adagio* for string quartet (TOCC 0058), the American critic Robert Reilly wrote that 'The Kreutzer Quartet plays this music with staggering conviction and skill'. For more information go to [www.kreutzer-quartet.com](http://www.kreutzer-quartet.com).



This prelude recurs three times, between developments of the fugue, which begins to incorporate the rising scales of the prelude. At its fourth appearance, the prelude is extended, leading to a quiet conclusion.

The tango second movement [5] is brief and hectic. It leads straight into the first of three cadenzas [6] that link the four middle movements. The first is for violin I; the second, after the *Menuetto Scherzando* [7], which employs a number of Haydnesque jokes, is for the cello [8]; the third, linking the Serenade [9] to the slow movement, for violin II and viola [10]. The *Canto Mesto* [11] is in B flat minor and is probably my most ambitious attempt to revive classical tonality, with extensive use of modulation. There is a contrasting section in a slower tempo which occurs twice. The Finale [13], prefaced by the brief *Menuetto Grazioso* (which includes a reference to Peter Sculthorpe's Eleventh Quartet) [12], is a sonata movement with an introduction based on that of the first movement. The development contains fugal elements. Almost all this movement was written in Fremantle, Western Australia, and its mood is mostly joyful. Peter Sculthorpe writes in the note to his Eleventh Quartet that 'Australia is one of the few places on earth where one may write straightforward, happy music', and I would agree that it is easier than in England, though here it isn't impossible. Towards the end there is a carefree melody in D major which was written on the ferry to Rottnest Island, setting off into the blue Indian Ocean. It is followed by an episode of Australian birdsong (based on the Australian Magpie and the Red Wattlebird), the last of three birdsong episodes in the Quartet. The other two are based on European birds: Song Thrush, Cuckoo and Blackbird in the first movement; Song Thrush, Nightingale and Quail in the Serenade (so deliberately including all three of the birds heard in Beethoven's 'Pastoral' Symphony).

The Twelfth Quartet was composed for the Kreutzer Quartet and is dedicated to Peter Sheppard Skærved, Mihailo Trandafilovski, Morgan Goff and Neil Heyde in gratitude for the many superb performances of my chamber music they have given over the past decade.

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, five concertos and twelve string quartets. 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.<sup>2</sup>

## 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 1969 began my First Quartet proper. Since then I have written another eleven.

<sup>2</sup> Recently recorded for future release on Toccata Classics.



One of the main influences on these early quartets was 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 the innovations in the late Beethoven quartets and to have moved them on a stage further.

The two quartets on this CD are separated by more than 25 years and are widely contrasted, formally and stylistically. The **Fifth Quartet**, which I composed in 1984 for the Brodsky Quartet, follows Nos. 1 and 3 in combining several movements – three in this case – into a continuous structure. It began with the idea of reusing a theme from an earlier piece, a Sonatina for solo violin I had composed in 1975. While on a walk in Normandy from Dieppe to Varengeville (where both Braque and Roussel are buried in a churchyard overlooking the sea) on a clear day in early spring, 1984, I conceived the beginning of the piece, a series of successive entries of this Sonatina theme on the four instruments, all high in their register.

I did not continue work on the Quartet until the summer of 1984, after a holiday on the Greek island of Santorini. The clarity of the light there, and also the starkness of the landscape and the powerful sense of the past all made a strong impression on me and coloured the content of the piece. In structuring the Quartet I introduced two distinctly Greek elements: the form of the first movement form is based on the Pindaric ode, a verse form in which a strophe is followed by a similar antistrophe, then an epode of different structure. I also made use of the principle of the Golden Section – where the proportion of the smaller part to the larger is the same as that of the larger to the whole – which was frequently employed in classical architecture.

The first of the three movements, *Lento, cantando* [1], is slow, and alternates passages of flowing counterpoint (the strophes) with chorale-like sections (the epodes). The second, *Vivace, energico* [2], is fast: it has three independent sections which increase in speed. The third, *Largo sostenuto* [3], is another slow movement in which a melody, related to the music of the first movement, gradually grows out of fragments. The end returns to the music of the opening of the Quartet, now presented as if in strongest sunlight: the Quartet might perhaps be thought of as progressing, like a famous precedent, from dawn to midday.

The **Twelfth Quartet** began in 2004 when I was one of a number of composers commissioned to write a short piece to commemorate Michael Berkeley's tenth and final year as Artistic Director of the Cheltenham Festival. I wrote *A Little Serenade* for string quartet. While composing it I thought that eventually it might form part of a larger work, but I did not realise this idea until, in February 2009, I heard the Kreutzer Quartet play Beethoven's Op. 130 String Quartet with the *Grosse Fuge* as finale. I then conceived the idea of a large-scale quartet somewhat modelled on Beethoven's formal plan, with two big movements at either end and a number of divertimento-like movements in the middle. As well as *A Little Serenade*, I decided to include a tango that I had recently written as part of a concerto for piano and strings, and a reworking of a minuet for piano based on the second movement of Haydn's Piano Sonata in C, Hob.XVI: 50, which I had composed as a contribution to a series of Haydn-inspired pieces to celebrate John McCabe's 70th birthday. Later I also included a short minuet for string quartet I had written for Peter Sculthorpe's 80th birthday, which forms a preface to the Finale.

In March 2009 I wrote an extensive slow movement, the melodic material of which was derived from the tango, noticing at the same time that the material of all four divertimento movements was fortuitously related by their use of short rising and falling scale motifs. So when I came to write the first movement and the finale in 2010 I also used this scalic material. The first movement, 'Prelude and Fugue' [4], has an introduction based entirely on rising and falling scales, followed by a fugal exposition.