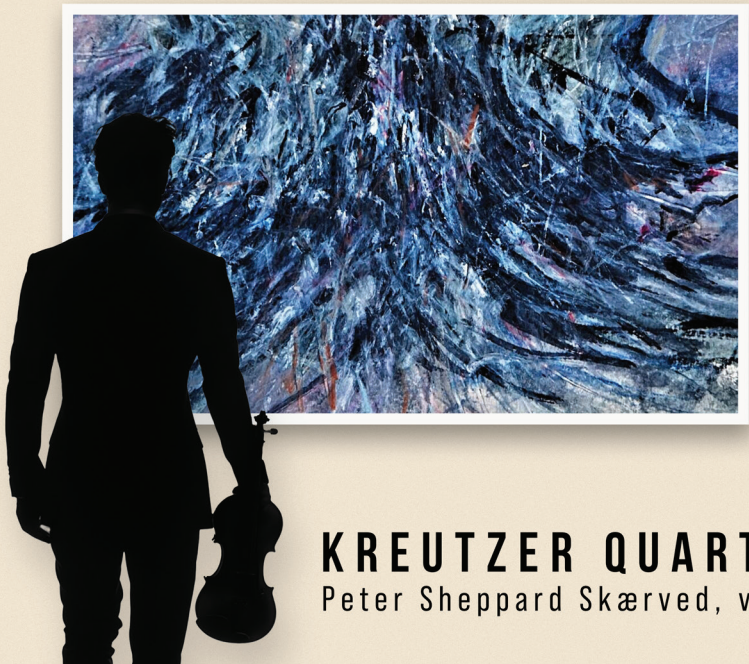


ROBERT SAXTON



String quartets 3 & 4

Sonata for Solo violin 'Reflections in Time'



KREUTZER QUARTET

Peter Sheppard Skærved, violin

ROBERT SAXTON

String Quartets 3 & 4

Sonata for Solo Violin 'Reflections in Time'

String Quartet No. 3

1.	I.	Departure and Return	3:21
2.	II.	Winter Light	3:58
3.	III.	Dance	3:44
4.	IV.	Sea Ground	4:31
5.	V.	Continuing Journey	3:09

Sonata for Solo Violin 'Reflections in Time'

Peter Sheppard Skærvæd, violin

6.	I.	5:14
7.	II.	4:07
8.	III.	4:00
9.	IV.	4:38
10.	V.	7:28

String Quartet No. 4

11.	I.	Wavebreak	2:35
12.	II.	Time Spiral (Passacaglia)	4:39
13.	III.	Nightscape	3:58
14.	IV.	...the dancing will never be done...	6:20
15.	V.	...at the still point of the turning world...	3:52
16.	VI.	Hymn	3:10
17.	VII.	Daybreak	4:28

Total playing time 73:23

COMPOSER'S NOTES

String Quartet No. 3

String Quartet No 3 was commissioned by the South Bank Centre, London and completed in 2009. The first performance was given by the Arditti String Quartet at the Queen Elizabeth Hall (SBC).

The work consists of five movements. The first, entitled *Departure and Return* sets out from the note D and, after flowing polyphony and two climactic points, retraces its steps, fading to the initial pitch, D. The second movement is slow and sustained, and is in three sections: *Winter Light*, *Hymn to the Winter Light* and *The Fading of the Winter Light*. Movement three, the centre of the quartet, *Dance*, is fast, while the fourth, *Sea Ground*, is in two parts: the first, based on Lydian A flat, is a sustained polyphonic passacaglia, the second (E flat minor modally) beginning at the climax on E flat and gradually fading to silence. The fifth and final movement, *Continuing Journey*, opens with active ascending scales (A acoustic scale) and re-traces ideas from the first movement, closing with an octave unison D crescendo, out of which one might imagine the opening of the quartet quietly resonating and beginning anew.

Sonata for Solo Violin 'Reflections in Time'

Sonata: Reflections in Time for solo violin is dedicated to, and was commissioned by, Peter Sheppard Skæved. It was begun in 2022 and completed in 2023. The five movements (fast-slow-fast-slow-fast) are based on my reaction to Peter's drawings which he has created over many years during his extensive professional travels. The drawing medium is basically pencil, colours being muted, and this brings out various structural aspects of his landscapes and seascapes which inhabit a fascinating world between realism and abstraction.

In paying tribute to Peter's extraordinary gifts as a musician and visual artist, I decided to reflect, both metaphorically and literally, the strength of line and tone combined with the drawings' frequent use of non-literal symmetry.

Solo violin seemed ideal for this artistic fusion, diagonal, horizontal and vertical axes of symmetry being fundamental to the whole, with line and harmonic 'depth' being paramount. The pitch centres of the movements form a non- symmetrical arc (G, D, A, D, G at close arrived at from an initial pitch centre

of C) and each movement's pitch, rhythmic and durational parameters emanate from considerations of reflection and its temporal (as opposed to spacial) manifestation, hence the subtitle *Reflections in Time*, rather than on Time.

String Quartet No. 4

The seven movements of the quartet form a Creation/Life cycle (hence the seven movements) from the first, *Wavebreak*, (initial pitch E) with its connotations of birth and nature, to the final movement, *Daybreak*, a movement which recalls the previous six and closes a tritone from the E of *Wavebreak*, of B flat, but with the original E also sounding. This not only signals closure, but also suggests a seasonal cyclical process leading to re-birth. Each movements' initial (modal) pitch area is a perfect fifth higher than its predecessor, a symbol of ascent.

The second movement, *Time Spiral (Passacaglia)*, progresses above and around a ground (setting out from B) via varying cyclical pitch centres, closing with a truncated retrograde of its opening, but transposed, reflecting the idea prevalent in science and philosophy of a spiral of time and thus creates an aural/temporal analogue of its visual/spatial source. The third movement, *Nightscape* is meditative and proceeds throughout from its initial voice-leading pattern.

Movement four's title '*...the dancing will never be done...*' refers to Siegfried Sassoon's World War One poem *Everyone Sang* which ends with the words, 'the singing will never be done'. This movement, a substantial and restless dance, forms the centre of the work.

The fifth movement's title '*...at the still point of the turning world...*' is taken from *Burnt Norton (Four Quartets)* by TS Eliot and is a meditation mostly in 'disembodied' harmonics around the note A natural. It is also a counter-balance to the fourth movement's dance. Movement six, *Hymn* is, in essence, a prayer and leads directly into the seventh and final movement, *Daybreak* which, as stated above, summarises and re-interprets preceding music and ideas, closing the work in a spirit of cautious affirmation and hope.

String Quartet No 4 was commissioned by Peter Sheppard Skæverd for the Kreutzer Quartet with funds provided by the Britten-Pears Foundation.

Robert Saxton

REFLECTIONS IN TIME: WORKING WITH ROBERT SAXTON

I have been friends with Robert Saxton since my early twenties, when our conversations began, about music, writing, art, politics – well everything really, which has not abated. Curiously, many of the outcomes of this collaboration have been private: it took some time for music to emerge from the conversations. One of the reasons for this is Robert's famous generosity: his instinct is always to see if he can help someone else, to advocate for a young musician, to enable the performance of a fellow-composer's work, anything, it sometimes seems apart from 'pushing' his own work. The Kreutzer Quartet began performing his works in the late 1990s: the rehearsals and recording of his great quartet 'Songs Dances and Ellipses', which lead up to our recording for Métier, lit the blue touchpaper of instrument-in-hand chamber-music collaboration, which blazed into our work on the *Quartet No 3*, and the birth of *Quartet No 4* – the substance of this disc.

In the year running up to the Covid-19 lockdowns, Robert and I began mulling over the possibility, then the materials of a major work for violin alone. Until 2023, this remained just a guilty secret: we but we continued to meet with paper, notebooks and pencil, over lunch or coffee in out-of-the-way haunts. In these somewhat clandestine sessions, Robert started to map out some of the musical 'building blocks' for the piece, in my notebooks. Working closely with Saxton gave me the chance to watch the of the composer's mind and process at work. In point of fact, this was not the first solo piece which Robert wrote for me: in 2006, he wrote a short *Prelude* on the notes 'ESCH', for the birthday of our mutual friend, the composer Elliott Schwartz. Elements of our experiments with that piece would find their way into the large work which would later emerge.

As the ideas developed, Robert revealed that he felt that my paintings and drawings would be crucial spur for the piece. A number of composers have used my graphic work as inspiration, starting points, or perhaps, as a ways of scrutinising who I am, getting inside my skull. This has resulted in cycles and individual pieces, from Sadie Harrison, David Riebe, Michael Alec Rose and Nigel Clarke amongst others. Robert was interested in my landscapes, or more to the point, my *riverscapes*. As Londoners, Robert and I both regard our relationships with the tidal Thames, which I live right next to, as fundamental to who we are: I have been drawing and painting the textures of the river as long as I can remember. My forbears worked on and by the water, up to my grandfather and father, not far from where I am writing this: at Billingsgate Fish Market.

What it means to live near, next to and around a great river would take a book in itself. However, seen, heard, smelled, and *felt*, the moods and timbres of the Thames, find their way into one's system. Perhaps it was inevitable that learning the resulting piece felt like a quest to find how the spirit of the river runs in his bones and imagination.

In May of 2023, Robert sent me three manuscript pages of the developing piece. This began the process of moving towards first performances. I began to approach some of the challenges which would be vital to the piece, which would be a five-movement sonata, entitled '*Reflections in Time*'. Soon after sending me that first glimpse of the music, an E-mail arrived, insisting that I take careful note of the:

*'Reflections (plural) in Time....everything that goes forwards is 'reflected' non-literally in reverse.....don't take my word for it!!!!'*¹

The implications of the title in the final piece proved as fluid, as tidal, as the river itself. The music overflows with palindromes and reflections on micro and macro levels. This has precedents: Haydn's *47th Symphony 'The Palindrome'*, includes a 'Menuetto al Rovverso'. The second part of the Minuet is the first backwards, as is the Trio.

The sharp-eyed and -reared know that 'al roverso' means 'upside down'. This is not wrong; if you play the phrase 'backwards' not only does the melody reverse direction, but necessarily *movement upwards becomes movement down* and vice versa. When JS Bach recapitulated the chorale fugue theme in his *C major Fuga* for solo violin, he wrote: 'al riverso' on the manuscript² and the new realisation of the theme is very much 'upside done'. And, in order to still be in C major, it starts on the supertonic, not the dominant of the scale as the theme had done. It is 'all shook up'. Palindromes, like these, in Bach, Haydn, and Alban Berg started to haunt my conversations with Robert.

The tide goes in and out. From where I am sitting here, next to the Thames, that is to the right and to the left. And the water rises and falls ... the wind shifts the fish stop biting on the ebb: the substance and the meaning both change. The palindrome, 'Madam, I'm Adam' is the classic example of meaning and substance morphing: the solitary comma, spun and inverted into an apostrophe, is the least of it. Playing the large and small shapes, gestures and melodies in Robert's sonata, I found similar eddies and cross-currents.

It took me about three nights of technical work, to work my hands around those first pages that Robert sent me. As I was mulling over the possibilities and narratives of '*Reflections in Time*', the news

1. (E -mail Robert Saxton to PSS 18 5 23)

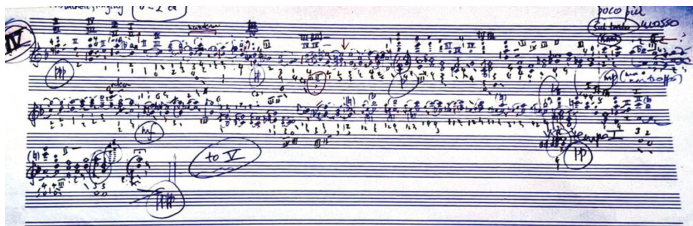
2. which today would be 'al roverso', or 'al rovescio' - 'in reverse'

reported that the writer Martin Amis had died. That very night, I was thinking about his *Time's Arrow* (1991) which is written in 'reverse time'. The reader and the narrator experience the chronology of the story in reverse. However, the events do not *happen* backwards, and nor do the characters *live* backwards, like Merlin, or as Albert Einstein wished to... As TH White explains, in character as 'Merlyn' in *The Sword in the Stone*:

"You see, one gets confused with Time, when it is like that. All one's tenses get muddled for one thing. If you know what is *going* to happen to people, and not what *has* happened to them, it makes it difficult to prevent it happening. If you don't want it to have happened, if you see what I mean? Like drawing in a mirror."/The Wart did not see, [...]"³

Initially, I was as confused as 'The Wart', but the Robert's three sketch pages brought clarity, as my hands and imagination caught hold of them.

The result of some hours work at the dead of night, from the 20th to the 21st of May 2023, at the desk, violin in hand:



Saxton's sketch with technical notes by PSS - overnight 20-21/5/23

I saw that the music is waves, falling-rising-breaking-falling-rising again. This material seemed to reflect on the human presence in nature - the sailor on the ocean swell, the wash of fluids through the body, the blood-brain barrier, the osmoses, real and figurative, through the epidermis ... and in my case, through the ocean of Robert's imagination. I muttered the old Breton fisherman's prayer. It seemed apt:

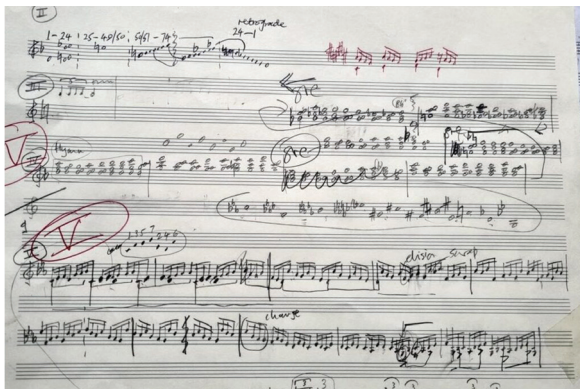
'O God, thy sea is so great and my boat is so small'

At this moment in preparation, or should I say pre-preparation, I try to find my way into the composer's particular headspace. An E-mail that Robert wrote me on the day before helped:

'Have been going like the proverbial clappers today on the 3rd movement/ piece of the 5, and dealing with some tricky (to write, hopefully not to play) enharmonic cadence 'areas'. [...]. Each movement is some sort of non-literal palindrome but, unlike 'proper' non-tonal 'stuff'(!!!) I have to work through consequences of modal/tonal shifts so that the 'spotlight' changes.....'⁴

This gave me clues as to how my more traditionally 'goal-orientated' technical approaches needed to be changed to realise this liquid material. Knowing the composer and I were working away at the same material, on our respective sides of the river, I on the north, he on the south, helped.

Another glimpse of the emerging material: it is not difficult to see how inspiring this is to have on my practice desk.



Another glimpse of the working materials of Robert Saxton's amazing, emerging '*Reflections in Time*'¹⁵

4. (RS to PSS 19 5 23)
5. 22-5-24

Three days later, and completely by chance, I ran into Robert on the street in Greenwich. We discussed our respective progresses. By the time I got home, he had pushed the collaboration forward a further step. An E-mail was awaiting me. It included very precise compositional explanations:

'The reflections in No IV is/are around a vertical axis as regards a transposed Ground, and a horizontal axis as the harmonic groups (rather than chords) reverse in terms of interval content.'⁶

But it also offered the most insight into his floodtide of time and forms, which were stretching my musical and imaginative limits:

'Peter Maxwell Davies once made it clear to the Dartington class (I was his assistant in the early 1980s there) that a palindromic arc (as in the 2nd movement of Berg's *Kammerkonzert*) is nothing to do with Time being perceived backwards, but a structural conceit at various levels (he was not being judgmental). He explained that, if you want the listener to hear Time/events in reverse or, more realistically, in a Proust-like manner to do with memory, then you have to compose this in an utterly different way (e.g.: a film run backwards is wholly dissimilar to a director (re)-'composing' events during a movie in terms of editing etc....)'⁷

This went far beyond my somewhat fumbling attempts to understand. It helped.

On the 28th of June 2023, the full musical text of Robert's 'Sonata' arrived. I fretted while it spooled to the printer, and onto my desk. The final form of the piece, when I had it my hands, was five movements (fast – slow – fast – slow – fast, itself palindromic). I decided to take the summer to learn it, and much of the work was done in New York City, before the first performance in the autumn of 2023. The premiere took place at Pharos Contemporary Music Festival, in Cyprus on the 4th of October. The British premiere was eight days later, at the George Wood Theatre at Goldsmith's, in Deptford near the Thames. However, it was only on the following day, that Robert was able to hear the piece, live, for the first time, as part of a concert in the beautiful modern chapel of Robinson College, Cambridge, along with a small exhibition of my pictures which partially inspired the piece.

But the work continued; after the concert, the question of 'what to adjust' was thrumming in both of our minds, and all the way home to London. Robert wanted the ending to have grace, more of a 'sense of an ending'. In a final rehearsal before the concert, we experimented various *rubati* to bring this off.

6. RS E-mail to PSS 22 5 23

7. RS E-mail to PSS 22 5 23

However, that afternoon, during a workshop to music students, we discussed how to notate shape, not using 'accelerandi' or 'ritenuti', but with note values. I mentioned the example of Ottorino Respighi's tremendous *Violin Sonata*, where the rubato is all 'written-in': this, it turned out, was exactly the solution which Robert would use. At midday on the next day (we had got home well after midnight), he sent me this :

'Again, thank you for everything.....attached: final revised version of piece. Movement 5 is the only one revised and you'll notice quite a bit of change, including the final bar, where grace note is open A now, and dynamic 'curve' altered.'⁸

- and here is how he did it...like a wave gently cresting, falling, and settling into the shingle beach a few yards from here.

The river runs on.



Peter Sheppard Skærved – London 2024



ROBERT SAXTON

Robert Saxton was born in London in 1953. Guidance from Benjamin Britten and Elisabeth Lutyens was followed by study at Cambridge and Oxford Universities. He won the Gaudeamus International Composers Prize in Holland at twenty-one and was Fulbright Arts Fellow at Princeton, USA in 1986. He is Emeritus Professor of Composition at Oxford University, Composer-in-Association at the Purcell School and Honorary Research Fellow at the Royal Academy of Music. His music is published by Chester/Wise Music, UYMP and Ricordi. Recordings are on Sony Classical, Hyperion, EMI, NMC, Divine Art/Metier, Nimbus and Signum.

Robert has been commissioned by the BBC (TV, Proms and Radio), LSO, LPO, ECO, London Sinfonietta, Nash Ensemble, Antara, Arditti and Chilingirian Quartets, St Paul Chamber Orchestra (USA), and written for the Huddersfield, Aldeburgh, Cheltenham, City of London, Lichfield and Three Choirs Festivals. He has worked closely with performers including Teresa Cahill, Leon Fleisher, Clare Hammond, Tasmin Little, Steven Isserlis, Mstislav Rostropovich and John Wallace.

Recent works include the opera *The Wandering Jew* commissioned by the BBC; a song cycle for baritone Roderick Williams; *Hortus Musicae*, for pianist Clare Hammond; *The Resurrection of the Soldiers*, commissioned by the 2016 Presteigne Festival, the English Symphony Orchestra and Kenneth Woods; *Shakespeare Scenes*, commissioned by the Orchestra of the Swan and trumpeter Simon Desbruslais; *A Hymn to the Thames* for oboist James Turnbull and St Paul's Sinfonia; *Suite* for violinist Madeleine Mitchell and pianist Clare Hammond; *Fantasy Pieces* for the Fidelio Trio; *Scenes from the Epic of Gilgamesh*, premiered by ESO at Music at Oxford in March 2023 and released on CD in 2024; and *Sonata - Reflections in Time* for violinist Peter Sheppard Skærved. Latest commissions include a major organ cycle for Jonathan Clinch.

Robert Saxton is married to the soprano Teresa Cahill.

www.robertsaxton.net

KREUTZER QUARTET

The Kreutzer Quartet is acclaimed for its adventurous performances and recordings of works from our time and from the great quartet literature. Their 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 Metier, Chandos, Guild, Innova, Lorelt, Move, Naxos, New Focus, NMC, Tadzik and Toccata Classics labels. Composers who have written, or are writing, for them include Jim Aitchison, Simon Bainbridge, Laurie Bamon, Gary Carpenter, Gloria Coates, Edward Cowie, Jeremy Dale Roberts, Peter Dickinson, Michael Finnissy, David Gorton, Hafliði Hallgrímsson, Sadie Harrison, Hans Werner Henze, Michael Hersch, George Holloway, David Horne, Nicola LeFanu, John McCabe, David Matthews, Rosalind Page, Paul Pellay, George Rochberg, Poul Ruders, Evis Sammoutis, Robert Saxton, Elliott Schwartz, Roger Steptoe, Jeremy Thurlow and Jörg Widmann. The Quartet has held residencies at York University and Goldsmiths University of London and has given hundreds of workshops for young composers, in the UK and internationally. The Quartet has a truly international career, playing at venues ranging from the Concertgebouw, Amsterdam, the Bergen Festspillene and Venice Biennale to Wilton's Music Hall, their 'home' near the Tower of London, and the Aldeburgh Festival.

PETER SHEPPARD SKÆRVED

Peter Sheppard Skærvæd is known for his pioneering approach to the music of our own time and the past. Over 400 works have been written for him, by composers Laurie Bamon, Judith Bingham, Nigel Clarke, Robert Saxton, Edward Cowie, Jeremy Dale Roberts, Peter Dickinson, Michael Finnissy, Elena Firsova, David Gorton, Naji Hakim, Sadie Harrison, Hans Werner Henze, Sidika Özgül, Rosalind Page, George Rochberg, Michael Alec Rose, Poul Ruders, Volodmyr Runchak, Evis Sammoutis, 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, premiering at 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, Peter has published a monograph on the Victorian artist/musician John Orlando Parry, many articles in journals worldwide, and most recently, Practice: Walk, for Routledge.

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 Skærved and they live in Wapping.

www.peter-sheppard-skaerved.com



Robert Saxton at his desk



Robert Saxton with his 4th Quartet



Mihailo Trandafilovski & Robert Saxton



Robert Saxton in conversation

Recorded at:
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String Quartets Nos. 3 & 4 performed by the Kreutzer Quartet:
Peter Sheppard Skærved, violin
Mihailo Trandafilovski, violin
Clifton Harrison, viola (Quartet 3), Morgan Goff, viola (Quartet 4)
Neil Heyde, cello

Sonata for Solo Violin 'Reflections in Time' performed by Peter Sheppard Skærved

Cover painting "Floodtide, Wapping Reach" 2019 by Peter Sheppard Skærved
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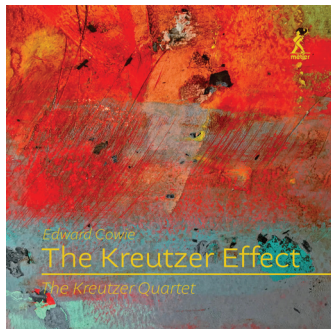
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Edward Cowie

The Kreutzer Effect

The Kreutzer Quartet

EDWARD COWIE



Edward Cowie: Three Quartets and a Solo
Kreutzer Quartet, Peter Sheppard Skærved

British Music Society

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Michael Finnis

Six Sexy Minuets Three Trios
and other works

Kreutzer Quartet
Linda Merrick clarinet



Michael Finnis: Six Sexy Minuets Three Trios
Kreutzer Quartet, Linda Merrick
MSV 28581

mihailo trandafilovski

diptych

peter sheppard skærved | roderick chadwick,
longbow | kreutzer quartet

Mihailo Trandafilovski: Diptych
Kreutzer Quartet, Longbow,
Mihailo Trandafilovski,
Peter Sheppard Skærved,
Roderick Chadwick
MSV 28582



Elliott Schwartz: Tapestry
Aaron Shorr, Kreutzer Quartet, Longbow, Nicole Johnson, Peter Sheppard Skærved
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Orfordness: Music by David Gorton
Christopher Redgate,
Kreutzer Quartet, Milton Mermikides, Neil Heyde,
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