

Peter  
**MAXWELL DAVIES**

**Black Pentecost**  
**Stone Litany**

**Della Jones, Mezzo-soprano • David Wilson-Johnson, Baritone**  
**BBC Philharmonic • Maxwell Davies**



## Peter Maxwell Davies (b. 1934)

### Black Pentecost • Stone Litany

Among the most significant symphonic composers from the post-war era, Peter Maxwell Davies has written numerous pieces that are hardly less intrinsically 'symphonic' than his ten numbered symphonies. These symphonic pieces encompass such extended orchestral works as the *Second Taverner Fantasy* (1964), the 'motet' *Worldes Bliss* (1969) [Naxos 8.572357], the 'foxtrot' *St Thomas Wake* (1969) [8.572349] and the two on this disc – both of them being inspired by the Orkney Islands where Davies has resided for almost 45 years.

The genesis of *Black Pentecost* actually stretches back over almost a decade, Davies having planned an orchestral piece that duly expanded into his *First Symphony* (1976) [8.572348]. The catalyst to his composing a work of that name was provided by the threat of uranium mining in the Yesnaby region of the Orkney 'mainland', soon provoking a vigorous (and ultimately successful) response from the local population to which Davies contributed the anti-nuclear cabaret *The Yellow Cake Review* (1980) – from which derive his enduring piano miniatures *Yesnaby Ground* and *Farewell to Stromness* [8.572408] – together with the present work. *Black Pentecost*, a 'vocal symphony' along the lines of Mahler's *Song of the Earth* or Zemlinsky's *Lyric Symphony*, derives its words from the novel *Greenvoe* (1972) by George Mackay Brown (1921-96), the Orcadian author with whom Davies was to collaborate on numerous occasions and whose envisaging of environmental catastrophe uncannily anticipated both the subsequent threat at Yesnaby and other such projects over coming decades. Completed in 1979, *Black Pentecost* was premiered at London's Royal Festival Hall on 11th May 1982 by the mezzo Jan DeGaetani and baritone Michael Rippon with the Philharmonia Orchestra and Simon Rattle (who had earlier taken on the première of the *First Symphony* with the same orchestra). The vocal writing ranges widely over the course of the latter three movements, taking in scenic evocation as well as reported speech in its relating of the systematic

destruction which befalls the imaginary island of Hellya.

The first movement is a purely orchestral evocation of what is to come. It begins almost imperceptibly on strings, against which woodwind gradually come into focus as a mood of sustained seriousness evolves which is enhanced by atmospheric contributions from timpani and tuned percussion. At length the brass enters with a vengeance, presaging a greater activity that sees the essentially polyphonic discourse grow in density and impact. Much of the string writing has a chamber-like restraint and intimacy, but this does not preclude a steadily mounting intensity which draws in the orchestra as a whole towards a powerful culmination – the whole movement having evolved as though an inexorable curve of activity which climaxes in an anguished threnody for strings, brass and timpani.

The second movement opens with simmering activity for woodwind and strings, subtly underpinned by marimba. This continues as the baritone enters with a description of the beginnings of Operation Black Star and the consequent demise of the village of Hellya in its wake, then the mezzo describes the natural environs that centre upon the loch of Ernefeia, to which the baritone responds with a description of the polluted environment that has resulted. The third movement then commences with menacing percussion and strident brass chords, strings and marimba now assuming the foreground as the mezzo describes the summary abandonment of a local homestead by its inhabitant before the demolition team moves in. Her expression of regret as to this irrevocable change marks the start of the final movement, to which the baritone responds – over pulsating rhythmic patterns on woodwind and percussion, then against sustained strings – that change is but an instance of the march of progress that has seen man evolve from primitive beginnings to become master of his own destiny. Against softly resounding horns and lower strings, mezzo then baritone alternate with descriptions of the demise of neighbouring villages, then the baritone assumes the

guise of the Controller as he explains the necessity of such destruction for the future good of mankind. Gently ticking percussion then intensifying string textures accompany the mezzo as she describes the degradation that follows, with baritone offering an evocation of this 'brave new world' as the music recedes into silence.

*Stone Litany* (1973) remains one of the most impressive works from Davies' early years in Orkney. The subtitle, 'Runes from a House of the Dead', indicates a great deal about its provenance: the inscriptions as left by Viking plunderers during the eleventh and twelfth centuries on the walls of the Neolithic burial mound (though it has been claimed to have functioned as an observatory or a temple that commemorated the winter solstice) known as Maeshowe, which has long been among Orkney's most totemic monuments. That said, this is not a song-cycle in any conventional sense – the words being a dialect of Old Norse which became extinct long ago and hence has the quality of a 'dead' language in the way that Stravinsky had utilized Latin in his opera-oratorio *Oedipus Rex*. The underlying form also bolsters the work's symphonic credentials – with the first, third and fifth of its seven continuous sections being purely orchestral and the remainder deploying the voice less as a conveyor of text than as a wide ranging vocal obbligato

such as merges with unobtrusive subtly into the overall texture. A commission from the University of Glasgow for the first Musica Nova, *Stone Litany* was first heard at Glasgow City Halls on 22nd September 1973 by Jan DeGaetani with the Scottish National Orchestra conducted by Alexander Gibson.

The first piece is a prelude with woodwind and flexatone to the fore. The second piece finds the soloist declaiming the Runic Alphabet against the spectral backing of tuned percussion, then the third piece brings a slowly mounting intensity on strings, brass and percussion. The fourth piece apostrophizes 'Ingbjorg the fair widow' in surprisingly menacing terms, before the fifth piece continues this ominous mood with restless string textures and shrill woodwind as enhanced by ringing percussion. The sixth piece denotes Lothbrokar's sons before going on to describe hidden treasure in the region of Maeshowe, the soloist unfolding an elaborate melisma over luminous woodwind and strings as heard against stabbing brass and dextrous percussion. The final piece then invokes (and seemingly with no pun intended) 'Max the Mighty', as a recollection such as resounds quietly yet evocatively across time and place.

Richard Whitehouse

**Black Pentecost**

**Baritone**

Ⓐ Black Star. Operation Black Star was how they described it. Great cargoes of cement were unloaded, lorries, hut sections, cranes, bulldozers, transformers. The houses collapsed before clashing jaws and black battering foreheads. Piecemeal the village died, shrivelled slowly in the radiance of Black, Black Star. What was happening was impossible to find out. The almost completed fence was too well guarded by men and dogs. But Hellya was probed and tunnelled to the roots. The island was full of noises, a clangour from morning to night. A thin shifting veil of dust hung between island and sun. A wooden town sprang up overnight with cook-house, laundry, canteens, sickbay, offices, a detention centre.

**Mezzo-soprano**

The burn of Hellya rises high in the hills. Ernefea and Korsefea bear up in their brown and purple hands a brimming chalice. It is the tiny loch of Ernefea. Above Rossiter the loch spills and splashes over. It becomes a bum falling from level to level. It squanders opals and sapphires and emeralds among the shallow stones, is all torn lace in the waterfall below Blinkbonny and a swath of green silk among the reeds of Skail before it gathers itself for a final rush among the immense round boulders that belong half to the sea and half to the land.

**Baritone**

On this particular day the bum was all khaki coloured scum, and the filth fumed out over the water of the bay for half a mile and more. Haddock floated on the surface, underside up.

**Mezzo-soprano**

Ⓑ Bella Budge presided over a diminishing republic of hens; they were being stolen by workmen at the site. 'Poor men' said Bella, 'they'll be half starved up there, no doubt, and all that noise and gutter too.' She took Kitty inside, and abandoned the rest to their fate. She appeared above the Skua one morning and was lifted aboard. A fierce clucking came from under her shawl. Bella gave the ferryman a pound note, but said nothing. It was the first time she had ever left the island. From the middle of the sound, the ferryman saw the door of Biggings standing open. 'You've left your door open', he Raid. 'Yes', said Bella. Her bosom clucked. At Kirkwall she was lifted ashore. She disappeared among a crowd of seamen and dockers and lorry drivers. There was one last diminished squawk, from the region of the harbour office. A bulldozer nudged the wall of Biggings next day. A rat rushed out. Dazzled spiders pirouetted briefly from the rafters. Cupboard and box-bed crumpled like matchwood. The bulldozer passed over and through Biggings till it was flat as a field; and this is what Torn Groat in Vancouver would come home to, if he ever came home.

Ⓒ It is a pity that the whole life and economy of the island should be so abruptly and radically altered.

**Baritone**

No; look at it this way; industrial man, bureaucratic man is a superior creature to agricultural man. He could bear a greater infusion of fight; just as the farmer's cycle was a stage beyond the dark blunderings and intuitions of the hunter, Hellya is a microcosm; this is how it must happen, inevitably, all over the universe.

The black star exploded slowly under the hills, and at last drew the whole of Hellya into its mystery and passion. The bulldozers, having flattened the village turned inland to the farms. The Glebe went down in a clatter of stones.

**Mezzo-soprano**

The farm at Isbister shuddered some days later. The two gable ends tottered and leaned towards one another, embraced for the first and the last time. The black hearthstone stood among ruins.

**Baritone**

Rossiter died in a cloud of dust. The men in the bulldozers covered noses and mouths with handkerchiefs. Rossiter died in cold dry whispers. The ghost of the house drifted seawards.

**Mezzo-soprano**

At the Bu, the Controller came himself to explain to Mansie Anderson.

**Baritone**

I am from Black Star. I am the boss. Much money has been spent, millions of pounds. This vital opening must be sunk through the Bu. Very technical, great secrecy. Black Star is necessary for the welfare of the western world. The fate of nations. If you refuse, the matter is out of my hands.

**Mezzo-soprano**

They thrust old Mansie out. After the inhabitants' tables, chairs, books and ale-kirn, grandfather clock, beds, chests, crockery, strewn about the yard like a defeated army. Great wheels trundled to and fro, flattening the ripe corn. The workmen rounded up the animals The younger children yelled with rage and pity through all this uproar. Old Mansie stood like a flushed statue at the end of his house setting sun. After sunset they worked by arc-lamps. At dawn the Bu, first built in 1006, was a cavity and scatter on the side of the hill.

**Baritone**

A penumbra hung over the island, as if it was being slowly pulverised. Muffled hammer thuds from the heart of Korsefea echoed faintly across the Sound. A half finished dome gleamed out of the Bu's cornfield.

**Mezzo-soprano and Baritone**

They picked up their heavy cases, and turned away.

Black Pentecost  
Words by George Mackay Brown  
Music by Peter Maxwell Davies  
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**[6]**  $\neq \text{O} \neq R \neq * \neq I \neq I' \neq B \neq A \neq O$

8) 1A7B1AR+ #1# F1R1 F1Y1 Y1R1Y1 Y1H  
F1R1 F1R1 MORIT AR Y1Y1R1 dF1Y1T  
F1F1 F1F1 F1F1

[illegible]

6 FUTHORK HNIAS TBMLYF

**8** Ingkiborg hin fahra ahia morgk kona  
hæfer faret lutrin her mihkil oflate  
ÆRLIKR

## 11 MAKUS MATTR RÆISTRUNAR THÆSAR

## 6 The Runic alphabet

8 Ingibjorg the fair widow. Many a proud woman bowed her head as she walked in here, no matter how proud a lady she was.  
(signed) ÆRLINGR

**11** Max the Mighty carved these runes.

6 èf u thō (è)r k(ō) ha èn i a ès te be èm èl i èn

8 ingibiorg hin fah-ra ah-i-a mork kōna  
hèfir farèt lutrin hèr mih-kil oflatè  
æ (è)r èl i k(o) èr

[11] makas matar raist runar thès-ar

ö the German ö (French jeune, cœur)  
 æ English a (man) • English consonants e.g. **th** and **ng**  
 h is pronounced i.e. aspirate



Photo: Annelies van der Vegt

David Wilson-Johnson read Modern Languages at Cambridge University and studied singing at the Royal Academy of Music. He sang many rôles at Covent Garden over 21 years, and in Amsterdam, Brussels, Geneva, Madrid, Turin, Paris, Rome and Salzburg. His happiest concerts have been with the world's finest orchestras and conductors, including David Atherton, Pierre Boulez, Frans Brüggen, Colin Davis, Charles Dutoit, Carlo Maria Giulini, Mariss Jansons, Neeme Järvi, Charles Mackerras, Kurt Masur, Kenneth Montgomery, Simon Rattle and Gennadi Rozhdestvensky. His most notable stage rôles have included those of King Priam in Tippet's opera, Merlin in the opera by Albéniz, *The Nose* by Shostakovich and *Saint François d'Assise* by Messiaen. Recordings include *Winterreise* with David Owen Norris and over 150 CDs of music of all periods and styles. His concerts and recitals continue with return visits to the orchestras of Amsterdam, Antwerp, Basel, Boston, Budapest, Dresden, Glasgow, Helsinki, London, Madrid, Munich, Philadelphia, Sydney, Tokyo and Zurich. He now directs the Dutch National Youth Choir, teaches in Amsterdam and runs the Summer Singing school he founded thirty years ago at Ferrandou in the Dordogne valley.

## BBC Philharmonic



Photo: Sussie Ahlberg

The BBC Philharmonic is based at MediaCityUK in Salford and performs an annual season of concerts at Manchester's Bridgewater Hall, as well as regular concerts in other venues across the north of England. As the orchestra is one of the BBC's six performing groups, the majority of its concerts are broadcast on BBC Radio 3. The BBC Philharmonic is supported by Salford City Council, enabling the orchestra to build active links in the local area through a busy learning and community programme. Juanjo Mena, from the Basque region of Spain, has been Chief Conductor since 2011, with John Storgårds as Principal Guest Conductor. The distinguished Austrian composer HK 'Nali' Gruber is Composer/Conductor and former Chief Conductor Gianandrea Noseda is now Conductor Laureate. The BBC Philharmonic has had its roots in the city of Manchester since its foundation in 1934 as the BBC Northern Orchestra. In 1982, soon after moving to the BBC's new building on Oxford Road in Manchester, it changed its name to the BBC Philharmonic. As an internationally-renowned orchestra, the BBC Philharmonic regularly tours in Europe and Asia.

## Sir Peter Maxwell Davies



Photo: John Batten

Universally acknowledged as one of the foremost composers of our time, Sir Peter Maxwell Davies has made a significant contribution to musical history through his wide-ranging and prolific output. He lives in the Orkney Islands off the north coast of Scotland, where he writes most of his music. In a work list spanning more than five decades, he has written across a broad range of styles, yet his music always communicates directly and powerfully, whether in his profoundly argued symphonic works, his music-theatre works or witty light orchestral works. Maxwell Davies' major dramatic works include two full-length ballets, music-theatre works *Eight Songs for a Mad King* and *Miss Donnithorne's Maggot*, and operas including *Resurrection*, *The Lighthouse*, *The Doctor of Myddfai*, *Taverner* and *Kommilitonen!* (Young Blood!). His huge output of orchestral work comprises numerous symphonies and concerti, and light orchestral works such as *An Orkney Wedding, with Sunrise* and *Mavis in Las Vegas* (8.572348). His substantial chamber and instrumental catalogue includes the landmark cycle of ten string quartets, the *Naxos Quartets* (8.505225), described in the *Financial Times* as "one of the most impressive musical statements of our time". Maxwell Davies has held the position of Composer/Conductor with both the Royal Philharmonic and BBC Philharmonic Orchestras. He has guest-conducted orchestras including the Cleveland Orchestra, Boston Symphony Orchestra, Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, San Francisco Symphony, Russian National Orchestra, Oslo Philharmonic and Philharmonia Orchestra. He retains close links with the St Magnus Festival, Orkney's annual arts festival which he founded in 1977, is Composer Laureate of the Scottish Chamber Orchestra and is Visiting Professor at London's Royal Academy of Music and Christchurch University Canterbury. Maxwell Davies was knighted in 1987 and appointed Master of the Queen's Music in 2004, in which rôle he seeks to raise the profile of music in Great Britain, as well as writing many works for Her Majesty the Queen and for royal occasions.

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Both *Black Pentecost* and *Stone Litany* share a symphonic scale and an Orkney setting. Premiered by Simon Rattle in 1982, *Black Pentecost* is an impassioned plea against environmental destruction, taking its words from Orcadian author George Mackay Brown's novel *Greenvoe*, and cast in the form of a vocal symphony. Chamber-like restraint is matched by tense, dark writing that embraces threnody and cataclysm. Beautifully orchestrated and featuring elaborate melismas from the vocal soloist, *Stone Litany*, subtitled 'Runes from a House of the Dead', evokes the haunted landscape of a Neolithic burial mound plundered by Vikings.

Sir Peter  
**MAXWELL DAVIES**  
(b. 1934)

<b>Black Pentecost (1979)*</b>		<b>54:00</b>	<b>Stone Litany (1973)</b>	<b>22:44</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>I. Adagio – Allegro molto</b>	<b>18:21</b>	<b>'Runes from a House of the Dead'</b>	
<b>2</b>	<b>II. Baritone: Black Star, Operation Black Star was how they described it</b>	<b>10:10</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>Molto lento – Andante 4:26</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>III. Mezzo-soprano: Bella Budge presided over a diminishing republic of hens</b>	<b>7:37</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>Recitativo lento Voice: The Runic Alphabet 1:23</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>IV. Mezzo-soprano: It is a pity that the whole life and economy of the island...</b>	<b>17:51</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>Allegretto 2:32</b>
Words by George Mackay Brown Music by Peter Maxwell Davies © Copyright 1979 Chester Music Limited. All Rights Reserved. International Copyright Secured. Used by permission of Chester Music Limited.			<b>8</b>	<b>Andante flessibile Voice: Ingibjorg the fair widow 2:06</b>
			<b>9</b>	<b>Allegro molto 3:13</b>
			<b>10</b>	<b>Moderato Voice: Lothbrokar's sons 6:59</b>
			<b>11</b>	<b>Recitativo lento molto flessibile Voice: Max the Mighty 2:06</b>

**Della Jones, Mezzo-soprano\* • David Wilson-Johnson, Baritone\***  
**BBC Philharmonic • Maxwell Davies**

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The sung texts, transliterations and translations are included in the booklet,  
and may also be accessed at [www.naxos.com/libretti/572359.htm](http://www.naxos.com/libretti/572359.htm)

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