

PRESS RELEASE: Sir Peter Maxwell Davies CH CBE (1934–2016)

It is with deep sadness that we announce the death of Sir Peter Maxwell Davies, at the age of 81.

One of the foremost composers of our time, Sir Peter Maxwell Davies made a profound contribution to musical history in the UK and beyond through his wide-ranging and prolific output.

Recognised as a successor to the avant-garde generation of Ligeti, Lutosławski, Berio and Xenakis, as well as a composer of a distinctly British hue, Sir Peter's output embraces every conceivable classical genre from symphonies and concertos to opera, music theatre, ballet, film, choral and more.

He was also an experienced conductor, holding the position of Associate Conductor/Composer at both the BBC Philharmonic and Royal Philharmonic orchestras for 10 years, and guest-conducting orchestras such as the San Francisco Symphony, Leipzig Gewandhaus and Philharmonia. He enjoyed a particularly close relationship with the Scottish Chamber Orchestra as Composer Laureate.

Born in Salford, Lancashire on 8 September 1934, Sir Peter attended Royal Manchester College of Music (now Royal Northern College of Music) where he was part of the so-called Manchester School with contemporaries Harrison Birtwistle, John Ogdon, Elgar Howarth, Richard Hall and Alexander Goehr.

He later secured a Fellowship at Princeton where he studied with Roger Sessions and Milton Babbitt.

The 1960s were an especially formative decade, establishing him as a leading contemporary musical figure.

In 1971 Sir Peter moved to the Orkney Islands, the place which would be his home for the rest of his life.

The landscape and culture had a deep impact on his music and in 1977 he founded the St Magnus Festival, an annual event with Orkney residents at its heart.

Sir Peter had a lifelong commitment to community outreach and education, writing much music for young people; his children's opera *The Hogboon* will receive its world premiere in June 2016 with Sir Simon Rattle and the LSO at the Barbican. His keen sense of social responsibility was threaded through many of his works, touching on major issues such as war, the environment and politics.

Sir Peter held the post of Master of the Queen's Music from 2004–2014. He was knighted in 1987 and made a Member of the Order of the Companions of Honour in the New Year 2014 Honours List. In February 2016, Sir Peter was awarded the Royal Philharmonic Society Gold Medal, the highest accolade the society can bestow, in recognition of outstanding musicianship.

Max (to all who knew him) passed away of leukaemia on 14 March 2016 at his home in Orkney. Our thoughts are with his loved ones at this time.

TRIBUTES

Max was a truly unique musician. A remarkable composer who created music theatre works of searing power, great symphonies, intense chamber music, works of truly universal popularity. A fierce fighter for music in the community and in education, and on environmental issues. And a man of invincible integrity, a true friend and a teller of truth to power. He lived in the world, even though he seemed far away in Hoy or in Sanday, and he put his beliefs into action. He loved life – and particularly the food and culture of Italy. The last years, even when battling against the leukaemia which came on him so suddenly, were an Indian Summer of wonderful, richly imagined works.

– Sally Groves, Former Creative Director, Schott Music Ltd.; and close friend

Everyone here at Intermusica is deeply saddened at Max's death. Few musicians of the past 50 years or more have made such a substantial impact on Britain's cultural life across so many areas. He never stopped sharing his vision that music was not only vital but life-enhancing. He was right to the end a pioneer whose non-conformity marked him out as an unimpeachable free spirit and creative thinker. As Master of the Queen's Music he took the role to new heights using his position to voice important opinions about music education and the value of culture to

our society, never afraid to point up where he felt the Establishment and politicians in particular had fallen short in recognising those values. He leaves a remarkable body of work enhanced by several outstanding works in recent years including his opera Kommilitonen!, the recent 10th Symphony and several works for children including his new children's opera The Hogboon, which he will sadly never get to hear. He was a man of great humour who never lost his passion for The Orkneys and for Scotland in general. We have been deeply privileged to represent Max these past years and we lose not only a great colleague but friend as well.

– **Stephen Lumsden, Managing Director, Intermusica**

When Benjamin Britten wrote to the young Peter Maxwell Davies in 1963 to applaud his "coming into the Boosey & Hawkes fold", it marked the start of a publishing relationship that was to span five decades and encompass major works in every genre. And what an astounding range of music Max wrote over those years! From the still shocking, era-defining music theatre works of the '60s, including Eight Songs for a Mad King, to symphonies, concertos and operas, to pieces for young performers and light-hearted expressions like An Orkney Wedding, with Sunrise (complete with bagpiper in full regalia), Max always wrote with his own unmistakable voice and with a fierce sense of musical integrity. Max's music is an important strand in the DNA of our catalogue and will be cherished in the years to come. We mourn the passing of an extraordinary man and celebrate his enduring musical legacy.

– **Janis Susskind, Managing Director, Boosey & Hawkes**

With Sir Peter Maxwell Davies' passing this country has lost one of its principal cultural barometers of the last 50 years. For those of us who care about the place of good music within British culture and education Max's voice was so often the rallying cry. But, of course, his voice only carried weight because of the unique qualities of his own work – a musical voice that was entirely and absolutely his, extraordinarily direct, emotionally varied and magnificently structured. My last meeting with Max was after a performance last autumn of The Lighthouse, that remarkable piece of story-telling and operatic murder-mystery, in which the overwhelming strength of the characterisation is almost claustrophobic. Max, already ill, retained the glint in his eye that seemed at one and the same time to approve of those who offered insightful comments and be dismissive of those who missed the point, and was still a welcoming magnet for groups of young people and their cameras. Max will be missed more than we know.

– **James Rushton, Managing Director, Chester Music**

I agree with every word of the tribute by Sally Groves, who worked with Max here at Schott over many years. I will add a memory of my last meeting with Max, which took place in the autumn during one of his last visits to London. He was sitting at his desk, pencil in hand, still putting the finishing touches to his last large-scale work: the upcoming children's opera The Hogboon. He spoke about how difficult the period of his illness had been, but that by dedicating his time to a work for young people – full of life, spirit and mischief – he had never become depressed. It is that passion for life, that tireless spirit and that mischievous sense of humour that I will remember above all. Here's to you, Max!

– **Sam Rigby, Managing Director, Schott Music Ltd.**

LINKS

Sir Peter Maxwell Davies was managed by Intermusica, and his works published by Boosey & Hawkes, Chester Music and Schott Music.

- [Intermusica](#)
- [Boosey & Hawkes](#)
- [Chester Music](#)
- [Schott Music Ltd.](#)
- [Sir Peter Maxwell Davies website](#)

PRESS ENQUIRIES

Please visit Sir Peter Maxwell Davies' profile page at intermusica.co.uk/sirpetermaxwelldavies to download images, video material and a complete biography. For further information, contact Intermusica Head of Communications & Marketing Fabienne Morris: fmorris@intermusica.co.uk / 020 7608 9908. Please send any tributes or comments to mail@intermusica.co.uk.