



Variations on a Burns Air

*By yon Castle wa', at the close of the day,
I heard a man sing, tho' his head it was gray:
And as he was singing the tears doon came,-
There'll never be peace till Jamie comes hame.*

*The Church is in ruins, the state is in jars,
Delusions, depressions and murderous wars,
We dar na weel say't, but we ken wha's to blame,-
There'll never be peace till Jamie comes hame.*

*My seven braw sons for Jamie drew sword,
But now I greet round their green beds in the yerd;
It brak the sweet heart o' my faithful and dame,-
There'll never be peace till Jamie comes hame.*

*Now life is a burden that bows me down,
Sin' I tint my bairns, and he tint his crown:
But till my last moments my words are the same,-
There'll never be peace till Jamie comes hame.*

Inspired by a wild boat crossing to the Ayrshire Isle of Arran, the Primrose Piano Quartet conceived the idea of Multiple Variations on an Air to celebrate the 250th anniversary of the birth of Robert Burns, which fell in 2009.

Variation on a Jacobite Air: This short piece was conceived as a lamenting song, with the lines of the violin and cello characterised in this way and supported by the piano. The viola on the other hand chooses not to lament but to behave more independently, responding with music of a decidedly dance-like character, to which the piano is also tempted to join in. Even at the end of the brief agitated passage when the ideas are thrown into disarray, the viola refuses to abandon the dancing figuration. It is only in the brief coda that its tripping triplet figuration seems to take on the lamenting character of the other three instruments. (John Casken)

Grunge Variation takes the melodic material of the air and ornaments it with swoops, glissandi, pizzicati and edgy bass lines. (Joe Cutler)

By Yon Castle Wa': My variation uses only the three string players, and follows the pitches of the song, displacing the octaves to open out the line into yearning phrases. A dual tonality is suggested, by harmonising in D minor and F against the original G major, with a guitar-like accompaniment. It comes with my best wishes, and is a gift of a few minutes respite to the silent pianist. (Sally Beamish)

My variation's title, **Air Apparent**, is an intentional misnomer as well as a pun about derivation, since the parentage of the music is anything but apparent: there was no intention in my piece to treat the folk-song as a musical, much less a cultural, entity. Instead, the variation is a little instrumental fantasia based upon discrete shards of melody, fragments shaved from the phrases of the folk-song and heavily refracted through my musical language. One of these opens the introduction; others are then found, disguised, in sustained strings, and in an ostinato cycle in the piano during the main section, which is marked *pesante*. (Piers Hellawell)

"There'll never be peace till Jamie comes hame" (Peter Fribbins) interprets the darker themes of the text. Dwelling on the 'oppressions and murderous wars' of the third stanza of the text, the theme, played in ghostly discordant harmonics and answered by falling phrases in the piano is first rhythmically compressed into a jig, then into a tense ostinato in the strings with violent syncopated piano interjections. Finally, as indicated in the score with the text 'my seven braw sons for Jamie drew sword', hammered fortissimo chords put the theme to death.

Like at least two of the other variations, **Castle Lament** is inspired not only by the melody but also by



the image of the man weeping by the castle. Whilst the three strings play an indistinct, moaning figure, the melody, slightly disguised by octave displacements, emerges in the piano. After a climax, the latter part of the theme appears more clearly before combining with Mussorgsky's The Old Castle which describes another miserable old sod singing by some ruins. This is followed by a reprise of the opening figure in high string harmonics. (Jacques Cohen)

Variation Z, "Hame" The starting point for my variation was the text whose opening lines paint the unforgettable image of an old man singing and weeping outside a castle at sunset. This scene immediately plunged me into the gothic romantic Scotland of Macbeth, tragedy and the supernatural. We learn that the old man is grieving for his "seven braw sons" who have been killed in the bloody Jacobite wars, whose ghostly voices are distributed amongst the quartet who hum and sing the theme, partially hidden amidst open string and harmonic resonance. As if his sons are still living, the old man repeatedly muses that "There'll never be peace till Jamie comes hame", in other worlds, until James II of England and the Stuart monarchy are restored to the throne. His obsessive thought is reflected in a recurring treble piano theme that breaks the hocketted string tune. In 1793 Burns wrote (concerning this Air) that "the second, or high part of the tune is only for instrumental music and would be much better omitted in singing", an instruction I've faithfully obeyed in two viol consort-like instrumental sections. For me, the Air's pivotal theme "Hame" represents a notion of peace irrevocably linked to an eternity beyond the grave, an idea echoed in the contrary-motion cycles of fifths and seconds given to the piano which end the piece in timeless, ever-expanding ripples over a hushed string tremolo glissando. (Zoë Martlew)

On a Stroud hill: My variation was, indeed, composed on a Stroud hillside, one very hot and balmy

summer afternoon in July 2008. It fulfils its intended role of being the one conventional variation in the set. The weather insinuated itself into the music, which is unashamedly influenced by Vaughan-Williams, and in an English, rather than Scottish, landscape. I responded to the ambiguous harmonies suggested in the Air by taking each of its four phrases to an unexpected resolution. (Robin Ireland)

In the short, fast **Scherzo Variation**, the Burns Air has been transformed into a jig. Open strings and natural harmonics, suggesting bagpipe drones, create a haze around a busy piano solo. The variation depicts Jamie's imagined return journey home. (Stephen Goss)

Variation on 'By Yon Castle Wa' An interesting aspect of being asked to contribute to this compositional team effort was that I knew nothing in advance about what others might be up to, and thus wrote my music wondering whether the end result for the Primrose Quartet might be a bit like dispensing with a wedding list and ending up with thirty toast racks but no sheets. (I needn't have worried.) Unlike most of my fellow composers, I also overlooked the opportunity to inject any deft word-play into the title, which remains dourly functional (a little like a castle wall, come to think of it). This variation, a free kind of scherzo, sets out by inverting the entire tune and giving it an irregular rhythm in which groups of three quavers regularly straddle main beats of a bar noted initially in 8/8 time. This is heard in the bass regions of the piano before generating material for the strings. Eventually the dotted rhythms of the opening give rise to jig-like rhythmic patterns for the strings, beneath which the piano presents a chordally supported statement of the folk theme, this time the right way up but somewhat obliquely harmonized. Free development of these elements creates triple rhythms in both quavers and semiquavers and an occasional sense of things happening in two speeds at once.



Eventually a romantically expansive but also short-lived climax leads to a headlong coda. The movement ends with a fleeting reference to the opening bars – and also, in the final cadence, to a hint of the conclusion to the Piano Quartet by Herbert Howells, a work much beloved of the Primrose Quartet. This music is unrepentantly retrospective, key influences being the splendid early Piano Trio on Irish Themes by the Swiss composer Frank Martin (1890-1974) and certain harmonic fingerprints from the music of Carl Nielsen. Although a flavour of more British pastoralism from the early 20th century hangs over it too, the movement features a fair amount of contrapuntal thinking. The piano part is particularly virtuosic, perhaps reflecting my performing enthusiasm for the music of Medtner, Rachmaninov and their Russian pianist contemporaries. (Francis Pott 2009)



John Casken studied with John Joubert, Peter Dickinson and Witold Lutoslawski. He was Professor of Music at the University of Manchester from 1992 to 2008. His first opera Golem (1989) won the first Britten Award for Composition in 1990, and the Gramophone Award in the contemporary category in 1991.



Joe Cutler is Head of Composition at Birmingham Conservatoire. Commissions include BBC Radio 3, Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival, LSO and SCO, and his music has been performed by leading artists and orchestras worldwide.

Sally Beamish, one of the foremost British composers of her generation, has had her music programmed worldwide. She was featured composer at Cheltenham Festival (2006) and St Magnus Festival (2005), and her "Knotgrass Elegy" was premièred at the BBC Proms 2001.



Piers Hellawell's work has been commissioned and performed around the world by leading artists. Recordings of his work are on the ECM (New Series), NMC and Metier labels. He is currently Professor of Composition at The Queen's University of Belfast. In 2007 his music was acquired by Peters Edition (London) Ltd.



Peter Fribbins is Director of Music at Middlesex University and Artistic Director of the celebrated and long-established series of Sunday London Chamber Music Society Concerts. Commissions include string quartets for the Chilingirian and Allegri Quartets and a cello sonata for Rapahael Wallfish.



Jacques Cohen is Music Director of the Isis Ensemble. His compositions include Yigdal (2006) and Passion Fragment which was given a sensational première in April 2009.





Zoë Martlew performs around the world as soloist and with contemporary music ensembles, rock, pop, jazz, electronica and improvisation bands. As composer she has written for ballet, theatre, film and her own one-woman cabaret show. She is a regular presenter for BBC Radio 3.



Stephen Goss's music has been recorded on EMI, Decca, and Telarc. Xuefei Yang's recording of Goss's *The Chinese Garden* (2008) was nominated as Editor's Choice in *Gramophone Magazine* and won 'Best Instrumental CD' in the Canton Radio Classical CD Awards in China.



Francis Pott was awarded First Prize in the second Prokofiev International Composing Competition in Moscow. His oratorio 'A Song on the End of the World' was written as the last pre-millennial Elgar Commission of the

Three Choirs Festival at Worcester. In 2006 he was a nominated finalist in the National Composer Awards of the British Academy of Composers and Songwriters.

Peter Maxwell Davies: Piano Quartet

The Piano Quartet was written in December 2007 for the Primrose Quartet, and is dedicated to Tam McPhail, in memory of his wife, Gunnie Moberg. Gunnie was Swedish, but settled with Tam and their four sons in Orkney, from which base she became internationally known as an artist and photographer, as well as being a close friend, and an inspiration in my own work. In this Quartet I have attempted to embrace as many of Gunnie's character traits and influences as I could, including her very Scandinavian rigour, her Scottish humour, and even her love of the Faroe Islands. It is plainsong based, with an eightfold magic square.

The first three movements are played without a break, as are the last two. Commissioned by the Primrose Piano Quartet with funding from the Scottish Arts Council, Mr and Mrs J.A.Pye's Charitable Settlement, the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama, and the Hope-Scott Trust.

Note by Robin Ireland on the Quartet:

When listening to this Piano Quartet, one thing that springs out is the sense of the mysterious and weird, also of the wild and unpredictable. It is not a novel experience to detect the Orkney landscape in Max's music, and surely it is very present in this piece, particularly in the first movement, with its long brooding silences, majestic chords, bleak harmonies and elemental musical gestures. Alongside this landscape is the presence of Max's Orkney friend, Gunnie Moberg, in whose memory the piece is written. Perhaps some of the Quartet's riddles lie in memories connected with Gunnie and her character, and no doubt these will remain unsolved for most of us. However, the prevalence of slow, reflective, poignant music, in four out of six movement, needs little explanation. The "Scotch snap" rhythm of the Jig in the first movement is another familiar Max signature. In this case it conjours up, to this writer, the image of inebriated jig dancers, getting out of step and



tripping over each other. The Jig builds up quite a head of steam, putting the viola player and pianist, as chief dancers, through their paces, before subsiding good-naturedly into the night. The Slow Air unfolds meditatively, with the measured tread of a funeral march, string trio in dialogue with piano. Towards the end of the movement, several "incomprehensible" fortissimo interjections from the piano obliterate the quiet strings, perhaps harking back to similar gestures in the opening of the first movement. Nature overwhelming sociable human activity perhaps? Not for the last time. The Lullaby from Faroe is a particularly touching piece, very spare in texture and understated, with an elusive lilting lullaby rhythm, and two high points marked all of mezzo piano. Rebus Runarum lives up to its title through being a puzzle. It opens with an incomplete 12-tone row in the violin, followed by a series of fragmentary gestures, decidedly non-human in nature apart from the briefest reference to the Scotch snap. Hortus Conclusus, translating as "Final Garden", provides the centre of high energy in the work. This time the world is that of John Coltrane's jazz piano. Any inebriation in the pianist left over from the Jig would be ill-advised when tackling the chaotic yet again largely good-natured frenzy which pervades the movement. There are reminiscences of the mysterious Orkney music and of the Jig, culminating in a collectively chaotic Presto which is brought to an abrupt halt by three time-stopping major-key chords. The short final movement, Tantum Ergo Sacramentum, emerges from the last chord; Sacramentum being the Latin translation of the Greek word for mystery. The liturgical-sounding slow music, with its poignant harmonies and "Tudor" false-relations, lays this work, and Gunnie, to rest, ending with an imponderable pizzicato chord and a dying piano note.

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 worklist that spans 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 or witty light orchestral works.



The **Quintet** by **Dmitri Smirnov** was a commission by John Thwaites's and Leon Bosch's chamber group, The Music Group of Manchester, in 1992. The world première took place at the Royal Northern College of Music on January 23rd, 1993.

"The sound basis of my Quintet is a 12-tone row constituted from four triads: C minor, E major, B flat major and F sharp minor. Unusually the first movement is in binary form, which I imagined for myself as "Introduction and Coda". The second movement is reminiscent of an "Intermezzo", and the principal, most weighty movement is the Finale. The work is dedicated to the memory of my teacher Nikolaj Sidelnikov, who like Stravinsky drew upon traditional Russian folk music in his compositions. Perhaps this was the reason for my Finale taking on a very obvious Russian character and featuring a quote of the well-known Russian folk tune 'The Bells of Novgorod'." (Dmitri Smirnov, 1992)



Dmitri Smirnov was born in Minsk in 1948. He studied at the Moscow Conservatoire from 1967 to 1972 with Nikolai Sidelnikov (composition), Edison Denisov (instrumentation), and Yuri Kholopov (analysis), and also privately with the Webern pupil Philip Gerschkovich. From 1973 to

1980 he was an editor for Sovetsky Kompozitor Music Publishers in Moscow, and has subsequently devoted himself to composition and teaching. Since 1991, Smirnov and his wife Elena Firsova have been resident in the UK. They were joint composers-in-residence at Cambridge and Dartington in 1992, at Keele University from 1993 to 1997, and from 1998 have been resident in St Albans, near London. Smirnov's works have demonstrated his fascination with the art and poetry of William Blake. A song cycle (1979) to Blake's *The Seasons* generated a symphony which has been performed at the Tanglewood Festival and at the South Bank Centre in London. Two Smirnov operas set texts by Blake: *Tiriël* was staged by the Stadttheater in Freiburg, and *The Lamentations of Thel* by the Almeida Festival in London, both in 1989. Recent scores include *Jacob's Ladder* and *The River of Life*, commissioned for the London Sinfonietta, *Quartets No.3 and No.6* for the Brodsky Quartet, *Song of Songs for the Orchestre de la Suisse Romande*, and *Between Scylla and Charybdis* for the Nieuw Sinfonietta of Amsterdam and the English String Orchestra. Dmitri Smirnov is published by Boosey & Hawkes (*Reprinted by kind permission of Boosey & Hawkes*)

THE PRIMROSE PIANO QUARTET

The Primrose Piano Quartet was formed in 2004 by pianist John Thwaites and three of the UK's most renowned chamber musicians (Lindsay, Sorrel, Maggini Quartets). It is named after the great Scottish violist, William Primrose, who himself played in the Festival Piano Quartet. Alongside their performances of the major repertoire, the Primrose Quartet have researched the forgotten legacy of 20th century English composers and revived a number of remarkable and unjustly neglected piano quartets. Their first CD featured works by Thomas Dunhill, William Hurlstone, Roger Quilter and Arnold Bax. It was released in 2004 to wide critical acclaim and was followed by a disc presenting music by Cyril Scott, William Alwyn, Herbert Howells and Frank Bridge, which was a Five Star choice in the *Classic FM Magazine*. The Primrose Quartet celebrated Hurlstone's centenary (30th May 2006) live on BBC Radio 3 and at the Wigmore Hall.

A recent highlight has been the world première of Sir Peter Maxwell Davies's *Piano Quartet* at the Cheltenham International Music Festival in 2008. Another exciting commission, born out of their strong Scottish connections, is the "Burns Air" project, timed to celebrate Robert Burns's 250th anniversary. The finished work had its world première in October and the Scottish première in November 2009 at the Sound Festival in Aberdeen, followed by a London performance in February 2010 at King's Place. Having been selected for the Making Music Concert Promoters' Network in 2004/5, the Primrose perform throughout the UK and abroad, with a 10-concert tour of Denmark in 2010.

The Quartet were Ensemble-in-Residence at the London College of Music 2004-2009. Having recently released a CD of the Richard Strauss Piano Quartet, Violin Sonata and Cello Sonata, a recording of Fauré C minor and Brahms G minor Piano Quartets is planned for 2010, also on the Meridian label.



Leader of groups such as the Werethina, Edinburgh and Maggini String Quartets, **Susanne Stanzeleit** has released more than 25 solo CDs.

Robin Ireland is renowned as the former violist of Domus and the Lindsays, perhaps the UK's foremost quartet with over 60 recordings in the ASV catalogue.

Former associate principal cellist with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, **Andrew Fuller** is also well known as a member of the Fibonacci Sequence and Primavera.

In addition to performing relationships with the Schidlof, Maggini, Brodsky, Martinu, Dante and Emperor Quartets, **John Thwaites** is duo partner to cellists including Alexander Baillie and Johannes Goritzki.



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Sir Peter Maxwell Davies Dmitri Smirnov Variations on a Burns Air

Variations on a Burns Air

[1]	Air "By Yon Castle Wa"	Robert Burns	0:57
[2]	Variation on a Jacobite air	John Casken	3:38
[3]	Grunge Variation	Joe Cutler	0:57
[4]	By Yon Castle Wa'	Sally Beamish	1:25
[5]	Air Apparent	Piers Hellawell	1:49
[6]	There'll never be peace till Jamie comes hame	Peter Fribbins	3:01
[7]	Castle Lament	Jacques Cohen	3:51
[8]	Variation Z, "Hame"	Zoë Martlew	7:42
[9]	Air on a Stroud hill	Robin Ireland	1:52
[10]	Scherzo Variation	Stephen Goss	2:02
[11]	By Yon Castle Wa'	Francis Pott	3:49

Sir Peter Maxwell Davies

Piano Quartet (2007)

[12]	Entrance and Jig	4:03
[13]	Slow Air	5:19
[14]	Føroya Kvædi (Lullabye from Faroe)	2:51
[15]	Rebus Runarum	1:20
[16]	Hortus Conclusus	4:36
[17]	Tantum Ergo Sacramentum	1:14

Dmitri Smirnov

Quintet for Piano, Violin, Viola, Violoncello and Double-bass, Op.72 (1992)

[18]	Quasi Allegro	3:27
[19]	Andantino con moto	4:37
[20]	Andante cantabile - Doppio Movimento	10:06

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