



Lagos

Mauricio Kagel String Quartet no. 4

From the very first moment, the elegantly light-footed line shared between the two violins accompanied by brusquely double-stopped chords in the viola and cello, the rustic tone in the work is unmistakable. Immediately one is captured: when have we last heard this peculiar colour? Yet it seems entirely fresh and unaffected, without the mawkish nostalgia of those who would like nothing more than to return to a golden age that never was, but likewise without any irony or parody, this all-purpose distancing device of postmodernist aesthetics that allows composers to, with an elegant or not-so-elegant sleight-of-hand, renounce all responsibility for what they have written.

The allusion to an unequivocal idea of classicism had already been a notable feature of Kagel's preceding

String Quartet No. 3. But in that work, the primary means to achieve this connection were form and structure: an overall four-movement form with unmistakable allusions to sonata form. To this can be added a commitment to a quasi-tonal syntax, textural complexity and a sense of drama, derived from contrasts in texture and character and other quintessential devices of classic-romantic string quartet composition. All of this is noticeable in the Fourth Quartet too, even though it is in only two movements: note, for instance, the clearly highlighted recapitulation of the opening material in the second half of the first movement, now with the melodic line compressed in the first violin only: could there be any clearer evocation of the sense of a return home, characteristic of classic-romantic sonata form? Or consider the solemn chorale ending the movement, with a pizzicato walking bass in the

cello, more than a little reminiscent of the second movement of Schubert's great String Quintet.

For a moment, there is even the suggestion that the movement might end on a major chord (G flat major to be precise), but this was clearly too much affirmation for Kagel, even in a work that is so emphatically positive and light-hearted and quite ostentatiously gives the miss to the tone of 'high seriousness' that seems to have become the rigour in new music.

But what is new about the piece is its nodding towards the folkloristic and popular and its open acceptance of this long-suppressed sound world, without any need to accommodate it through sublimation or irony. Listen to the triadic tune at the beginning of the second movement: when have we last heard anything so delightful and uncomplicated in new music? And

yet, there is no hint of nostalgia here, no heavy moralizing or a 'critique of modernity', nor does Kagel seem to feel a need to distance himself from this simplicity through any compositional quotation marks or intrusive artistry. Listen too to the wonderful cacophony when the tune is repeated in multi-tonal distortion. There are many moments like this in both movements: the haunting violin tune in the first movement or the almost aching sentimental parallel thirds in the violins to the pizzicato accompaniment in the second etc. Yet at no stage is any of the material clearly identifiable: no exoticisms, Alpine cuckoo-clock kitsch, Hungarian colours or gypsy tunes – just some sort of distillation of the folkloric. And thereby Kagel refers – quite consciously one would assume – to the great synthesis of the artful and popular of the classic-romantic tradition. Yet there is one more voice

that can be clearly heard here and that serves as the link between the classic-romantic tradition and contemporary music: Bartók!

It is a perhaps surprising reference and maybe also an unintended or unconscious one: Bartók had never loomed large in Hagel's music, nor in that of any composer of the West-European avant-garde (Stockhausen of course had written his student dissertation on Bartók, yet all but disowned his music when he discovered Webern – which seemed to have set a pattern). Yet, from the aforementioned double-stoppings of the opening to the Bartók (!) pizzicatos in the second movement Bartók seems never far away. And how apt this reference is! While the quotation of and allusion to folk music was a hallmark of Bartók's style in general, it is, perhaps surprisingly, in his magisterial cycle of string quartet where the

synthesis between the traditional and the most advanced reaches its apex.

There we are then: a work that in its effortless betrays few of the exertions characteristic of the avant-garde, but whose very serenity would not have been possible without those; that rehabilitates the genuinely rustic without reactionary sentiment; that harks back to Bartók as well as the classic-romantic tradition while sounding fresh and full of vigour; that makes a virtue of simplicity without ingratiating itself to the lowest common denominator or talking down to its audience; that is genuinely positive in spirit, without ever seeming forced, hollow or triumphalist – in short, a deeply affecting, humane, even wise work.

Björn Heile

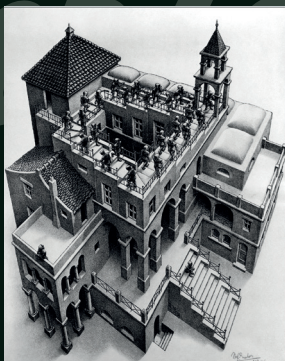
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Tristan Keuris String Quartet no. 1

As in Bartók's String Quartet no. 5, Tristan Keuris uses the so-called mirror image effect in which the central movement serves as the axis. Melodious with many recitative-like elements, this movement gives a prominent role to the first violin. From the middle movement Keuris works towards the beginning of the first movement and the end of the third, the beginning and end of the quartet using the same motif. In other words, a return to the first movement immediately after the third movement would make a seamless transition, ultimately creating a never ending story. This is exciting because, like Kagel, Keuris draws on extremes of rhythm, timbre and register.

After a concert a listener once came to us and said he imagined he was in a dark castle in which he had to go from the first floor to the third and back,

not knowing what he was going to encounter: "unbelievably thrilling". This experience have given us a particular image of this quartet: "Ascending and Descending", an M.C. Escher lithograph showing a castle with a never-ending staircase on its roof. It makes no difference whether one goes up or down, it has no end.



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This High Definition Surround Recording was Produced, Engineered and Edited by Bert van der Wolf of NorthStar Recording Services, using the 'High Quality Musical Surround Mastering' principle. The basis of this recording principle is an optimal realistic and holographic, 3 dimensional representation of the musical instruments, voices and recording venue, according to traditional concert practice. For most historic music this means a

frontal representation of the musical performance, nevertheless such that width and depth of the ensemble and acoustic characteristics of the hall do resemble 'real life' as much as possible. Some compositions in history, and many contemporary works do specifically ask for placement of musical instruments and voices all over the 360 degrees sound scape however, and in such cases this is also recorded as realistic as possible within the possibilities of the 5.1 Surround Sound standard.

This all requires a very innovative use of all 6 loudspeakers and the use of fully equal and full frequency range loudspeakers for all 5 discrete channels, and a complementary sub-woofer for the ultra low frequencies under 40Hz, is highly recommended to optimally benefit from the sound quality of this recording.

Recorded: 28-30 augustus 2006 in the Hervormde Kerk Renswoude

Recorded and Mastered by: Turtle Records/Edison Production Company BV

Producer/Balance Engineer & Editing: Bert van der Wolf

Instruments: a Hendrik Jacobs violin from 1693 played by Ron de Haas, a Johannes Bernardus Cuypers violin from 1817 played by Jan Koomen and a Johannes Theodorus Cuypers cello from 1770 played by Sebastiaan de Rode provided by het Nationaal Muziekinstrumenten Fonds.

Recording Equipment: Sonodore Microphones & pre-amplifiers
Siltch PRO-S4 microphone cables & interlinks
dCS DXD/DSD Analogue to Digital converters

Surround Monitoring: Avalon Eidolon special-X & Avalon Indra
monitors & Spectral Power amplifiers



Ensemble