



DAVID BRAID + EPOQUE STRING QUARTET

flow



STEINWAY & SONS



DAVID BRAID: FLOW

This recording showcases the music of David Braid, a Canadian with a vision to transform understanding of musical performance and creativity. Braid is a Steinway Artist and has twice received a Juno Award, Canada's highest recording honour. Establishing a reputation as one of his country's 'renaissance men when it comes to music' (*Ottawa Citizen*), he has excelled in a diverse range of styles and has an ability to communicate at high levels as a composer, performer and inspirational teacher. He has worked across the world to develop a new direction for music-making, and now offers this latest recording as part of that mission. The music presented here, for piano and string quartet, is linked to collaborations with The Canadian Brass, Sinfonia UK Collective, and various international string quartets. Profoundly respectful of the Western Art Music Tradition, it is influenced in part by philosophical ideas such as the Chinese concept of *qi* (氣) (energy flow) and the Ancient Greek concept of *pneuma* (πνεῦμα) ('breath' in the context of 'spirit' or 'soul'), which for Braid are manifestations of the same source of 'true inspiration' (Braid 2012-16).

The music on this recording evolves from a process of cultural consumption, absorption and musical rebirth in which *qi* and *pneuma* are essential. This sense of *qi* and *pneuma* extends to a concern for balance in contrast and forward propulsion, including the dissolving of conceptual restrictions in order to induce in the inner creator the 'breath of life'. Braid applies these ideas to himself as well as his collaborators. His vision encompasses an œuvre that establishes through the works' originators a collective *qi*. This collective *qi* embraces diversity

in musical language and democratic approaches to authorship and ownership (Tsang, 2015).

The main aspects of culture that Braid absorbs are typically characterised by their temporal and dynamic phenomena. Such phenomena include all kinds of artforms and disciplines that have the capacity to capture a sense of continuous movement, such as music and film.

Braid's unusual conceiving of jazz as a verb rather than as a noun provides, moreover, a route to creations that are ever expanding and that lead to the discovery of new horizons. This recording reveals how in the pursuit of self-discovery – what it means for him 'to jazz' – Braid has harnessed aspects of Western classical, folk, ancient and world music forms, underpinned these with his jazz sensibility, and channeled them through the nuanced palette of piano and string quartet: a richly creative *qi*.

Filmic templates

The temporal and dynamic nature of film energizes Braid's musical creativity. He searches for inspiration deep into film's content, structure and working methods, and is able to create – through the filmic principles that he deduces – musical structures that appeal and surprise.

Let us take as an example his ***Joya Variations***. Whilst Braid is not seeking to write 'movie music' here, he is quite explicit about the link with film, writing a music that has a filmic essence in its timing and yet exists independently of any need for visuals: 'I wanted it to have

non-stop action, like a well-made Hollywood action film', he confirms (see Braid, 2012-2016). Just as pop-culture action movies are often designed to shock, thrill and surprise spectators, and are highly focused on keeping their narratives on a forward trajectory, so Braid plays with our musical expectations in order to achieve a sense of continuous dynamism. This potential parallel with visual action narratives was nevertheless an unexpected revelation for Braid. **Part 1** of *Joya Variations* was (re)conceived during a chance encounter with the 2015 action movie *Mission Impossible: Rogue Nation*, which was being screened during an intercontinental flight. Whilst happening to observe the movie's visual rhythms and tempi without the aid of sound, Braid was suddenly struck by the possibility that a filmic template of surprise could be used analogously in music to capture and to sustain his audience's interest. Braid proceeded to study the movie in detail in order to extract this template and he moulded and developed his musical ideas around aspects of the resulting structure.

The main theme of *Joya Variations* is 42 1/2 beats in length and has a rhythm inspired by *Lundú*, a Brazilian piece for two guitars by Egberto Gismonti. Unlike a traditional 'Theme and Variations', which starts with a clear statement of the theme, this version is, as Braid puts it, 'more deconstructed'. Full and partial variations of the theme are intentionally interrupted at unexpected points to surprise the listener, and some variations (in the case of the piano solos) are improvised. Harmonically the piece makes use of a Mixolydian mode in a pentatonic pattern (1, 3, 4, 5, 7), but with a tendency for the leading tone to be raised when the melodic line ascends (e.g. A, C#, D, E, G/G#). **Part 2** is notable for its use of improvised body percussion, which involves Braid 'dancing on a hollow wooden box, jingling coins [in his

pocket] and hand drumming inside the piano' (Braid, 2012-16).

Braid's approach to form and structure in *Joya Variations* resembles that of a filmmaker in the sense that he uses the theme and variations concept as merely a starting point; he can freely adapt and edit the structure in the pursuit of his vision. Such musical parallels to filmmaking perhaps recall the conductor and orchestrator Stokowski whose approach to musical free transcription shares with Braid a passionate drive to engage the public through music's sensory aspects over and above any artificially constructed sense of fidelity to the original object. In contrast to Stokowski, Braid chooses facilitation over grandstanding to achieve this aim and his approaches are focused on the development of original compositions.

Chauvet (2011-2015) is a work that perhaps more strongly than any other communicates how the content of a film can affect Braid's approach. It was inspired by Werner Herzog's *Cave of Forgotten Dreams* (2010), which documents the recent discovery of 30,000-33,000 year-old paintings in Chauvet Cave – Pont D'Arc in Southern France. Braid was so inspired that he often recounts being drawn back to see the film eight times. The artwork in the cave is considered in the film as a manifestation of the early human psyche, illustrating sophisticated symbolic thinking, innovation and, among other things, intellectual 'fluidity and permeability' as exemplified by the capacity to perceive and communicate in 'the beyond'. It helps us to identify how art made us human, and the cave – like our modern concert halls, galleries, museums and theatres – is a space of ritual where spirituality, communication, and innovation meet.

Braid has sought to capture these ideas whilst aligning his work with the rich narrative of the cave painters' art. In conversation with Peter Hum (2015), he articulates the film's relationship to his musical composition:

Elements from the film manifest themselves in my piece mainly on two levels: I think the primary level is my inner reaction to provocative inquiries expressed through the various archaeologists, art historians, and paleontologists throughout the film. The secondary level of inspiration occurs with the invention of musical elements that correlate directly to specific elements appearing in the film itself, such as the haunting painted faces of animals long extinct, the discovery of an ancient flute, the artists' palm prints of red dye, one inventive proto-cinematic drawing, and the sudden comical appearance of an eccentric perfumist sniffing around Chauvet Cave.

Braid later explains that the film's provocative themes are articulated in the composition's seven narratives, most of which are conceived from the perspective of a central protagonist. **Part 1 'Descent to the Unknown'** conveys our protagonist's initial physical and psychological experiences as he explores the cave. **Part 2 'Memories of Long Forgotten Dreams'** expresses the igniting of inquiry and imagination as he encounters the paintings and considers them from the perspective of humanity. **Part 3 'Awakening'** relates to how the combination of the cave's ambience and the fertile, sensual imagery of a 'Great Mother', centrally placed in the cave's complex of images and tunnels, establishes our protagonist's connection with humankind's fundamental self. **Part 4 'Conception'** explores this connection further and yet

more profoundly, expressing the idea that the ritualistic cave – as Herzog puts it, the ‘birthplace of the modern human soul’ – is an awe-inspiring space where the act of physical, spiritual and ideological penetration occurs. **Part 5 ‘Homo Spiritualis’** sees our protagonist return to the surface, reborn; his revelatory experience has increased his awareness of the hubris of so-called *Homo sapiens* and instead the concept of humanity as *Homo spiritualis* is brought into focus. **Part 6, ‘The Juggler Dreamt of Lions’** expands on these ideas, as it reflects on two characters in the film: a young scientist (and former circus juggler) struggling to describe his intense dreams about the cave, and an eccentric perfumist who comically and unexpectedly turns up to explore the cave’s meaning through the use of his olfactory sense. Finally, the reverential **Part 7 ‘Eyes Upon Us’** depicts the cave's uncanny qualities as a perpetual ‘living’ presence that observes and calls out from dark recesses to all who have encountered her.

Beyond these details is a wider concern to explore our relationship to the past, to begin to comprehend how the human need to express through art is something that is shared across millennia. As demonstrated by the work of the cave artists who painted new visions within existing paintings, art can be a collaborative process that stretches across hundreds, potentially thousands of generations. And it is perhaps this view – the sense that communication with our artistic forefathers is an innately human endeavour – that gives Braid licence to absorb selective aspects of Bach, Brahms, Stravinsky and others in the pursuit of his own creative voice. By absorbing what is effective and rejecting what he does not like, Braid begins to establish a creative dialogue with the past that ultimately surfaces in his compositions. Thus, bygone composers can begin to communicate collectively to audiences through the historical layers of Braid’s style.

Braid's musical *qi*

For Braid, a collective approach to authorship is a natural consequence of his pursuit of *qi*. For him co-authors are to be found not just in the past, but also in the present. He is passionate about ensuring the potentials of the musicians performing are not left grossly unexplored. In 2016, he explained the point:

I recently watched an American performance involving the National Symphony Orchestra at the Kennedy Center featuring a highly respected hip-hop artist. Combining the traditions of both rapper and orchestra, as it seems to me, could yield tremendous results if contemporary rhythm, mass-energy, pulse, improvisation, performance-art, and multi-media (among other things) were balanced within a capable musical form enhanced with the limitless flexibility of a world-class orchestra. The concert was clearly the 'rapper's show' where the forces of the orchestra were limited to synthesizer-like riffs, but unlike an amplified synthesizer, the acoustic sound was muddled behind a plexi-glass wall, isolating the orchestra from the rapper on stage and unbalancing the acoustic instruments; amplified drums, electric bass, electric guitar and keyboard played ceaselessly throughout the entire concert. The performance was considered a great success by rap performance standards; however, as a meeting of music traditions, it was a failure ... Of this performance, and others I've seen like it, I was left with a general heavy-hearted feeling of 'missed opportunity' as this was simply a

concert centered entirely on the skills of one artist among about fifty skilled artists on stage. ...

The yielding of creative potentials, even between disparate traditions, is a central motivation within the collaborative nature of my work. If there is innovation in my work then, it's really not harmonic, rhythmic, or melodic – composers over the last 500 years already provide me with more ideas than I could exhaust; however, I'm interested to innovate how musicians combine, and how they create when directed narratively and through the use of verbal imagery and metaphor. I believe this is one way to get in touch with creative forces beyond our perceived limitations, and unlock the 'inner creator' during controlled improvisation. For instance, in moments of controlled group improvisation, such as the section subtitled 'Conception' in my composition, Chauvet, I believe there are factors of interpersonal, perhaps 'spiritual', communication at play that cannot be easily measured; however, they can be identified by uncanny synchronicity in spontaneous musical choices, and a feeling that the audience and performer are intertwined. In the best of these moments, I feel like time, space, sound and the consciousness of all present combine in a uniquely singular way that, if nothing else, gives 'life' or 'breath' to this 'one-time' performance experience – notating that improvisation for a later re-performance would certainly kill something vital. (Braid, 2012-16)

The 'Conception' episode of *Chauvet* creates the sensation of a 'melting chorale' and was the result of work on the piece that Braid undertook with the Sinfonia UK Collective in the summer of 2015. Structurally, this section opens up a window, taking us somewhere new, no matter how familiar we are with the piece. It has a sense and effect of ever expanding 'the work', so that 'the work' (and by that we mean the full gamut of performances/versions that exist) is always a vital, expanding object that pulls in, or simultaneously opens up a portal to, another part of the creative universe. As Braid has put it in his correspondence, 'It feels like a living piece' (Braid 2012-16).

Such windows of creative opportunity instil something precious back into the live concert experience, something that adds a sense of adventure and never becomes routine. In the age of recording, particularly in the classical genre, interpretation and musical creativity in performance can sometimes be impeded by reverence to recordings, which in the ears of some listeners seems to 'set in stone' the limits of what is possible. Or at least that is a perception with which many performers continually wrangle. In Braid's music what is affected is not just performance nuance, a tempo shift here, a difference in dynamic there ... The musical substance, including sometimes the harmonic world that we enter, can change. The performers dig deep into their personal performance histories in order to release their inner creative *qi*, all the time feeding off the *qi* of the audience and ambient context.

The performers' ownership of these authorial contributions serves to heighten the conviction of the delivery. This is something that conductors such as Semyon Bychkov recognize when

they talk about ‘opening up’ orchestral performers to new ideas; the aim is for the musicians to feel they can draw on their own talent, can find a way to play which is the way that they want to play (Caffrey, 2015). What Braid expects – and gets – from his ‘opening up’ of performers is this kind of conviction combined with a whole lot of compositional creativity to boot.

So, Braid’s music provides a sense of adventure; narratives are always defined by their context (i.e. the musical forces, the players, the performance environment), have aspects that are constructed in real time, are continuously re-edited and reworked and there is no final version. Why no final version? Because Braid prefers not to have ‘arrived’ (see Hum, 2014). When composers of contemporary classical music write a new work, the music usually occupies a narrowly-defined creative space and when it is complete, the work is often, at least conceptually, shelved. It is as though the composer has said everything about that subject and the performers can only ever just recreate whatever she or he had to say. Even in those cases where a piece exists in different versions and revisions, a sense that one or other of these was definitive is prevalent. Such arrival points carry self-imposed barriers that can in some cases translate into dead ends; as such they are antithetical in purpose to the *qi* philosophy that underpins Braid’s work. Essential to *qi* is the notion of ensuring energy can flow unhindered and if there is nowhere for that energy to flow then the effect can be negative. When a work may be said to have ‘arrived’, to have reached its compositionally creative end, something of its *qi* dies, and audiences may perceive this. By contrast, the welcoming of process in real time as an integral aspect to Braid’s work enables an ‘opening up’ to the audience, an invitation for them to come along and enjoy the creative ride.

The remaining works on this recording are consistent with these *qi* ideas and they demonstrate Braid's concern also for balance in contrast to achieve a coherent compositional identity.

Semi (2015) is a demonstration of Braid's handling of musical affect through sustained tension and a prolonged search for resolution. It unfolds with a nostalgic sense of landscape that is aggravated by discordant piquancy; there are dreamy, warm and bittersweet sentiments as it floats back and forth between hope and tragedy. Propelled forward harmonically and contrapuntally, the music builds in intensity, gorgeously rendered by the strings throughout. Improvised piano cadenzas steer the work at key junctures and at times reposition perspectives on the past through jazz-inflected gestures drawn from musical Classicism and Romanticism. Towards the end, following an extended cadenza, accompanying strings are concerto-like, providing a scalic, harmonic backdrop to the piano's elaborations, which proceed with classically-inspired figurations and runs; here, one becomes increasingly aware of the emergence of Mozart's ghost, which gently guides us towards resolution, however fleeting.

Spirit Dance (2010-2015) is a joyful, witty celebration of Canadian cultural and ethnic diversity. In this light-and-lively piece, a range of cultural fragments may be traced through aspects of melody, harmony, rhythm and meter. A whirling dervish inspires the circular motion of the opening repeated 11-beat phrase; sharp contrasts, such as a Brazilian dance rhythm interrupting the exposition, portray the 'ethnic enclaves' of Canada's metropolitan neighbourhoods (Hiebert, 2015); and a violin prominently evokes the irregular rhythms of Métis folk music. As the work draws to a close, a 7-note 'international' scale (1, \flat 2, 3, 4, 5, \flat 6, 7),

developed by drawing from scales associated with various ethnicities, serves to help communicate musically aspects of connectivity amidst moments of musical contrast that reflect aspects of the cultural mosaic.

Epilogue has its origins as a piece for two trumpets and is, in Braid's words, 'essentially a two-voice composition'. The influence of the Estonian composer Arvo Pärt and Polish-British novelist Joseph Conrad are apparent in this work. Just as for Pärt 'every blade of grass has the importance of a flower' and for Conrad 'a work that aspires to the status of art should carry its justification in every line', so Braid sought to give 'absolute gravity' to each note in the polyphony (see Supin, 2002; Conrad, 1897; Braid, 2010). For Braid it was 'like a Bach two-part invention – pulling out just one note could damage the structure'. Braid elaborates on the version presented on this recording: 'After I was satisfied with the composition for two voices, I fleshed it out idiomatically for string quartet. At the last minute, I decided to improvise throughout the piece, trying my best to feel deeply the compositional weight of each gesture.'

These improvisations, often with their Bach-ian gestures, conjure up the presence of Glenn Gould, a pianist with whom Braid feels a close affinity. But the work is far more than a clever allusion or tribute to a celebrated Canadian 20th-century pianist. *Epilogue* is a highly enigmatic, contemplative piece about Time. Non-vibrato strings convey a haunting, edgy quality that evokes an internal sense of ancient time and the presentness of the piano improvisations position Braid as time's contemplator. Manipulation of string timbres captures a sense of shifting perspective, from the past to a more emotional present: it pulls us coolly into the

depths of the past when lean, and draws us towards the present when the warmth and interaction between piano and strings increases; these dynamic moments function as brief emotional memories or ideas for the future that are experienced vibrantly in the present. A brief contrasting outburst – lively, rhythmic, unsettled – jolts us into an intense awareness of Time's urgency, but we quickly retreat with Braid into the reflective past once more. And what is the significance of this retreat? *Qi*. Flow. A contemplation of the past enables us to escape an unsettled, directionless present, opening up routes for us to find a new way.

— Dr Lee Tsang



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LEE TSANG

Dr Lee Tsang is Managing and Artistic Director of the Sinfonia UK Collective and a lecturer at University of Hull. In 2015 he toured with David Braid and the Sinfonia UK Collective. During this period *Spirit Dance* and orchestral versions of *Chauvet* and *Semi* were performed throughout the UK and Canada.

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DAVID BRAID

‘Braid’s tone, touch, chord voicings and imagination make him one of the most interesting new pianists I’ve encountered in a long time.’

– Doug Ramsey, recipient of *Jazz Journalists Association’s Lifetime Achievement Award*

Hailed in the Canadian press as ‘a jazz genius to call our own’ (*Maclean’s Magazine*), multi-Juno-Award-winning pianist David Braid has performed concerts of his original music and improvisations across Europe, Scandinavia, Asia, Australia, Brazil, The United States, and Canada. Combining principals fundamental to European classical music and the spontaneity of American jazz, Braid’s fusion of art music engages audiences with a style described as ‘refreshingly uncategorizable’ (*Paris Transatlantic*), ‘brilliant’ (*Montreal Gazette*), ‘wide-ranging, exploratory’ (*South China Morning Post*), ‘une force poétique’ (*Le Soleil*) and ‘hauntingly beautiful’ (*The Globe & Mail*).

David Braid is a Steinway Artist, Artist-in-Residence at the University of Toronto, and a Special Associate Artist of Sinfonia UK Collective.

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EPOQUE STRING QUARTET

The Prague-based Epoque Quartet was founded in 1999. Members of the quartet are prizewinners of numerous international competitions, twice winning first place at Liezen, Austria, the first prize at the International Ludwig van Beethoven Quartet Competition and a Jeunesses Musicales prize. As an ensemble, they have recently completed tours in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, France, Italy, England, Israel, Japan, Brazil, Greece, The Netherlands, Poland, Bosnia and Canada. They appear regularly in the subscription concert series of the Czech Broadcasting Symphonic Orchestra, the Czech Nonet and the Association for Chamber Music, perform frequently on Czech National Television and Radio and are regular guests at prestigious festivals such as the Schleswig-Holstein Musikfestival (Germany), Concentus Moraviae, the Music Festival of České Krumlov, the chamber music series of the Stuttgarter Philharmoniker, Metamorphoses (Switzerland), the Ludwig van Beethoven Music Festival and Moravský podzim (Moravian Autumn).

Members of the quartet have led masterclasses in jazz interpretation around the world, including in Jerusalem, São Paulo, Belgrade, and Prague, and have performed with jazz personalities such as Gregory Porter, George Mraz, Benny Bailey and Yoshiko Kishino. The quartet has close affiliations with the Robert Balzar Trio, French horn player Radek Baborák and Canadian pianist and composer David Braid.

www.epoquequartet.com

