

ST. MAGNUS FESTIVAL ORKNEY

1. [Background](#)
2. [Getting Started - Commissioning The Martyrdom of St. Magnus Feb 1976](#)
3. [Bringing the Committee together- April 1976](#)
4. [Disaster – November / December 1976](#)
5. [Renewed Hope – January 1977](#)
6. [Green Light –Go ahead – January 1977](#)
7. [Moving the Martyrdom to Orkney – June 1977](#)
8. [Rehearsals in Kirkwall - June 1977](#)
9. [The First Performance -June 1977](#)
10. [Media Activity – June 1977](#)
11. [The Two Fiddlers - 1978 and subsequent performances](#)
12. [Le Jongleur de Notre Dame 1978](#)
13. [Kirkwall Shopping Songs/Solstice of Light 1979](#)
14. [Cinderella - 1980 and subsequent performances](#)
15. [Trouble with the Orcadian](#)
16. [Yellow Cake Revue/ Farewell to Stromness - 1980 and afterwards](#)
17. [Scottish Television Documentary - 1980](#)
18. [The Rainbow/Lullaby for Lucy - 1980](#)
19. [Songs of Hoy - 1982](#)
20. [Glenys Hughes leaves Orkney and returns 1982](#)
21. [Violin Concerto - 1986](#)
22. [Jimmack the Postie/ House of Winter - 1986](#)
23. [Max as Artistic Director](#)
24. [Celebrity Recitals](#)
25. [Five Festival Crises](#)
26. [Peter Maxwell Davies' Works for St. Magnus Festival](#)

Background

Peter Maxwell Davies (hereafter referred to as Max) brought up the subject of a festival in Orkney, where he had lived since 1971, within a few days of my becoming his manager. He lived an isolate life on the island of Hoy, and had no telephone, other than the [phone-box](#) at the head of valley, or means of instant communication. Max had derived great benefit from his living in Orkney, and his music had taken on a different and less frantic quality from the violent explosions of his compositions in the late 1960s. Max felt that he wanted to give something back to Orkney, and its people, and being a musician and composer, a festival seemed to be the most appropriate way of doing this. Max told me that he wanted to write an opera based on the novel by the renowned Orcadian poet George Mackay Brown. The opera was to tell the story of St. Magnus, who is the patron saint of Orkney. St. Magnus Cathedral stands in the centre of Kirkwall, the largest town in Orkney. His opera would be the centre-piece for the first festival.

In January 1976 I went to Orkney for the first time when I went to visit Max in his home on Hoy. During this visit I met [George Mackay Brown](#) himself, and also [Archie Bevan](#) and his wife [Elizabeth](#), all three of whom lived in [Stromness](#), the second largest town on the mainland of Orkney. Thus at one fell swoop, I was

introduced to the whole essential Orcadian experience, which was Rackwick, Hoy, Stromness and those three friends with whom Max had become close since his move to Orkney. All three had lived their whole lives in Orkney and knew everything that was to be known about its extraordinary history and folk lore. George, as well as being a poet and novelist, wrote a weekly column for *The Orcadian*, the local weekly newspaper, and Max had already set some of George's poems to music.

Archie was the deputy head master of the Stromness Academy School, and head of English. Elizabeth played the organ in the local church in Stromness. Max had already written an organ work for Elizabeth to play and a piano work for their daughter Ann, who was eight years old. In 1974 Max had also written a large-scale orchestral work called *Stone Litany: Runes from the House of the Dead*. This work, for voice and orchestra, relates to the prehistoric burial chamber of Maeshowe on the mainland island of Orkney. The litanies of graffiti, which are carved out on the stones inside the chamber, are in the original Orkney language, left by the Vikings many centuries later. So, in his music, both on the small and large scale, Max had demonstrated how drawn he was in every way to Orkney

Getting Started – Commissioning of *The Martyrdom* February 1976

There had been some previous discussion about a possible festival with the Orkney Arts Society, but as far as the members of the Society were concerned, Max was lived as a recluse, and had no connection with them in any tangible way. As far as they were concerned he was just a composer who had come to live alone on Hoy. Thus the idea of a festival had not met with any kind of enthusiastic response, and any attempts to put something positive together had fallen by the wayside because of the lack of being able to be in reliable communication with Max owing to his lack of a telephone.

It was in February 1976 that [Robert Ponsonby](#), the director of BBC Radio 3 and of the BBC Promenade Concerts, asked to meet me. He told me that he was making a number of commissions in connection with the upcoming Silver Jubilee of The Queen, which was to be the following year in 1977, and that he would like Max to write one of these commissions. Commissions of this sort were almost invariably orchestral works which would have their first outings at the Proms. I then suggested to Robert that instead of an orchestral work, Max would like to write a chamber opera on the life of St. Magnus. This opera, whose title would be *The Martyrdom of St. Magnus*, would be performed by The Fires of London, Max's own ensemble (of which I was also the manager), and that it should have its premiere in Orkney, as part of a festival which Max hoped to be able to establish there.

Robert immediately responded positively to the idea in all its aspects. The commission was signed. If the festival did not take place, then the premiere would be at the Round House in Camden Town, as part of the BBC Proms season. The commission would go ahead notwithstanding, and Max would write the opera for The Fires, whether or not the festival took place.

All this was very exciting, and it meant that I would now be able to go to Orkney to try to put a package together. This would entail bringing a group of people together

to form a committee which would push Max's vision forward. In February 1976, The Fires had a date in Edinburgh, and I used the occasion to see Christie Duncan, who was in charge of music at the Scottish Arts Council. I told him the whole story, and he was very enthusiastic. He said, however, that the Scottish Arts Council would only give money if there was money coming from Orkney itself, and that meant the Orkney Islands Council. The Scottish Arts Council would match the Orkney Islands Council, pound for pound. This also was encouraging. I now had two big plus factors working for me. One was the commission for Max to write *The Martyrdom*, and the other was the promise of funding from the Scottish Arts Council, provided the Orkney Islands Council came along too.

Bringing the Committee Together – April 1978

Thus it was that in April 1976, I set off once again for Orkney on my great mission. I remember talking to Michael, my husband, as I left home, wondering how on earth I could get such a thing off the ground. How would it be possible to convince people in such a remote corner of the British Isles that it would be a good idea to have such a festival? When I came onto the scene, Orkney had just recently become one of the main transfer and processing points for North Sea Oil from the Piper oilfield to the Flotta terminal on Max's island of Hoy. The North Sea oil marked the start of a huge change in Orkney. Occidental, the oil company which operated there, had been cautious with spreading its' money around. But it had purchased and donated to the Orkney Arts Society a Steinway Piano, which resided in the former church in Stromness, now called the Stromness Academy Hall. There was a stipulation than on no account was this Steinway piano to be moved out of the hall.

On my arrival in Stromness to stay with the Bevans, Archie handed me a list of people that I should visit:

Colonel. Macrea – Lord Lieutenant of Orkney (this is the Queen's representative in the county)

George Marwick – Convener of the Orkney islands Council,

Graeme Lapsley – Chief Executive of the Orkney Islands Council

Edwin Eunson – Councillor Orkney Islands Council

George Marshall – Head of Education on the Orkney Islands Council

Josh Gourlay – Education officer

Jack Ridgeway – British Airways

Norman Mitchell – Orkney Arts Society, head of music at Kirkwall Grammar School, and organist in the cathedral, and conductor of the cathedral choir. He was the musical person on the list.

I phoned all the people and asked if I could come and see them, and I was able to secure a very satisfactory list of appointments spread over the following days. My object was to tell each of them of Max's vision as to what a festival in Orkney would be, and to see if they were interested. I set a date at the end of that week when they would all foregather, and when Max would talk to them all himself.

What was Max's vision? There should be community interest. The object was not only to import attractions from outside. Max wanted the local population to be

involved in the performances. This could be in a variety of ways, such as choirs,, children from different schools, performance plays by a local amateur dramatic society. Max as a composer, also strongly felt that there should be at least some element of new music in the contexts of many of the programmes. He also wanted the professional artists who would perform should be of the highest quality. There was no reason that just because the audience was going to be made up, mostly, of Orcadians, they shouldn't be able to enjoy the same quality of performers as those people who live in London. The fact that there was a first class Steinway piano in the Stromness Academy Hall meant that I knew this would be an attraction for artists, who always feared the inferior quality of the pianos they were liable to find in outlandish places.

I hired a car and set off. I have always been a reluctant driver, but in those days, any kind of public transport in Orkney was virtually non-existent, and there was simply no alternative way of getting around. Although I covered quite a large amount of territory during that week, the drive I made most often was that of the fifteen miles from Stromness to Kirkwall. Once you got off that main road which joins the two towns, you really hardly knew where you were, or where you were going, because there were no road signs that gave you any information. I did have a map, and also I followed Archie's instructions. I would return home to the Bevans every evening, and report on my progress. It was in driving around in this way that I began to fall in love with Orkney. I was lucky. The weather was clement and the ever-present wind was subdued. Everyone I saw received me in the most hospitable way, and gave me the time to say what I had to say. Each and every person was positive. They wanted to hear more from Max personally of course, but, in principle, nobody had a word to say against the idea of the festival.

The end of the week arrived, and the meeting of all the people that I had seen gathered together to meet Max took place. This was the first time that any of them, with the exception of Norman Mitchell, had met Max. Max spoke most eloquently, as he always does. He was diffident. He said that he was an outsider, but that he had grown to love Orkney and all that it represented in the few years since he had come to live there. Starting a festival, and working hard to make a go of it, was his way of giving something back to his new home. He realised that it would be a steep climb, but he was willing to embark upwards.

Everyone murmured that it would indeed be wonderful if a festival such as the one that Max envisaged could happen in their midst. There were then questions as to where the funding would come from for such a festival. I was rather nonchalant about it, and somehow waved my hand, and exclaimed that I would be responsible to get the funding. After all, as I thought, the Scottish Arts Council had agreed to come along, and there was no possibility that the Orkney Islands Council would refuse, and those two bodies would be the basis for implementing the plans. I was particularly pleased that Norman Mitchell, from the Orkney Arts Society, was in favour, because I distinctly had the impression that the club as a whole would not be supportive.

Thus, at the end of my week, a committee had been formed. Applications to the Orkney Islands Council were made. For my own part, I went to see Alistair Dunnett, the chairman Occidental Oil at his London office. I was most delighted at the reception I got. He thought the idea was splendid. He would have to speak to his

committee, and they would have their say of course, but, if he had anything to do with it, things would go forward. So, at that time, in the spring of 1976, things were looking hopeful.

Meanwhile I was getting on with the dozens of other matters which were demanding my attending. Chief among them was the tour which The Fires of London were about to make of the United States and Canada in October and November of that year, and also putting together all the elements for *The Martyrdom* itself. This meant getting all the very large number of singers, musicians, designers, stage and lighting personnel together, which was completely outside the range of what little experience I had had to that date as manager of The Fires.

Disaster – November - December 1976

It was 25 November 1976. We were almost at the end of the North American tour. We were in Halifax Nova Scotia, in Canada. There would only be one more concert and that would be in Boston, Massachusetts. Our American agent for the tour, Sheldon Soffer, forwarded the mail on to us in Halifax. There was a letter from Elizabeth Bevan to Max. In it she told him that the application for funding for the festival to the Orkney Islands Council had been turned down. Elizabeth enclosed the copy of the Orcadian newspaper which described everything.

“A recent minute of the policy and resources committee of the Orkney Islands Council stated that although the council had agreed in principle with the proposed presentation of the production of Peter Maxwell Dives’s The Martyrdom of St. Magnus the overall proposals for the festival had escalated far beyond the original concept first put to the council. He, (the convener Mr. George Marwick), felt that the council could not be satisfied as to the extent of the commercial element in the proposed festival and in view of all these aspects and the many financial difficulties already facing the council he moved no action be taken in support of the festival.”
The Orcadian 1976.

Max exploded. He was naturally bitterly disappointed, as anyone might be. But it was the reason for the rejection of the application that upset him most. He resolved to write an open letter to the Orcadian newspaper himself. I used to have a typewriter in my hotel rooms when on tour, so that I could catch up with my correspondence. In those days there was no such thing as a laptop computer. Max sat in my room and dictated his letter. He stated how he had thought it would be a wonderful idea to start a festival in Orkney, and how disappointed he was that the council had turned down the application. Throughout that night, Max kept re-appearing, banging on my door, as he wished to add yet another sentence or paragraph to the letter. It was pretty strong. The point that upset him the most was that of ‘commercial aspect’. What it meant was that people who were performing in the opera would be paid a fee. This was, surely, normal, was it not? Max described how The Fires were currently on tour in a foreign country and was being paid for each of their appearances. Was the idea that musicians and everyone associated with putting on the production should get paid for their services so outlandish? After many knocks on the door, and more explosions of “and another thing”, the letter was finally written. I made a fair copy

the following morning and gave it to Max to sign, and put it in the envelope. I went to post the letter, and distinctly remember thinking to myself 'well that is the end of that – no more festival'. I didn't want to think about it any more. I had plenty of other pressing matters on my plate.

We continued our successful tour, and Max returned to Orkney. In the meantime, the Orcadian had printed his letter on its front page, ending with . "*It is clear that I shall never start or participate in any kind of cultural event in Orkney.*" *Peter Maxwell Davies 9 December 1976*

This was the first time that most people in Orkney had ever heard of Max. It caused a great stir. People were beginning to take notice of him, but the idea of the festival was now dead.

Renewed Hope – January 1977

A month after these events, in January 1977, Max phoned me. He said

- "How much was that festival?"
- I was cross. "What festival?" I asked him tersely through my teeth
- "You know the one with *The Martyrdom* here in Orkney."
- "Why?" I asked him.
- "Because they want to try to go ahead, and they are having a meeting and I need to give them a figure."
- "When is the meeting?" I asked.
- "Tomorrow" Max replied.

So, Michael (my husband), who did all the budgets, had to rework a new budget for the proposed festival. Adding everything together, including the additional concerts over and above *The Martyrdom.*, the figure was £15,000, which, in those days was an enormous sum of money. Max phoned and I gave him the new figure. The following day after the meeting, I received a phone call from Norman Mitchell.

- "Well, that is not such a bad sum" he said
- "What do you mean?" I asked. "Where on earth are we going to find "£15,000?"
- "£15,000", said Norman, "Max told us it was £1,500."

I was silent. Quite why Max gave that incorrect sum I will never know. Be that as it may, it gave the committee the idea that somehow it would be possible to go ahead with the festival, in spite of the fact that the Orkney Islands Council would not come in on it.

The next day, Michael and I went to see Robert Ponsonby to give him an idea of the whole situation. He already had the commitment on behalf of the BBC that there would be a performance of *The Martyrdom* for the commission. Robert was very keen that the first performance should take place in Orkney itself, in the cathedral as I had told him initially.

After a few days, Robert came back with the following suggestion. This was that the performance in the cathedral would be counted as a studio performance, that is, that the audience would not be charged a fee. As such, all expenses relating to the cost of this performance, including those of transportation of all the instruments and all the people involved, would be borne by the BBC. What Orkney would have to contribute, would be the costs of the visual production, that is, the props and costumes. These costs would be £4,000.

I relayed this information to Norman. The official committee was set up. Max and Norman were to be the joint Artistic Directors. The festival was to be called the St. Magnus Festival. It was to be held for the first time in June 1977, which was less than six months later. Thus, in spite of no funds from the Scottish Arts Council or from the Orkney Islands Council, or, alas, from Occidental Oil, as Alistair Dunnett had failed to persuade his own committee, The St. Magnus Festival was going to happen.

Green Light – Go Ahead – January 1977

Once the green light had been given, I arranged for the actor [Murray Melvin](#), who Max's had met while writing the music for the Ken Russell films of *The Boy Friend* and *The Devils*, who was to direct the opera, and for Mark Prichard, who was to do the lighting, to go to Orkney in February, and to look at the situation on the ground in St. Magnus Cathedral. Max was at that meeting and the whole plan for the production was discussed. Max and Murray did not see eye to eye at all. Murray felt that Max had little or no theatrical experience, and that what he wanted for the production was totally unworkable in any circumstances. These problems were to emerge later on during the run-up to the performances.

One of the most important matters, as far as I was concerned, was that I knew that we had to let the world know that this festival was going to take place. In order to do that, it was necessary to get the media on board. In those days the media was very different from now. All the major serious daily newspapers had significant arts pages, each with a team of classical music critics, who covered the scene across the country and abroad, as well as most London events. I discussed the matter with Max's publishers, Boosey & Hawkes, and suggested that they might consider giving a press reception, at which Max and other representatives from the Festival committee would talk. To my great astonishment, Booseys agreed to do this, and the event took place at the offices of The British Council, in Portland Place, just a stone's throw away from Booseys' own offices, and from the BBC. There was a large take up from the press, which was very excited about the prospect of a brand new festival in such a remote corner of the country, and the fact that it was to be Max's festival. I knew that it was likely that there would be a goodly turn out in Orkney.

My part in the festival at the London end was preparing and getting *The Martyrdom* ready and delivering as a ready-made opera into St. Magnus Cathedral. As far as I was concerned, it was never less than a huge mountain which had to be climb. All the while I kept thinking that I had no experience of presenting theatricals or the way that theatrical people worked. Yes, I had by now been on the Contemporary Network Tour round the UK in November 1975 and the USA tour in 1976, in the embracing roles of manager, road manager and lighting and stage manager. In other words, I did everything. But the theatrical world was different. Thus Murray Melvin gave me a lecture on the first occasion when I met him, and warned me, that even though at that minute he said he was prepared to take on the job, if he received an offer of other and better work the day before the rehearsals started, he would drop me like a ton of hot bricks. This gave me a sense of great uneasiness throughout all the months leading up to our rehearsals.

Robert Ponsonby arranged the best possible circumstances for all the preparations for putting the opera together. We had the run of some of the BBC Maida Vale Studios. We were given all the additional percussion and keyboard instruments which were housed in the BBC's own store, in the same studios as our rehearsals. Even at that time, I knew that this was unique, and how lucky everyone was to be involved in this particular way. The rehearsals went smoothly as far as the musical content was concerned.

However, the theatrical problems were another matter. In the first place, Murray did not agree with Max in any aspect of the stage instructions of what he, Max, had written in his libretto. Max had asked that the five singers, who between them encompassed twenty five different roles, should be on stage the whole time, and that they should visibly change their costumes, so that the audience would see what they were doing, and that it would know that a different character was now being brought into the action. Murray totally rejected this approach, and insisted that the singers move off-stage to make their changes.

Kris Misselbrook had now joined our team as the stage manager. Sue Plummer designed the costumes, and Clair Mitchell was her assistant. Clair would appear with something, and then disappear equally as fast. Max would constantly ask me what was happening. I had no idea. I did not know why such and such a prop requested in the libretto was not there. Was it not there because it was not yet ready, or because Murray and Kris had decided that Max didn't know what he was talking about, and had sent the offending object away? Thus, throughout all the rehearsal period, there was a constant state of tension between Max and me on the one hand, and Murray and Kris on the other. I suppose you could say that Max and I had paranoia, and that Murray and Kris were plotting against us, or more particularly me, because it was always me that came forward with my difficult questions. But, in the end, things did all come together, and we were able to give a dress run-through at the studios, to which we were able to invite quite a few people, especially a large number of the staff of the publisher Boosey & Hawkes.

During all these months, my only contact with Orkney was my daily late-night conversations with [Archie Bevan](#). Communication with Norman Mitchell was virtually non-existent because he didn't answer my phone-calls and letters. I assumed that the Orkney end was doing everything necessary to put the festival

together. There were to be other concerts. Max had asked The Fires if they would give an additional concert without fees, and they had agreed. Norman had asked the Edinburgh String Quartet, if they, similarly, would give a free concert, and they too had agreed. Norman was also arranging for concerts to be given by the St. Magnus Cathedral Choir, and the choir and chamber orchestra of Kirkwall Grammar School. Norman himself would give an organ recital, and there would be a lunch-time trio concert by three members of The Fires. There would be a Festival Service on the Sunday morning. All the participants who were being brought in, were to be given accommodation by local people, almost all of whom would be living in Kirkwall.

Moving The Martyrdom to Orkney -June 1977

Kris and Mark Pritchard were to drive the van with all the instruments, all the lighting and the two large wardrobes built especially to contain the props and costumes which had been made. Having the wardrobes would be very beneficial all round, but especially for Clair Mitchell who was in charge of all the costumes. By having the costumes hanging in the wardrobes, there would be no need for the endless ironing if everything were to travel in boxes.

All the rest of the company were to take the train on Wednesday 15 June from Euston to Glasgow, and thence travel by air on to Kirkwall. Whilst everyone was waiting at the airport, there was an announcement requesting Magnus Erlson to report immediately to enquiries. We all laughed. Our own Magnus, in the shape of the tenor Neil Mackie, was making a joke. Imagine the consternation some few minutes later when there was another announcement requesting the person who had asked for Magnus Erlson to report to the enquiry desk. Neil duly presented himself, and found that he was face to face with a very tall man answering to the name of Magnus Erlson. This turned out to be a traveller from Iceland, with the same name as near to Magnus Erlson as makes no difference, demanding to know why he had been so summoned. Neil had the somewhat difficult task of explaining the background, and how we were all involved with this opera which was on its way up to Orkney, and that he had the title role, and that he thought it might be a good idea to keep the rest of the company amused in this way. Our new friend from Iceland took it all in good part, and after a few slightly anxious moments, all ended well, and we then proceeded on to Kirkwall.

On arrival at the airport in Kirkwall, we were all shepherded into a coach which drove us the four miles into the heart of Kirkwall itself – outside the cathedral. We all tumbled out and, as, if by magic, everyone disappeared into the cars which were lined up outside the cathedral. I panicked. I had absolutely no idea where anyone was going. I asked Norman Mitchell several times to give me a list, but this was not forthcoming. I expostulated that I was worried. What would happen if some family member became ill and needed to contact their relative? I would not be able to give any kind of answer as to where each and every member of the company was. At this distance in time, I realise that it was probably up to everyone to give their own contact details to their own families, but at that time I thought that it was my responsibility.

Rehearsals in Kirkwall – June 1977

But at least all of us were right there in Orkney and ready for the very last leg. My own billeting was with a family called Rosie, who lived a ten minute walk away from the cathedral. There were two teen-age daughters in the family, and they all made me feel very welcome. I knew that I would hardly be spending any time in their house as I still had a lot to see to during the next days prior to our premiere on the Saturday night.

The next day, Thursday, the company moved into the cathedral. I had somehow expected that there would be a whole troop of extra hands to help Kris and Mark with all the necessary heavy lifting, but nobody turned up. I had not realised, or had not taken on board, the fact that it was still term-time, and that there would be no eager youths available to help out in their holiday time. This fact also applied to both Archie Bevan and Norman Mitchell, who were both teachers. Neither of them was on hand for anything. I sorely needed some local help with any number of questions that kept on cropping up.

The main problem afflicting everyone was the intense cold. Orkney has famously dreadful weather, and on that occasion it certainly lived up to its reputation. Hard as it is to realise, in those days in June, the temperature was freezing. The officials of the cathedral were not allowed to turn on the heating, which was invariably turned off after April, no matter what the temperature was. And so everyone froze. It was virtually impossible for the musicians to make their fingers work in any meaningful way. I was unable to alleviate their discomfort by providing hot drinks, because I had no means of supplying them. There were no convenient cafes just across the road, as one might reasonably expect. It was just misery.

The ramps which Murray and Kris had requested leading up to the central performing area had been constructed, so at least that was in place, and we could proceed from there. Max, as conductor, was placed on a pedestal just behind the very pillar in which Magnus's bones were located. As we had had the complete dress rehearsal in London, with everything and everyone all present and correct, there were no last-minute items for the opera which had to be obtained.

There did not seem to be much evidence in Kirkwall that a great new festival was about to take place. But then, the Orcadians are not notably demonstrative. I did see one notice which showed the way to the 'Booing Office'. I was reminded that by no means the entire population was in favour of the festival. Rather the other way, if the truth could be known. A great attraction that weekend was for the royal visit of the Queen's cousin, Princess Alexandra. She would not attend any of the performances, but it did mean that there was a great deal of extra security in and around the cathedral.

There was to be a final dress rehearsal on the Friday night, open to the public and, like the main performance itself, free. I suggested to the daughters of the house where I was staying that they might like to attend that performance. I was greeted with derision. They exclaimed that they certainly would not like to go. I asked them why not. They replied that they had heard on all sides that it was going to be nasty modern music. I was becoming accustomed to such adjectives being used, as an excuse for

people not wanting to go to any performances of music written in the twentieth century. I then reasoned with the girls, asking if they had ever wasted any evenings in their lives. They replied that indeed they had had many such evenings. And so I suggested that they might as well waste just one more evening, and they reluctantly agreed, and I arranged for tickets to be left in their names.

As the days are extremely long in Orkney in mid-June, and it really hardly ever gets totally dark at all, the time for the performance of the dress rehearsal and the performance itself was set for 9pm, to allow for the most amount of darkness in the cathedral to give the lighting maximum effect. The dress rehearsal went off in a relatively good manner. I was very struck by the great difference there was in the sound in the cathedral to that in the BBC studios. I had learnt the work by attending the rehearsals in the studios, and here, suddenly, it seemed to me as if fifty percent of the sound was missing. My ears gradually attuned to the new acoustic, but it certainly was not the same. But, what was missing as far as the quality of sound was concerned, was certainly made up for in the atmosphere and the whole setting.

I returned back to the house very late, and found the two girls waiting up for me. They told me that they had attended the rehearsal, and that it was the best thing they had ever been to in their whole lives. Suddenly, in that moment, everything changed. All the worries and anxieties as to how it would all come together vanished into thin air. Max had written the opera for the people of Orkney. And here were two of those very people, giving their thumbs up verdict. We were going to make it. I knew it.

First Performance - June 1977

The following day there really was nothing much to do except to try to keep warm. And then, around four in the afternoon, Max came to me in a somewhat sheepish way. He said

- "I can't find my score"
- "Which score"?
- "You know, the one with all my markings in".
- "When did you last have it" ?
- "Yesterday at the rehearsal"
- "Didn't you pick it up to take it with you?"
- "No. I was so overcome"

We then proceeded to crawl all over the cathedral on our hands and knees, looking under all the chairs and in every corner. Although St. Magnus Cathedral is a small one compared with others, it certainly seemed like a very large space during those

hours of our search. It was horrible, but at length, the missing score was located. I wouldn't like to go through those hours again.

My last worry before the opera started was due to the fact that I could not find [George Mackay Brown](#) anywhere. The cathedral was crowded to overflowing, I am glad to say, and it was impossible to try to find anyone in the throng. George had slipped in at the back at the very last minute.

[Mary Thomas, as Blind Mary](#), lay on the ground, singing of her woes, about the terrible situation of the civil war raging in Orkney. Then the trumpets sounded aloft from the triforium. [Max's opera](#) and the first St. Magnus Festival had started.

I can't say that I remember much of what was happening during those roughly ninety minutes. I was probably too anxious in case something might go wrong. But it did not. The opera finishes with Blind Mary praying for a miracle at Magnus's tomb against the litany, sung by the monks, of the names of northern saints. The miracle occurs as her sight is restored to her, and what she sees is the audience, all 'dark faces, blind mouths, crying still for sacrifice'. She prays to St. Magnus to 'keep us from a bedlam of sacrifice', prophesying just such a course of events, before she dismisses the audience to 'carry the peace of Christ into the world'.

All I knew was that I had to tell Michael that it had all happened. I rushed out, and went to the phone boxes just a few yards away on the corner, and screamed down the phone "we have done it". It was still bright daylight.

Media Activity – June 1977

There was a great deal of media activity connected with the festival. The press reception earlier in the year had yielded most excellent results. By this time I knew just about enough about Orkney and its key figures to be able to be of help to the press journalists who had come for the festival.

The press turned out in force, with critics from all the daily national and Scottish newspapers. I arranged for [Gunnie Moberg](#), the Swedish photographer who had come to live in Stromness with her American husband, [Tam McPhail](#), to take photographs of the opera during the rehearsals, so that they were available to hand to the critics, so that these photographs could be published in the newspapers. On a local level, Howie Firth, of Radio Orkney, gave daily reports of the activities in the festival, and of course The Orcadian gave full coverage

The BBC sent its' vans from Scotland to make the recording of *The Martyrdom* with Martin Dalby in charge. A separate BBC documentary radio programme was made by John Amis, which emphasised the general atmosphere of the brand new festival. . A documentary film on the festival and on Max in particular, was made by the British Council with [Barrie Gavin](#) as the director. In his film, Barrie was able to include the final scene of the *The Martyrdom*, an interview with George Mackay Brown and Max together, George reading his own poems, quotations of works by local Orcadian poets Edwin Muir and Robert Rendell and the ancient Orkneyinga Saga read by the local

actress Claire Isbister (using her own Orkney name rather than her stage name of Claire Nielsen. The film also featured footage of [Rackwick Bay, where Max lived](#), and where I had taken Barrie and his crew on the day after the end of the festival. This film, called *One Foot in Eden*, was shown later on the BBC television.

The Two Fiddlers – 1978 and subsequent performances

The planning and the ideas for the second festival had already begun round the Bevan kitchen table during the days after that first one. Some while later, Max informed me that he intended to write an opera to be performed by the children of Orkney.

Max had come into public notice via the works he wrote for children when in charge of music at Cirencester Grammar School from 1959 to 1962. He had an orchestra and a choir in his care. He wanted to find music suitable for children between the ages of 11 to 18, and searched through scores at the publishers, but didn't find anything that suited his purpose. He decided that the best thing to do was to write some works himself. He had written orchestral pieces, such as *Five Klee Pictures*, and arrangements for earlier music for orchestra, but it was for *O Magnum Mysterium* the series of carols, with orchestral interludes, for which he became known. A television documentary on the BBC about his work at Cirencester enhanced his reputation as an educationalist. After he left Cirencester in 1962, his professional life did not bring him into contact with school-aged children.

Following the success of the first St. Magnus Festival, things changed as far as writing for children was concerned. Max's co-artistic director of the St. Magnus Festival was Norman Mitchell, who was the head of music at Kirkwall Grammar School, Max felt that he could entrust Norman with being in charge of the opera he proposed to write.

The opera was again to be based on a novel by George Mackay Brown. This time it was *The Two Fiddlers*, a children's book. How does one define a children's opera? For almost everyone, it means an opera performed by adults, perhaps with a few children dotted around here and there, and that children will be in the audience. Max's view of this subject was entirely different, and very much his own. Max felt that a children's opera should be entirely performed by children, including the orchestra. To this very day people find Max's vision most disturbing. How can it be that children would be able to support such a weighty burden? Max knew that the material had to be suitable, and that it would be up to the teacher to bring the children up to the standard.

My involvement in the putting together of this opera was nil. Everything was in Norman Mitchell's hands, ably assisted by his deputy [Dick Hughes](#), both at school and at the cathedral, and by Dick's wife, [Glenys Hughes](#), also a music teacher of primary school children. It was these three people who put the musical aspect of the opera together. The director was Jack Ridgeway, in charge of British Airways in Orkney, and who, from the very beginning, had been a most enthusiastic supporter of the St. Magnus Festival. Max wrote the music for just ordinary children in any ordinary school. It was necessary, of course, for the two fiddlers of the title roles to be

able to play the solo music themselves, which needed child with enough violinistic and musical talent.

It was an excellent idea all round for Max to write a work that was to be performed by the children of Orkney, and to be prepared by their teachers. In this way, a very large number of people within the community were now to be involved. So many parents now had a child who was in the opera, and other parents were making the costumes and the sets. Certainly the parents of children taking part in the opera would come to the performances.

Orkney had a long tradition of participating in amateur dramatics, as indeed do communities everywhere within the British Isles. One only has to think of the popularity of the annual pantomime which occupies vast numbers of people throughout the winter months. I was not party to all the agonies which must have taken place in the preparation of the opera. All I can say is that it was the most resounding success. Max wrote a work which brought out innate humour, and the audience was rolling in the aisles.

My own job, as Max's manager, came after the Orkney performance. I had to try to convince other schools or organisations to put it on. It proved a very tough nut to crack. The Orkney production made a grand and wonderful tour of Italy in 1979, thanks to the help of [Jack Buckley](#) of the British Council in Italy. The Orcadian children, plus their minders, visited some seven or eight Italian towns. Most of the children had never previously been out of Orkney. Many of them had never been in a lift, as there were no lifts in Orkney. Everywhere the production went, the children were greeted with rapturous applause from adults and children alike.

I also spoke to Covent Garden, and to my great surprise they thought it was a splendid idea to put on a production. This took place at the Jeanette Cochrane Theatre. Everything was under the auspices of Covent Garden. Children, of a high standard were recruited, and musically it was good, but the production itself was quite awful, and bore no resemblance to the naïve freshness which had been such a feature in Orkney

I also spoke to the official in charge of 'culture' in Bonn, and he liked the idea, and he made arrangements for a production. This was to be in August 1979. Bonn at that time was the capital of West Germany before re-unification in 1991, and, although small, was a very important German city. The British Council had offices in Cologne, which was next door to Bonn, and Annaliese Greulich, in charge of culture at the British Council, arranged for Max and I to be invited to lunch to the home of Sir Oliver Wright, the British Ambassador, in Bad Godesberg prior to attending the performance of *The Two Fiddlers* later in the afternoon.

In the morning, Max was interviewed by Hans Schürmann of the General Anziger, the local Bonn newspaper which was nationally influential in Germany. He was very friendly, and during the course of the interview he said that he had been to a rehearsal the previous day. He asked Max what kind of people was taking part in the opera. Max replied that of course they were children. Herr Schürmann then said that the people he had seen were not children. There were one or two of them, but everyone concerned, including the orchestra, were all adults.

Max was speechless. “I am going home” he said. I foresaw a major scandal. “You can’t go home - we are going to have lunch with the Ambassador in an hour’s time”. I couldn’t see how I was going to make this impasse right. My diplomatic skills were not up to it. I reckoned that Sir Oliver, being a diplomat, would be able to handle the matter. Max, most reluctantly agreed to go to the lunch.

We arrived in Bad Godesberg. Sir Oliver, who seemed to me to be at least seven feet tall, peered down at Max, asking how he was. “Terrible” replied Max. This was not a good start. Max blurted out what the problem was. But, I must say, to Sir Oliver’s credit, he did pull the situation round. Somehow he got Max out of his justifiably bad mood, and the next thing we knew we were all sitting in the front row at the performance.

The performance was entirely ridiculous. Lines such as “we are not frightened – we are real men”, intended to be sung by a boy of twelve, was boomed out with full operatic theatricality, by a strong baritone. Somehow we all survived. I can’t imagine what any of the audience made of it. Of course Max’s tunes were always brilliant, which helps.

Afterward, I caught hold of the official who I had persuaded to put the opera on, and asked him why, in spite of clear and definite instructions that everyone participating in the opera was to be a child, he had completely disobeyed the orders, and everyone who took part was an adult, and some were even professional opera singers.

- - “Well, you see, how could any child sing this?” he asked, demonstrating where the Queen of the Trolls sings “have, have, have a cup of tea” in mock coloratura mode.

- - “It is a send up – a gentle satire” I explained. He had obviously taken everything at its face value, and not understood the joke at all.

Not a success. That day, 27 August 1979, was additionally a very sad one because it was the one in which Lord Mountbatten had been blown up on his yacht off the Republic of Ireland by the IRA. Frau Greulich had kept the news from us thinking that we had enough on our plates.

Le Jongleur de Notre Dame – June 1978

The following year, Max presented *The Fires* with yet another challenge. He was going to write another music-theatre work – not a chamber opera – to feature the talents of a friend of his Mark Furneaux. Mark was an Australian mime who had become a juggler. Or so he informed Max, whose imagination took over, and he envisaged a piece with dazzling juggling. This was to happen at the second St. Magnus Festival, in June 1978. The Festival had acquired a commission from the Royal Bank of Scotland, which greatly assisted matters with the costumes and sets

Max again wrote his own libretto. He took the well-known story of the street juggler, who, being poor, cold and miserable entered into the monastery to become a monk.

The other monks did not accept him, and gave him menial tasks to perform and taunted him. On the birthday of the Virgin Mary, all the monks gave gifts. The juggler, having no gifts other than his juggling, performed in front of the statue of the Virgin Mary. The statue comes to life, and accepts the gifts, but the shock is so great for the juggler that he dies. Max re-adjusted the story. The juggler does enter into the monastery. The other monks make fun of him, and there are pantomime acts between the monks and the juggler, as they gave him household duties to perform. There are processions in front of the statue of the Virgin Mary. Then each of the monks performs a virtuoso act on their given instrument. The juggler creeps in, and he gives a virtuoso display of juggling in front of the Virgin Mary. The other monks catch him at it, and rush off to find the Abbot to report to him. All are in horror when the statue comes to life, and starts to play her violin – another virtuoso display. The Abbot translates the meaning, saying that she accepts all gifts, however humble, but that the juggler should not hide his gifts within the confines of a place such as a monastery, but should be out in the world where he brings joy to many people. The other monks then all accept the juggler, and he leaves the monastery. The outside world is represented by an ensemble of twelve children playing wind and percussion instruments. This ensemble accompanies the juggler as he enters the monastery at the start of the work, and again as he leaves. The juggler exits through the audience, out of the hall and into the street, with balloons and bunting being released from the ceiling, or where ever, to conclude in an explosion of joy as all ends well.

The work was to feature Mark as the juggler, and Michael Rippon, one of our baritones in the *Martyrdom*, and by now a regular in *Eight Songs for a Mad King*, as the Abbot. The flute player, clarinetist and percussionist are all costumed as monks, and the violinist as the Virgin Mary. The baritone is the only singing voice as the Abbot. The juggler is of course silent as himself. The keyboards and cellist are the continuo. The children's band was to be from the Stromness Academy School This was in line with the fact that he had written *The Two Fiddlers*, an opera which the children from Kirkwall Grammar School to perform in this second festival in 1978. No adults took part in this opera. Max was always most anxious to actively involve as many children as possible. The show was directed by Pamela Howard who was a big shot at the National Theatre, and I must say I found her most objectionable – very bossy and not at all helpful. Mark was to have a wonderful juggler's costume which was designed by Doreen Watkinson.

We rehearsed in a most unsuitable place. Whenever we had theatricals, I had the greatest difficulty in finding rehearsal rooms. This was a continuous problem. The Craxton studios were ideal for the straight chamber music repertoire, but not for the theatricals. Church halls were good, except for the fact that we were not able to leave all the paraphernalia of the productions in those halls over night, as they were used for Boy Scout meetings and the like, and we had to remove everything, which was a great bother. There was a lot of slapstick in the *Le Jongleur* and much water splashing about, and this did not fit at all well with the shop which sold precious objects, which we hired for some of our more sedate rehearsals. The lady who owned the shop was not at all pleased with the goings on.

The Fires themselves were reluctant to don costumes. They felt uneasy doing anything more than their accustomed excellent playing. But we all soldiered on in the attempt to realise Max's vision. The great problem, however, was Mark Furneaux

himself. Whilst he had told Max he was juggling, he had omitted to state, that his juggling had not reached a proficient, let alone a dazzling, state. In a word, he was absolutely no good at all. The whole show builds to the climax, where the juggler shows all his tricks to the Virgin Mary, but, alas, Mark did not have any tricks.

Another, much lesser, problem was the fact that Beverley, our violinist, would have to sit still on her altar for a good forty minutes or so, until the moment when she comes to life. It was completely impossible for Beverley to sit still for such a long time. So the altar had to be built where Beverley would be hidden behind curtains until her big moment. Max was not at all happy with this, as he had bargained on the fact that the Stromness Academy Hall, where the show was to take place, had its own built-in altar, as it was a converted church. As this was the second festival, the Fires felt at home. What I enjoyed the most was the fact that as the players all had to do their comedy routines, and the audience started to laugh, they all fell into their roles with the greatest aplomb, and really enjoyed themselves, and what they were doing. Beverley sat quietly on her altar behind the curtains until her big moment, and she played her big virtuoso number superbly, as Max surely knew she would. Alas, Mark let us all down. It might have been enough to ruin the whole show, but somehow it wasn't. It carried through, and everyone was highly delighted. This show was a very different kind of Max, where all the previous theatrical works had been very serious indeed. This was a comedy and might even be called family entertainment.

There was a second performance at the Edinburgh Festival, a couple of months later, this time in the St. Mary's Cathedral, which was course larger, and the performance was on an altogether different dimension. Once again, even with Mark, The Fires pulled it off. In the large space of the Cathedral, the sight of the balloons cascading down at the end brought tears to the eye.

Clearly I had to get rid of Mark. Unfortunately, I had signed a contract with him to take part in a number of any future performances which might happen. Max absolutely refused to allow Mark to do any more performances, and we had to find another juggler. I had to somehow pay Mark off. This was a bitter lesson which I learned. *Le Jongleur* became, in essence, the quintessential Fires work, and it made an excellent contrast to the serious works in any of our all music-theatre programmes

Kirkwall Shopping Songs /Solstice of Light - 1979

1979 brought the brought the Hughes family into focus. Dick Hughes was the organist at the cathedral and he also taught music at Kirkwall Grammar School. Glenys was a primary school music teacher. She went to a different primary school around Orkney on different days of the week. Both Dick and Glenys, who were not Orcadians, had worked on *The Two Fiddlers*, but they were in the background as far as the festival was concerned. For this third festival, Max wrote a set of songs for primary school children which the children at Papdale Primary school in Kirkwall were to perform with Glenys as their teacher. Max wrote the words for the songs, and each one was a situation known intimately by every child. They were singing about their own place and happenings which they encountered on a daily basis. The title of this work was *Kirkwall Shopping Songs* although Max originally called it *Kirkwall Messages*, but Boosey & Hawkes, who published the work, felt that the public at large would not

know what “messages” were, and asked for the change in the title. I remember when Max went to one of the last rehearsals before the festival, he was practically weeping with joy down the phone as he exclaimed “they know it – they know it.” Glenys had done a wonderful job with the children.

Max wrote *Solstice of Light* for the Cathedral choir, with organ and tenor solo. Dick Hughes was given the virtuoso organ part, and Neil Mackie, our Magnus from *The Martyrdom*, had the tenor solo part. Norman Mitchell conducted the cathedral choir. Each of these two new works, in their own, very different ways, made demands on the participants which stretched them. Here again, it was local participation exactly as it should be. Max never believed in writing any easy old thing, which was not be a challenge for the participants. He knew that in the end, it would be infinitely more satisfying from every point of view. *Solstice of Light* was later recorded by the Choir of King’s College Cambridge

Troubles with the Orcadian - 1979

The Fires went to the festival again, but this time there was no new piece to put together, and the programme was our old favourite, Max’s music-theatre work *Miss Donnithorne’s Maggot*, and another smaller lunchtime recital in the cathedral. The third festival introduced yet another important element, namely a symphony orchestra. The BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, located in Glasgow, came to give a concert in the Cathedral. The festival had moved up yet another notch. But not everything was sweetness and light. There was a discordant element throughout. Many people resented the Festival as being something introduced from the outside. Almost all of those who complained so bitterly never actually attended any of the performances. They just stood on the sidelines and ranted and raved. The local newspaper, *The Orcadian*, which everyone in the island read religiously every Thursday, was rather naughty. It employed a critic to review some of the most important concerts. The person given this task, year after year, was someone who had every reason not to approve of what was happening. This man had come to live in Orkney, and was also an English composer. I can’t say whether or not he was hoping to outstrip the strides which Max and the Festival had made, but he certainly found many things of which to complain in his reviews. Max used to get in a great tizzy when these reviews came out in the two editions following the first festivals, and was wanting to write angry letters of complaints to the *Orcadian*, but I did my best to restrain him and to tell him to leave well alone, and just let each and every item stand in its own right, and make its relevant impression on its listeners.

Cinderella - 1980 and subsequent performances

The fourth Festival in 1980 introduced several changes when Max said he was going to write another children’s opera – *Cinderella*. Most importantly Norman Mitchell had moved on to another very big job at the George Watson College in Edinburgh. This left Max as the sole Artistic Director of the Festival. Dick Hughes took over Norman’s professional jobs in Orkney, namely that of Head of Music at Kirkwall Grammar School and conductor of the Cathedral Choir. At the same time, both Dick

and Glenys stepped forward to take much more active parts in the Festival as a whole. The Festival was lucky to have two such highly competent and committed musicians working so actively during these years. Between the two of them, they covered all levels. Dick working with the adults in the choir, and with the older children at Kirkwall Grammar School, while Glenys was, working with a large range of the junior children at the several primary schools which she visited throughout the year.

Max had got his original idea for writing *Cinderella* from a conversation I had had with him. I told him that one day I was in Scotland on holiday with my friend Iris Brendel. We were staying with Anthony Phillips, another friend. One evening, Iris recounted how she had found a set of false teeth lying in the road, and had taken them to the police station so that the owner could reclaim them. Everyone laughed heartily and then Anthony's brother, Bruce, remarked "Oh, we could have a re-write of the Cinderella story". I thought this was wonderful, and later told the story to Max, who also loved it, and acted upon it.

It wasn't only Dick and Glenys who were contributing to the overall effort of putting on [Cinderella](#), which Max called a Pantomime Opera. Parents of the children came forward to make the costumes and the props. It was, in every sense of the word, a community effort. In true pantomime tradition, many of the songs allowed for local references and local personalities to be inserted, so that the laughs were genuine and meant something to the local audiences. Max himself had got the hang of it all, and loved it. The idea of writing something for performance by children at Christmas time was something that appealed to him. *Cinderella* did not have its first outing at Christmas time, but it is in every sense a Christmas pantomime, whilst being an opera at the same time. Max increased the number of ugly sisters from two to three. This was in order that they should meet up with the three Commanders-in-Chief of the Armed Forces – the Army, the Navy and the Air Force. The three ugly sisters were all to be played by boys with broken voices, who towered above the three commanders-in-chief, who were small boys in extravagant uniforms. The ugly sisters are a great comedy element in the opera. The other comedy part was that of the wicked step-mother, Widow Grumble, very self-satisfied. Cinderella herself was a charming girl of course, the Prince Charming, played by either a boy or a girl, added glamour. Although the opera only runs for just under one hour, Max insisted that there should always be an interval, as all children, whether performing or in the audience, need to have a chance to go to the toilet during the proceedings. It is always impossible for me to make a choice of my favourite of Max's works, but I know for sure that I invariably cry as we reach the last chorus of "now that it has turned out alright". I most particularly enjoyed the review in the *Orcadian*, by the usual person, who roundly condemned "the outrageous lampooning of Her Majesty's Armed Forces". This certainly has been my favourite review of all of Max's works. *Cinderella* reached across many sections of the *Orcadian* populace. So many people now were unable to say that the Festival only put on items which had nothing to do with the Orcadians as a whole, because so many families were involved, one way or another.

Once again I was not at all involved in any way in the production of *Cinderella* in Orkney. Everyone there was more than well able to look after themselves. For *Cinderella* Max again wrote his own libretto, and it is entirely delightful, with humour

threading its way throughout. There are roles for all levels of competence. There are of course Cinderella and the Prince, but there are also pantomime roles for three older boys with broken voices, who play the three ugly sisters, as three blatantly comic roles. The three tall sisters fall in love with the three commanders of the armed forces, played by small boys. Widow Grumble, mother of the three ugly sisters, has a significant role, as does the Cat, who is by way of being the fairy godmother who arranges for Cinderella to get to the ball, and there is the chorus of her kittens. I will never forget how I felt at that first performance at the Orkney Arts Centre in Kirkwall, especially as I had not had any of the agony of trying to make it happen. Dick and Glenys Hughes, between them, had done a superb job with the children from Kirkwall Grammar School and Papdale Primary School. Max had written a masterpiece, which was a comedy at the same time.

Once again, it was my job to try to spread the word. The Buxton Festival decided to put it on. There were troubles. Somehow the festival had not paid the crew that ran the theatre, and the day I arrived for the performance was the one in which the crew had refused to go ahead, until their wages had been paid, in cash, on the stage. This was hardly the atmosphere for an exciting morning at the opera. Actually, that production was not at all bad. But the one which again was done by Covent Garden, again at the Jeanetta Cochran theatre, proved as disappointing as had *The Two Fiddlers*. Max was extremely upset that Covent Garden had let him down. He knew from the brilliant production in Orkney that his opera was not like that. It was a missed opportunity.

I was in touch with Urs Leicht, who was the Dramaturg at the opera house in Bremen in Germany. He liked the idea of putting on a children's opera, even when I stressed to him that it must be done with children, having in mind the horrendous experience in Bonn with *The Two Fiddlers*. He said he would give the musical direction to one of the kappelmeisters, Gunther Bauer Schenk. It was usually the job of these kappelmeisters to train the singers for their roles, and very occasionally they were given a chance to conduct an unimportant opera. I was more optimistic about this production, because Gunther and I quickly became friendly, and used to make a lot of phone calls to keep in touch, to inform me how he had been getting on. Here was someone who was really taking trouble. Max and I went to the first performance in March 1981, really a very short time after the initial St. Magnus Festival premiere. I was nervous. Max had called *Cinderella* a pantomime opera, and pantomime is something which is unknown in Germany. As befits a pantomime, Max has made the humour broad. He also allows the words of some of the songs, particularly those of the three ugly sisters, to change according to local circumstances. In other words, each production will write its own words to the same tune, so that it is meaningful to the local audience, with references to local place names and personalities. How would all this go down in this kind of terrain? The audience, which was full of children as well as adults, started to laugh from the very first moment, and during the entire show they were rolling in their seats. There was no question that they had more than thoroughly enjoyed themselves, and the audience made its feelings felt at the end. Backstage, immediately after the show, I spoke to one small boy. He spoke in flawless English – which again made me feel ashamed of the fact that, despite all my good intentions, my command of German was gradually worsening. He said “oh you just don't know what it feels like to have all those people roaring at you and shouting and laughing – it is the best feeling I have ever had”. I was delighted. Although this production under the auspices of a theatre was not what Max had in mind when he wrote the work, as

he always thought in terms of a school or schools, here, with careful guidance, expertise and enthusiasm, was the next best thing.

I spoke to my friend Louise Greenberg, who is American, and asked her to speak to her sister, Judy Shapiro, who is a professional violinist in Washington, to see whether she might know of a school which could be interested in *Cinderella*. Judy's daughter attended the Sheridan School in Washington D.C. Nettie Ruth Bratton, the music teacher agreed to take it on. From the start she understood that it would be the children who would perform the work, and not 'just help out a little'. The performances were arranged for April 1982.

It so happened that there was to be a conference on the subject of Children's Opera in Washington at exactly the same time, and, as part of the conference, there were to be several performances of these kinds of operas. It was a most dispiriting experience. I sat at one of those round tables, and we all discussed the question. I tentatively put forward the idea that the children would learn so much about so many things, especially about music and theatre, if they were actually participating themselves, and were not just the audience. To say I was shouted down is putting it mildly. To a man, and woman, they all thought I was completely mad. They carefully explained that the idea of a children's opera was to present something suitable to be viewed by children, which would warm them up to be able to face the real thing later on. My idea – well of course it was Max's idea – was utterly ridiculous. All music should be performed by professionals, and the best professionals possible at that, so how on earth could you expect an audience of children to enjoy anything that was going to be performed by a bunch of children, however talented they might be? I could see it was absolutely useless. They were coming from a different world. If Nettie Ruth was doing her job properly, and I had already seen than she was, the end product would speak to itself.

The review in the Washington Post more than amply vindicated my position

"People without children in a school production are seldom expected to enjoy such an enterprise, much less attend it. However, thanks to Peter Maxwell Davies's ingenious writing, absolute strangers could walk in on his opera Cinderella and have a grand time. In the tradition of the British Christmas pantomime, Davies has taken the sugar out of the familiar story and put spice in its place. One of the cluster of children's operas that have recently come to Washington, Davies's is the only one done entirely by children. Given last night's delightful performance at the Sheridan School, this was the opera's American première, that difference must be counted as a big plus. He not only gives the young cast - in this case they were fourth-through eighth-graders - easily manageable material, but he also makes room for the freshness of their viewpoint within the opera. To those who know Davies as one of Britain's major avant-garde composers, the accessibility of the work will probably come as a surprise."

The Washington Post

France did not, in general, prove a good place for my promotional efforts. I usually exerted every endeavour not to go to France, mainly because I am afraid to say I found that the people I came into contact with were rather negative. But, through the good offices of Tim Brown at the British Council in Paris in 1986, I was able to see, of all things, the Paris Opéra, and it liked the idea of *Cinderella*. It was to come under the department that was called Opéra Comique at the Salle Favart. The performances were due to take place in May 1986, and in February I thought that it would be a good idea to have a meeting to see how the various departments were getting on

It was a good job that I did. Everyone concerned sat round a table. When I asked how the children were getting on with everything, the person in charge looked quite astonished. He had thought that someone else was taking care of gathering together the children and at that point, no children had been recruited. In fact, virtually nothing had been done. At least this was obvious to everyone around the table. I suggested that, if possible, the performances should be postponed, as otherwise they would have a disaster on their hands.

The man who was making the French translation took me aside, and said he had a question. He was finding the job extraordinarily difficult. There were all sorts of phrases he had never come across previously. "For instance", he said, "what does 'shiver my timbers' mean?" I didn't restrain myself. I laughed long and hard and I don't think he was upset. The three Commanders-in-Chief of the Army, Navy and Air Force are all given one-liners which are typical things people in the Army, Navy and Air Force might say, and 'Shiver my timbers' is just such a one. I can't myself say what it actually means, but I have always taken it to be a sort of naval slang to do with the wooden parts of a ship. I wasn't going to even attempt to explain this to the translator, but what I did point out was that it was a joke, and that Max intended to make the audience laugh at this point. He should attempt to find some kind of colloquial slang – anything really would do – to get a laugh at this point. He was very grateful to me and I probably had eased his load as he now realised that it wasn't the words themselves, but the meaning behind them that was important.

The English conductor John Burdekin was to be in charge of the musical aspect, while the American Richard Carceras was to be the director. Richard was entrusted with bringing Jerome Robbins' productions around the world to the stage and he was obviously a very safe pair of hands with an open mind. He understood what Max was getting at. The performances were postponed until September. This was a glorious production, with both John Burdekin and Richard Carceras capturing the spirit of the piece, whilst the audience certainly laughed long and hard at all the many jokes. I have happy memories of the whole enterprise.

The Yellow Cake Revue/[Farewell to Stromness](#) - 1980 and subsequently

The other significant happening at that fourth festival in 1980 was the work *The Yellow Cake Revue*. One of the burning topics in Orkney at that time was the possible introduction by the Government of uranium mining. I give you Archie Bevan's background account:

“During the early 1970s, a geological survey being carried out as part of a check-up on strategic reserves of uranium in Britain revealed a corridor of uranium ore ('yellow cake') of 'nuclear' quantity between the town of Stromness and the cliffs of Yesnaby on the main island of Orkney. The South Scottish Electricity Board, with an eye to the possibilities of nuclear energy, negotiated individual agreements with the local farmers (who didn't realize their significance at the time) to make test bores in the area. Application was subsequently made to the Orkney Islands Council”.

“In 1977 the Orkney Heritage Society started a campaign to prevent the exploitation of local uranium resources, and the Orkney Islands Council, alerted to the implications, formalized local opposition by turning down the Electricity Board's application. The Islands Council then tried to launch a private members' bill in Parliament which would grant it full control over Orcadian mineral resources. This attempt failed”.

“The Orkney Islands Council had to produce a structure plan of its future developments, and included a clause concerning permanent resistance to any future plans to extract uranium. This was submitted for the approval of the Secretary of State for Scotland who chose the uranium clause as a point for public examination, and appointed a Public Examiner to hear both sides of the issue”.

“The Orkney Islands Council and the entire local population were now totally opposed, and a large silent protest demonstration was organized to make the Public Examiner aware of the extent of local opposition. The case was heard in the spring of 1979, with Orkney arguing not only from the fear of pollution itself, with the gravest consequences for the second principal town of the islands, but also from the point of view of the psychological damage and disastrous social and economic implications of uranium extraction on Orcadian fishing, dairy farming and tourism”.

“Late in 1979, the Examiner's report was made public, and he recommended to the Secretary of State that the Orkney submission be rejected in the national interest. Max wrote The Yellow Cake Revue in the aftermath of this report, and it was first performed at the fourth St. Magnus Festival in 1980/ The Secretary of State for Scotland gave no immediate authorization for uranium mining to begin, but the long-term threat remains”.

“The original local agreements negotiated by the Scottish Electricity Board have since run out, and there is now strong activity afoot in the direction of alternative energy sources, with Orkney the centre of experimentation in wind power generation. In the meantime, The Yellow Cake Revue symbolizes the active position of vigilance inside Orkney. Well-maintained placards still stand outside the town of Stromness, and the campaign would be immediately resuscitated if there were any suspicion of attempts to re-open the matter”.

Max's own response manifested itself in two works. One was a large-scale work for orchestra and soloists called *Black Pentecost* with words from George Mackay Brown's book *Greenvoe*. The other was *The Yellow Cake Revue*, which is a cabaret for actress and pianist, consisting of three spoken interviews, six songs and two piano interludes. Max wrote the work for the actress Vanessa Redgrave, and indeed she had been booked to come to Orkney to give the first performance. Max and Vanessa

knew each other's work from previous collaborations. But, as so often happens in the acting profession Vanessa pulled out at the last minute due to something else – in fact something better as she saw it - turning up, and so the actress Eleanor Bron came on board. Eleanor did not have any musical skills, but was extremely good in the spoken interviews. The Fires' pianist Stephen Pruslin was brought in to coach Eleanor in the six songs. The work as a whole is satirical. The interviews highlighted government activities in Northern Ireland, whilst the six songs were in Max's wonderfully lyrical style.

Max himself accompanied [Eleanor Bron](#) at the piano and it was one of the two piano interludes which created by far the biggest impact. The titles of the two piano works were *Yesnaby Ground* and *Farewell to Stromness*, and it was this last which was an instantaneous hit. Within a few minutes of the conclusion of the performance, Timothy Walker, the guitarist of the Fires of London, rushed up to me. He said that one of the piano solos would be most suitable to be transcribed for the guitar, and could I ask Max if he would allow him to do this. Max of course gave his permission. This was the first and most immediate response of extreme enthusiasm for *Farewell to Stromness*.

Everyone made similar comments. I realised that the two piano works must be published in order to make *Farewell to Stromness* available to a wider public, and this meant that Boosey & Hawkes should have to publish it immediately. The world 'immediate' was not one with which Max's publishers, Boosey & Hawkes, were at that time at all familiar. Max was undergoing a very considerable battle with Boosey's to get the enormous backlog of his compositions published. Some of these had been waiting for up to fifteen years for publication. So when, on my return to London, I approached Tony Fell, the managing director of Boosey & Hawkes, and asked him if he could do a fast-track job on the two piano solos from the *Yellow Cake Revue* in advance of the publication of the work as a whole, I was not received with open arms. However, much to everyone's surprise, Tony acceded to my request, and almost immediately the two piano solos were published. A recording with Max playing was included in the Unicorn Kanchana album called *A Celebration of Scotland*. And so, surprisingly quickly, at least within the realms of so-called classical contemporary music, *Farewell to Stromness* and *Yesnaby Ground* were available to the public.

But more unusual things were to follow. Greg Knowles, our percussionist in the Fires, was a great enthusiast for the piece, and, entirely at his own suggestion, said that he wanted to see if it could somehow be used for a television show. He accordingly went to David Putnam, who at that time was in the midst of producing several films both for big screen and for television. David Putnam accepted the piece, and very quickly, I heard that the piece was to be used extensively for a Channel 4 television film and the cinema with a script by Ray Connolly. The story is about two students in the 1960s who play guitar together and who hope perhaps to become Lennon and McCartney, or similar. But they fall out badly and the film plots the progress of their lives. The music of *Farewell to Stromness* appeared in several different formats, ranging from rock to choral. The film was called *Forever Young*. I must say that I was rather alarmed at these various arrangements, not one of which came anywhere near to Max's own original for solo piano, but that is what seems to happen, and it seems that it was another way of advancing the popularity of the piece.

Since then, there have been numerous arrangements for a host of different combinations, including one for strings, which was made by Rosemary Furniss, which was played at the celebration of the wedding of Prince Charles, The Prince of Wales, to Camilla Barker Bowles. It is probably Max's most loved composition.

Scottish Television Documentary - 1980

In 1980 STV (Scottish Television) decided to make two films concentrating on Max. One of them would be to shoot the performances of *The Lighthouse* and to make a composite film from the best of each of them.

The other was to make a documentary film about Max, which would feature works performed at the St. Magnus Festival in Orkney in June, with a big interview with Max at the same time, and then move on to Edinburgh in September where they would take extracts from other works which would be performed by The Fires of London who were to have a week long residency, which would include *The Lighthouse*.

The director of the documentary film was Paul Odell, and I invited him round to tell him what was coming up. Paul decided that he would shoot the film in two halves, going both to Orkney and to Edinburgh. We arranged what elements of the St. Magnus Festival would be used, and of course there would be some of the glorious land and sea-scapes. Paul was anxious to shoot Max in and at his home at Bunnerton in Rackwick on Hoy, but Max was adamant that this should not happen as he always wanted to keep his home completely private. Max agreed to the making of the film and to the interview, only if Paul promised not to include any kind of footage with Max's home in it. It was therefore agreed that the big interview would take place at Max's friends Archie and Elizabeth Bevan's home in Stromness two days after the end of the St. Magnus Festival.

The day after the Festival was one where Max hosted a party at his home in Rackwick, inviting his friends who had come up to Orkney especially for the Festival, as well as other local Orcadian friends and supporters of the Festival. By the time of this fourth festival, Max's post-festival party had become a tradition. Everyone would assemble at the pier in Stromness – Stromness being on the Mainland of Orkney - to take [Stevie's ferry](#) which left at 8.30 in the morning for the half-hour journey across to the north part of Hoy. On arrival in Hoy, most of the people would travel the five miles by car to the head of Rackwick valley, where the road stopped, and then walk the remaining mile through the difficult terrain up to Max's croft. Others people, making a day of it, would walk the whole way to the croft from the ferry. The guests would spend the whole day, wandering around the valley, drinking, eating sandwiches, made by Elizabeth Bevan, and generally relaxing after the intense happenings of the Festival itself. Then everyone would walk down from Max's croft to the head of the valley, and then take any cars from there to the ferry which left at 5pm to return back to Stromness. A couple of people who lived in the valley would help out with driving people backwards and forwards.

The arrangements I made with Paul Odell were that the day after this Rackwick party, Max would catch the morning ferry into Stromness and that the cameras would meet him as he got off the boat, and then take some shots of him walking around in Stromness and then they would all repair to the Bevan house where the big interview, which was to be the cornerstone of the film, would take place.

Paul came to the Festival with his camera crew and shot everything they wanted, concentrating on the children in *Cinderella* (Max's children's opera) and on Max and Eleanor Bron in *The Yellow Cake Revue*. The morning after the end of the end of the Festival everyone who had been invited to Max's party duly turned up to catch the ferry, and everyone was in an extremely good mood, as the weather was glorious and the Festival had been a success, and now everyone could relax and enjoy themselves.. As the time came for everyone to leave, I offered to lead the procession down the valley to where there would be cars to take us on to the ferry.

As I approached my destination, I was suddenly aware of a rushing sound behind me. This turned out to be Max who was running towards me at great speed. As he caught up with me, he yelled "there has been a helicopter flying low over my house with the camera hanging out. I agreed to make this film under the condition that there would be no shots of my house. As this has now been done, I will take no further part in this film and I am not going to Stromness tomorrow to do the interview". With those words, Max turned around and started running back up the valley. Oh my goodness!

I was of course stunned. I knew that Max was in a raging temper, and from previous experience, I knew that there was absolutely no point in even trying to reason with him at this moment. I turned to Jack Rendall, who was Max's neighbour in Rackwick, and who was on the point of taking many of the party-goers in his car to the ferry, and I asked him if he would be willing to let me sleep in his house that evening. Jack agreed to this and drove off.

I contemplated my options. Max had signed a contract that he would take part in the documentary, but on the other hand the boundaries had been clearly laid out. I went into Jack's house and attempted to phone Paul Odell at the hotel which was his headquarters during the making of this film. When I finally reached him, I asked him what on earth he had meant by going against the exact stipulations of which he was well aware. At first he tried to argue that the helicopter had only been taking general pictures of Rackwick, but then he finally admitted that he had in fact taken pictures of Max's croft. I admonished him as best as I could, and then told him that at that moment, there would not be any further involvement by Max. I told him that I was currently in Jack Rendall's house, and that it was my intention to go up to Max a few hours later than evening to try to bring him round to agreeing not to withdraw from the film and to catch the ferry to Stromness the following morning. Quite how I was going to achieve this I still had no idea. Paul was by now quite shame-faced as he had begun to realise what he had done, and he said he would agree to any demands which I or Max might make, so long as Max did not pull out.

So there I was, with Jack in his house. I told him all my troubles and he was, as always, helpful and sympathetic. Many walkers who made pilgrimages to see [The Old Man of Hoy](#), the iconic stack which was a Mecca for climbers, would ask where Max lived, and Jack said that he would always give them misleading information in

order to protect Max's privacy. Many hours later, with my heart in my mouth, I slowly made my way up the valley to Max's croft. Luckily, as this was mid-June and the sun hardly sets in Orkney at that time, it was still broad day-light at about 10.30 pm. Max was of course astonished to see me, as he thought that I had left the island with everyone else. I started to talk to him and I pointed out that it would do no one any good if he withdrew from the film. I told him that even though footage had been taken, I would be able to ensure that it would not go into the film, and that I would get a signed affidavit from a solicitor, whereby Paul would swear that this footage would not go into the film. Max gradually calmed down when he saw that things might not be as black as they seemed. At the end, he grudgingly and reluctantly agreed to come to Jack Rendall's the following morning, and that we would go together on the ferry to Stromness, but that there would be no shooting until I had managed to get the solicitor to draw up an agreement which Paul would sign. I then went back down the valley, considerably relieve, but nevertheless nervous and apprehensive as to how things would turn out the following morning.

The ferry arrived in Stromness and Paul with his camera crew was waiting. Max pulled his cap down over his face and moved quickly away to walk to Archie and Elizabeth's house. Luckily I knew a solicitor who was just up the road from the ferry, and Paul and I presented ourselves, securing an immediate appointment. I explained our extraordinary circumstances, and what needed to be done. The document stating that not a single frame of Max's croft would appear in the film was drawn up, and Paul signed it. Paul and I then made our way through Stromness to the Bevans' house, where the crew was already waiting outside. Max appeared, and I waved the document triumphantly, with as much relish at Neville Chamberlain in his famous "peace in our time" speech in front of 10 Downing Street in 1938. Max turned around and walked into the Bevans' living room, and motioned to Paul Odell to begin. He was instantly professional, and nobody would ever have known that there had been any trouble at all.

The Rainbow / Lullaby for Lucy - 1981

The fifth Festival in 1981 saw another children's work, this time for the Stromness Academy School, called *The Rainbow*. This was on a far less ambitious scale than either *The two Fiddlers* or *Cinderella* but again, with Max's own libretto, it hit right at the centre of Stromness activity, with many delightful roles with one-liners which the younger children were able to shine. I must say that I revelled in these children's works, and came to think that they were the true heart of the Festival.

[Jack Rendall's](#) wife [Dorothy](#) on Hoy had given birth to a daughter called [Lucy](#), Lucy was the first child to be born in Rackwick Valley for over thirty years. To celebrate this momentous event, George Mackay Brown wrote a poem, an acrostic spelling out the name of Lucy Rendall as the first letter of every line. Max set this poem for chorus, and *Lullaby for Lucy* was first sung at the 1981 Festival by the [Cathedral Singers](#). At the Festival four years later, in 1985, Russell Harty came to have a television interview with Max, centred mainly in Rackwick, and he was so entranced by Lucy, that the film concentrated mainly on her, and she was interviewed and shown playing on the beach.

Songs of Hoy 1982

The Festival in 1982 saw another of Max's works for children, this time working on his own island of Hoy. These were *Songs for Hoy* with Max delighting in writing about his very own island. The BBC took particular interest in *Songs of Hoy* and made a television documentary, following Glenys Hughes, who taught the children, as she went on the ferry from the mainland in Orkney over to Hoy itself, and the activities of the children. For the young children of Hoy, the idea of coming over to the big town of Stromness and performing in the Festival was to be a huge event for them. Everything was at the local level. Glenys would go over to Hoy once a week and teach the children. Almost all of the children at the local Hoy school were under the age of eleven, but there were a very few older ones, who, for one reason or another, did not go onto the mainland to attend Stromness Academy of Kirkwall Grammar School. Max gave these elder children suitable parts, which they all loved. Once again, I fell as if, by writing these works for children, Max was hitting at the very epicentre of what the Festival was about.

Glenys Hughes Leaves Orkney and returns - 1982

But, from my point of view at least, there was a chill wind now blowing in the Festival. The Orkney Island's Council officer in charge of music activities throughout the county paid no attention whatever to the activities of the Festival. He completely ignored the wonderful work which Glenys had done with the children. *Cinderella* had been brought back into the Festival again in 1982 owing to its huge success, and the fact that so many people had missed it the first time around, and the production had gone onto to Bristol, and was broadcast on the BBC. Glenys had found herself in conflict with this man, and had decided that she would leave Orkney and find another job outside, and that Dick would join her as soon as he was able to find a suitable job for himself. And so, to my great regret, Glenys moved away from Orkney to another job which was not as a primary school teacher of music. Max was in no way inclined to write any more works for the Festival as he had been doing for these past years. At that moment, to my mind, the zest had gone out of the Festival. Of course, this was only as far as I was concerned. For other people, who had not felt the same way as I had done about this run of children's works, the Festival was booming and expanding. Indeed, Max did write *Into the Labyrinth* for the Scottish Chamber Orchestra and for Neil Mackie as the tenor solo, and for Dick Hughes as the organ soloist. This work, with words yet again by George Mackay Brown, cemented Max's relationship with the orchestra. But, the years from 1983 to 1986, were ones in which Max's contribution in terms of what he was writing, was very low. Dick tried to find a job which was on the level of the one which he held in Orkney, but none of them were really as good, and so he did not leave, and then, finally, Glenys returned back to Orkney.

Violin Concerto - 1986

A new and significant element had entered into the Festival, and this was the appearance on the scene of the wonderful [Ian Barr](#), the head of the Scottish Post Office. Ian was a deeply cultured man, and was genuinely interested in the arts, and

had, for some years, made generous contributions to the Edinburgh International Festival. Then, in 1985, Ian turned his eyes towards Orkney and the Festival, and started off with a toe in the water, so to speak, to see whether he could become more involved. It was in 1985 when I first met him, and we hit it off personally. I became very friendly with him and his wife, Margaret, I visited them in their home in Edinburgh and they likewise came to me in London. Ian's interest was considerably more than just the money which he, in his position, would be able to donate towards the matters in which he was involved. He was genuinely interested in the long-term outcome and planning.

One of Max's commissions, which were for June 1986, was a *Violin Concerto*. The commissioners were the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, and the occasion was the fortieth anniversary of the orchestra, which I had arranged with the manager, [Ian Maclay](#). The soloist was to be the great violinist Isaac Stern, who knew of Max and who was interested to have Max write a work for him. All these matters came together in the form of this commission, organised by [Hanne Wilhelm Hansen](#). The premiere was to be part of the orchestra's London Festival at the Royal Festival hall. The orchestra's music director was André Previn. André was an extremely well-known figure in musical circles, but was even better known to television viewers for his many appearances, and the one which sticks in everyone's mind was on the Morecombe and Wise Christmas Special, with André playing the Grieg Piano Concerto which has somehow become part of television history.

[Conrad Wilson](#) was the long-standing music critic of The Scotsman, which was one of the two main daily papers in Scotland. Conrad had been a devotee of the St. Magnus Festival from the start, and came regularly. Equally regularly he would ask for an interview with Max, and they would discuss future plans which Conrad would write about. Imagine my horror when reading Conrad's interview with Max, I found that Max has told Conrad that the premiere of the *Violin Concerto* would take place at the St. Magnus Festival. I was really cross and chided Max, who did not reply to me at all. The matter continued to rumble on in my head, and that night I suddenly thought to myself "you know, Max's idea is rather good. In fact, it is very good. But it could only ever be wishful thinking". I found it almost impossible to even contemplate the idea of the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra performing at the St. Magnus Festival. Firstly, the orchestras which had hitherto been to Orkney in the Festival had been from Scotland. London orchestras were an altogether different matter, bearing in mind the difference in the cost of the flight. Secondly, it had only been chamber orchestras which had gone to Orkney. There was not a venue that was large enough in Orkney to hold an orchestra that was larger than what had already been there.

However, moves towards making Max's statement a reality started, and it was Ian Barr, with the backing of the Scottish Post Office which came in on the act by financially supporting the concert of the *Violin Concerto*. Naturally, things were in no way as simple as I have written here, but the negotiations were successful, and the fact that The Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, conducted by André Previn, with Isaac Stern as soloist would take place at the tenth St. Magnus Festival was able to be announced and could be worked towards. Once the orchestra was up in Orkney, it was eminently sensible that they would perform two concerts, and that this second one would be conducted by Max himself. Ian Maclay, who was the manager of the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, paid a visit to Kirkwall to see how the orchestral

would or could fit into the cathedral. And now another venue loomed into view. There was an old fleapit of a cinema called The Phoenix in Kirkwall. I used to pass by, and the first 'P' from Phoenix was always missing. I had offered the suggestion on previous occasions that this building might be brought into use. The salient point of this building was that it had five hundred seats, whereas the number of people in the audience in St. Magnus Cathedral was considerably fewer than that. Additionally, and most important, the people on the stage could be seen by all the audience, whereas in the cathedral, the musicians could only be seen by the very few people in the front rows while there is a great deal to be said for the musicians actually being seen to play their instruments. The back-stage facilities at the cinema were nil. All the musicians and soloists had to walk across the car park to a building which provided toilets and running water, and some kind of basic interval refreshments. The committee decided that they would take a chance and bring the Phoenix Cinema into use for the second of the two Royal Philharmonic Orchestra concerts which Max was to conduct.

One of the places which I stayed at on visits to Edinburgh, which were becoming increasingly frequent with Max starting to conduct the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, was at Mrs. Dunne Meyer's bed and breakfast at the top of one of those very tall houses. On one of these occasions Humphrey Burton was also staying there. Humphrey worked as a producer on the BBC and who knew Max from a documentary he had made on Max for the BBC programme Monitor many years earlier. I told him about the upcoming wonder concert of Max's concerto with Isaac Stern and André Previn, and asked whether he might have any influence to see if there could be a live television relay. He said that such things were more than extremely difficult to get, but that he was very interested, and he would do his best to see if he could push it through. There was always much competition with any number of competing events. So I hoped for the best.

Then the news came through that the BBC had decided that they would do a live television relay of the concert. This would be the very first time that anything had been telecast live from Orkney, and it was going to be done via satellite over Brazil. The excitement over this Festival was growing all around. I think the word 'game-change' is the one that is currently used. By this I mean that suddenly people were beginning to perceive that two of the top stars in the classical musical world were coming to perform at the Festival, and that the event was going to be shown live on television.

Max had met [Isaac Stern](#) several times in London in the years prior to the Festival, and had also been to visit André Previn at his home in Surrey, and had gone through the concerto with each of them. The rehearsals were to take place at the Henry Wood Hall in London. After the performance, Isaac and André would return to London, and the concerto was to be recorded for Sony, which was Isaac's recording company. I had lengthy correspondence with Isaac's London agents to attempt to change the days of this recording because, as I explained, Max would not be able to be present. As Artistic Director of the St. Magnus Festival, he could not possibly leave in the middle. The Festival was to continue on until the Wednesday after the Saturday of the concert. However, nothing I said seemed to make any difference, and the days for the recording were set for the Monday and Tuesday following the performance in Orkney on the Saturday.

At a dinner party following one of the London rehearsal days, Isaac asked Max about the recording, and was absolutely astonished to find that he would not be there. He – Isaac – flew into a violent rage. How could it be possible that the composer would not be present at the recording? I tactfully explained that I had spent months attempting to impart this crucial piece of information to Isaac's agent, but had got nowhere. Max was in an extremely difficult position, as he most certainly did not want to offend the venerable and revered artist, and, during the course of the evening, after Isaac's wife Vera had managed to calm him down, Max indicated that he would be prepared to change his plans.

The following day Max's mother Hilda died in the hospital where she had been following her stroke in 1984. Now what would happen? Max turned up- at the rehearsals at the Henry Wood Hall, only to find that André Previn's very elderly mother had also died the previous day. This was an extraordinary set of circumstances. Max decided, in his true professional way, that he would go ahead with everything. He would go to Orkney for the two orchestral concerts, one of which he would conduct himself. He would be present at the premiere of *The House of Winter* Max's new work to be performed by the Kings' Singers and, according to Isaac's fervent wish, would return to London to be present at the recording of the concerto. He would, after that recording, be present at the first performance in London on the following day.

So, the time table was that the *Violin Concerto* concert would take place in the cathedral on the Saturday night. Then, immediately following the concert, Max would get together with Isaac and André in the Kirkwall hotel where they were staying, and play a recording, which would have been made by the BBC, which was also broadcasting the event, live on radio as well as television. They would sort out any problems which would enable them all to go straight into the recording. Isaac was to give the celebrity recital with Jean-Bernard Pommier in Stromness on the Sunday afternoon, and then both he and [André Previn](#) were to take a private plane back to London, as at that time there were no commercial flights in or out of Orkney on Sundays.

The overwhelming impression that sticks with me as my first sight of the cathedral was that of the many BBC vans. It echoed the thoughts from that first festival and the day of *The Martyrdom of St. Magnus*. Now, as well as Martin Dalby, and his van for the sound broadcast, there were the many vans to cope with the live television relay. The excitement was intense. I knew that I had to get that tape of the recording from Martin Dalby almost as soon as the last chord had been played, so that I could give it to the big three – Max, [Isaac Stern](#) and [André Previn](#) – for them to have their important post mortem. The concert went ahead without any incident. Afterwards there was a supper at the Kirkwall Hotel. I approached the BBC people to ask for the tape. There was a lot of coughing, and then I was informed that there was no tape. I was aghast. How could this have happened, when everything had been so carefully planned? The reason was simple. Just seconds before the start of the concert, Martin Dalby had been taken ill and had been rushed to hospital. It was as much as the technicians could do to ensure the broadcast went ahead, and certainly nobody had given a thought to the extra tape which nobody but Martin himself knew anything about.

This was a blow. How on earth was I going to break this devastating news to Isaac? I needed support. I had already witnessed Isaac's wrath on the previous occasion, when he heard that Max was not going to attend the recording. I asked James Hunter, who was the head of BBC Scotland, and who was of course present both at the concert and at this party, if he would actually come with me to Isaac's table, and tell him that there was no recording. With sinking heart, we moved across the crowded room. I introduced Isaac to James Hunter, who delivered his message, giving the full explanation of Martin Dalby's sudden illness. Isaac responded with "so you fucked it up"! We both moved away as fast as we could.

I resolved to try to find a solution. I knew that everyone in Orkney had watched on the television, and we might be lucky that someone might even have made some kind of a recording. I dashed blindly out of the Kirkwall Hotel, and found a street with a lot of houses, and started knocking on doors. Within a couple of minutes, I had a positive reply. Someone had indeed made a recording. I explained my situation, and the precious tape was willingly handed over. I knew that only in a society such as the one in Orkney could such an impossible mission result in success, and I thanked my lucky stars. I hurried back to the party, and pressed the tape into Max's hand so that he could be in charge of it, and so that the three of them could have their post mortem. I was later able to have a quiet laugh at a couple of the comments I had encountered in my frantic search for a tape such as "that poor old man – couldn't them have given him something easier to play"? This was in reference to the profusion of sweat pouring down Isaac's face owing to the intense heat from the television cameras, and that he was sixty-six years old at the time.

Attending breakfast at the Kirkwall Hotel the morning after the previous evening, Michael and I looked around the room. There was Jasper Parrott, André Previn's manager from the Harrison Parrot Agency. There was Sir Ian Hunter, Isaac Stern's manager from the Harold Holt agency. There was Mary-Jo Connealy, representing Max, from the Columbia Artists Management Inc. in New York. There was Hannah Wilhelm Hansen from Edition Wilhelm Hansen in Copenhagen, which was not only a publishing company, which owned Chester Music, who were publishing the *Violin Concerto*, but they had a concert agency as well. It was Hannah who had had the idea that Max should write a violin concerto for Isaac Stern. As Michael remarked to me "you know, you can book any artist in the world in this room". Yes, the Festival had made its mark.

So the tenth festival happened in all its glory, and the concert with the *Violin Concerto* was seen by 800,000 people – or so I am told. Max departed early from the Festival to be present at the recording in London. I later found out that the reason Isaac continuously said he was not available at the end of that week, was because he was determined to attend the tennis at Wimbledon, It was this that had caused me so much trouble for all those months.

Jimmack the Postie / House of Winter – 1986

There were two other works by Max in that tenth festival in 1986, Ian Barr at the Post Office commissioned Max to write an orchestral work for the second of the two Royal Philharmonic Orchestra concerts which Max would conduct in the Phoenix cinema. This turned out to be a loving portrait of Max's rather eccentric postman, and was called *Jimmack the Postie*. Jimmack was not always altogether reliable in his visits up to Max at Bunnerton to deliver his letters.

Another new work for this special festival was one for the vocal ensemble [The King's Singers](#). This group was famous for its many different styles of singing and had hoped that perhaps Max might write something with some comedy in it to display their talents, but in the event Max wrote a very serious work on some of [George Mackay Brown's](#) poems called *House of Winter*.

Artistic Director

Max was the Artistic Director of the Festival, and he had many meetings in Orkney with the Festival Committee. Prior to each of the Committee meetings, I would discuss the items which would probably come up, and I hoped that Max would be able to steer his way through the minefield of local interests. I always felt uneasy about those meetings, as I had noticed, throughout, that Max was always more comfortable attending any kind of meeting when I was present. I knew precisely what his views on things were, and it was somehow easier for me to bring these things into the open, than it was for Max to do so himself, and I feared that, without my presence in Orkney, a lot of what Max really felt on any given topic, was not aired and that misunderstandings of intentions would ensue.

From around 1983, the time when Glenys Hughes had left Orkney, and Max felt that he had lost the person who would safely deliver the works that he wrote for children of primary school age, and he was growing unhappy with his role as Artistic Director of the Festival. He repeated to me over and over again that he wanted to resign, and I managed, with great difficulty, to persuade him to hang on for a further three years until 1986, when he would have been in the position for ten years, which was an honourable length of time. In truth, Max was reluctant to be involved in anything which was not his composition and matters relating to it. He was very agitated about *The Fires of London*, with which he had been involved now for getting on for twenty years. He was the Director of The Dartington Summer School of Music, in which I had no role as Max's manager, but with which he had a great deal of trouble and which caused him much anxiety. All in all, he was over-committed in many matters which were unconnected with his composition. While Max did continue, he remained determined to bow out as an active player on the Festival front.

As we approached 1986, which fulfilled the ten years I thought it advisable for Max to remain, I had to break the news to Archie, which was very hard for me to do. I took the opportunity on a visit to Edinburgh when we were both there. Archie was very distressed at the thought of Max abandoning, as it were, the Festival. I assured him that while Max was no longer prepared to continue in an active way, I would go on as I always had done, and phone in every night to discuss all the Festival problems. I was always in touch more or less every evening with Archie, who did not have an official position at this time, but had gradually got drawn in, or, perhaps even sucked

in against his will, into the daily cut and thrust of what had to be done. Our phone conversations were always last thing at night, and Archie would tell me of whatever happenings had taken place. I also suggested that Ian Ritchie, as the Managing Director of the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, could be brought in, as he was always brilliant, and he had access to all sorts of artists and avenues which Max, somewhat on the outside, did not have. This suggestion went down well. The local aspect of the Festival was working well now that Glenys Hughes had returned, and the connection to the outside, through Ian and the SCO had a good feeling about it. All this greatly relieved Max's burden, and I had always felt that it was my job to smooth Max's path as best as I could for him to have the peace of mind to be able to concentrate on his compositions.

At the tenth Festival in 1986 when Max stepped down as Artistic Director and became the President, his role changed. He was active over many years as a conductor at the Festival, and he always made a point of attending as many of the events as he could. From now on, Max was very much in the background as far as the Festival was concerned. Archie and Glenys took over the reins, but this was much as it had been. I still continued with my late-night phone calls to Archie. Max himself had a huge commitment on his plate, and that was the composition of the ten Strathclyde Concertos for the Scottish Chamber orchestra. This meant that there was little or no space at all for any compositions for the Festival. There was the committee which operated throughout the year, and then at the festival time, a large number of additional volunteers came on board. After three years, Archie himself thankfully withdrew, as he had always felt it to be a burden. Glenys was now fully in control and no words can express what a magnificent job she was doing on every front. She could do everything that was necessary, but, if I look at it now, perhaps her greatest asset was the fact that she managed to achieve everything without antagonising anyone in the process. She always got everyone on her side. It took a very long time indeed before the constitution of the Festival was changed to the point where the position of Festival Director was a paid position. Up until that point, Glenys had been doing all the work on top of her work as a primary school music teacher. But finally, under threat of withdrawing completely, things were changed, and the Festival Director became an official post, which was advertised. Once Max was no longer Artistic Director, my own responsibilities in the Festival reduced down to virtual vanishing point. I was always around to provide any help when it was needed and called for in any crisis – and there were a few – and I would drive Max around wherever he needed to go.

Celebrity Recitals

From the second festival in 1978 onwards, the tradition of having a celebrity was established. This was made possible because of the Steinway Grand piano which resided in the Stromness Academy Hall. This had been the gift of Occidental Oil, and the stipulation was that it should not be moved from that hall. Hence the recitals were always held there.

As I had a lot of personal friends who were internationally renowned artists, I was able to arrange for them to be invited to the festival. In many cases I initially spoke to the artists personally, to make sure that when the official invitation came from the festival, their agents did not find an excuse to refuse (which was often the case).

Over the years, the celebrities included Vlado Perlemuter, [Fou Ts'ong](#), Jeremy Menuhin, [Victoria Postnikova](#), [Gennady Rhozhdestvesky](#), [Manoug Parikian](#), [Amaryllis Flemming](#), [Bernard Roberts](#), [Rosemary Furniss](#), [Günther Bauer-Schenk](#), [Emiko Tadenuma](#), [Julian Bream](#), [Ralph Kirshbaum](#), [Isaac Stern](#), Jean-Bernard Pommier, [Vladimir Ashkenazy](#), [György Pauk](#), [Peter Frankl](#), [Evelyn Glennie](#), Linda Hirst, [Stephen Pruslin](#), [Håkan Hardenberger](#), [Imogen Cooper](#), [Michaela Petri](#), [Sarah Walker](#), [Barry Douglas](#), [Sylvia Rosenberg](#), [Evelyn Glennie](#), [Truls Mørk](#), [Jean-Yves Thibaudet](#), [Joanna McGregor](#), [Kathryn Stott](#), [Steven Isserlis](#), [John Lill](#), [Natalie Clein](#), [Julius Drake](#), [Angela Hewitt](#), [Ilya Gringolts](#), [Stephen Osborne](#), James Ehnes

Five Festival Crises

(1)

The celebrity recitals were always on the Sunday afternoon of the Festival. In 1980 the celebrity was to be the Scottish singer Margaret Marshall. However, late on the Thursday afternoon, word arrived at the Bevan house where I was staying, that Margaret Marshall was ill and would not be able to sing at the Festival. This was a major disaster. In most other places, when an artist is sick, one gets in touch with the various artist agents who run through their lists and find someone who is free, and that person gets on a plane and travels to the venue. But this is out of the question in Orkney owing to the great difficulty in reaching the place, with very few planes coming in to Kirkwall. It would be difficult enough to find an artist just at the last minute who was free, and who had a recital programme up his or her sleeve that they could pull out on the spot, never even taking into account an accompanist.

I discussed the matter with Archie. There was a quartet of singers, who were to be the soloists in the Mozart *Requiem* which Max was to conduct with the Scottish Chamber Orchestra on the Saturday night. I knew that the orchestra, presumably with their soloists, had been on tour in the north of Scotland, and that they would be poised ready to make the crossing from Thurso to Stromness. One of the singers was Linda Hirst, whose work Max knew very well, as she had very often been the soloist in one of his works *Revelation and Fall*. I suggested that if we were somehow able to find Linda Hirst, she might be willing to contemplate giving a recital. It was a pretty long shot, but the fact was that she would actually be in Orkney on the desired day. Archie and I consulted with Max who thought it a good idea and we set about trying to find Linda. We looked up the hotels in Thurso, and found one and I made a call. Someone answered the phone and I asked if there was a Linda Hirst staying at that hotel. To my great astonishment, the man said that there was a Linda Hirst staying there. I asked if I could speak to her, and the reply was that they had to go and find her. I thought this rather odd, and I waited while I heard a huge amount of noise coming from what I thought would be a bar. After a very long time, I heard a small voice over the phone

which did not in the least sound the Linda Hirst that I knew. I asked if she was Linda Hirst and she said she was, and then I started to explain myself. The voice at the other end erupted. It said that it was all a plot to catch her and to make her feel bad, and to get her out of bed unnecessarily. I couldn't make head or tail of what she was trying to say, but clearly this was not our Linda Hirst, but someone else with the same name that happened to be staying at that hotel. I tried to pacify the poor lady who was in a dreadful state, convinced that there was some plot against her. It had seemed as if we had struck lucky straight away, but it proved not to be the case.

So we moved on to other hotels, and, after a while, I did manage to locate Linda at a different hotel. I explained my predicament, and she immediately said that she would be willing to give a recital on Sunday. But she needed to have an accompanist. She gave me the names of several of the pianists with whom she regularly worked, together with their telephone numbers, and I said I would ring around to see who might just be free. This I did, but none of the people on the list was available. I then phoned Linda back and asked if she would consider working with Stephen Pruslin, our pianist in The Fires, and explained that he was a most brilliant sight-reader and that she could be totally confident that he would do a marvellous job if happened to be free. I phoned Steve – this was all still Thursday night – and he said that he was free and that he would be delighted to do the date. He asked what the next step would be. I had actually booked a flight from London to Orkney for whoever it might be that was going to fill that slot. I phoned Linda back at her hotel and she told me that Steve would have to go to her house in London to collect the music, which was on the top of her piano, and she gave me a list of all the pieces which she wanted to have. Someone at her house would let Steve in. I then phoned Steve back and gave him the details of where Linda lived, and which pieces he was to collect. Steve would spend the Friday collecting the music and then returning home and reading through it. He would then travel up to Orkney on the Saturday, and get ready to work with Linda on the Sunday morning. Linda herself would be busy on the Saturday with the rehearsals and the performance of the Mozart *Requiem*. But it could all work.

And here we come to things which could only happen in Orkney. Steve was to also stay with the Bevans, with whom he had had a long-standing friendship. But when he was to arrive, everyone would be out at the various Festival events. . But this was not a problem, because the Bevan front door was always open, and Steve could just walk in, as he had always done on numerous occasions previously. The key to the Stromness Academy Hall would be on the kitchen table, so that he could go along and spend some hours practising these new pieces which he had undertaken to play. So this is how it all worked out. Linda and Steve put their programme together on the Sunday morning, and stepped forward to give the recital in the afternoon. Everyone was thrilled to pieces. The sheer professionalism of both Linda and Steve to step into the breach in that way, and to conjure up a whole recital out of nothing, was beyond any praise. The Festival had pulled through.

(2)

In 1983, the celebrity recital was to be given by Hungarian born British violinist György Pauk accompanied by Emika Tadenuma, the Japanese violinist. . The recital was to begin at 2.30pm in the Stromness Academy Hall. At 10am, György phoned me and asked if I would go to his hotel. He was very unwell and obviously was not fit enough to give a performance. I asked if Emika would be willing to give a solo

recital, but she said that she was not prepared for such a big undertaking, but would be willing to fit in and help with whatever other arrangements might be made.

I went back to the Bevans' house where I was staying and we discussed the extremely urgent problem. I said that I knew that Rosemary Furniss, the violinist of The Fires of London, was in Orkney with her recently-married husband, Gregory Knowles, the percussionist of The Fires. Greg was there performing at the Festival's night club with his band. I ascertained where the two of them were staying.

I asked Rosemary if, in the first instance she would be willing to play a recital in three hours' time, with an accompanist she had never worked with previously, playing repertoire of pieces she might not have touched for months or even years. And then, going further, whether she would consider taking over as the soloist playing the Mendelssohn Violin Concerto the following Wednesday with the Scottish Chamber Orchestra. This was a tall order. Rosemary agreed to both the suggestions.

György had been going to play sonatas by Beethoven and Debussy, and Rosemary knew these pieces, and of course Emika had the music with her. I brought her back to Stromness with me, and she and Emika rehearsed together, and then, at this incredibly short notice, they played those two sonatas.

These sonatas, however, did not make a long enough program. Gunther Bauer Schenk was an Austrian conductor who had conducted some of Max's operas in Germany, and was visiting the Festival as a holiday. I asked him if he would also be prepared to do something in the recital, which he said he would. He would play Mozart Piano due for four hands, and Schubert Military Marches together with Emika. It was suggested that the music could be obtained from someone in Kirkwall. Again I phoned up, and that person who did have the music jumped in my car and drove the fifteen miles to Kirkwall, and secured the music, bringing it home triumphantly. Gunther and Emika were also able to have a run-through before the concert. Everyone was so relieved and grateful to the three artists who had jumped in so magnanimously at such incredibly short notice to save the situation.

Rosemary had a few days to prepare for the Mendelssohn Concerto which she played with the Scottish Chamber Orchestra conducted by James Conlon. I am glad that I was on hand and that I knew that Gunther and Rosemary both happened to be visiting the Festival in non-professional capacities.

(3)

In that very same Festival of 1990, there was a somewhat sour note. This occurred at the opening concert which took place at the Phoenix Cinema, which was collaboration between the Scottish Chamber Orchestra and various differing groups from the Orkney Schools. It happened that I was not sitting next to Max at that concert. When I heard the first strains of the first piece which the Orkney children were playing, I had a premonition of what might happen. Let us say that it was not the nicest noise that anyone had ever heard. I knew that Max would react violently. This was not just poor – it was downright dreadful, and certainly not something that one would expect to hear at the St. Magnus Festival. I sat shuddering in my seat. Sure enough, to my horror, at the end of the piece, I saw Max get up, and in full view of everyone, walk sedately out of the auditorium. I dashed out after him, and I found him having a violent row with the teacher who was in charge of the children.

- “How dare you put the children onto the stage without tuning their instruments?” asked Max

- “Don’t you talk to me about these matters – you with your elitist ideas”, said the teacher

- “It is not elitist that the children should be playing in tune, and it is your job to see that they have a chance to do so, and you have not made this possible by not tuning their instruments.”

And there was more in the same vein. Eventually Max moved away, and I said that we had to go home. The children were playing horribly out of tune, and Max was quite right that it is the job of their teacher to tune their instruments. However, Max, as the President of the Festival, and arguably the most important musical person present, should not have walked out on the children so that everyone could see his displeasure. This was going to be a great blow to all the good work which had been achieved in winning over the wider Orcadian public. It was, shall we say, politically a bad move, and I was so cross with myself that I had not been sitting next to Max to be able to restrain him at the appropriate moment when he had decided to walk out.

We drove back to Stromness in silence. The mood in the Bevan household the following morning was thunderous Both Archie and Elizabeth were absolutely furious with Max for having acted in the way he did, however great the provocation. Max resolved to make amends as best as he could, as he realised he had behaved badly and inappropriately. We drove, again in silence, to the choir rehearsal. Max had had several rehearsals with the choir for the Mozart *Requiem*, and now here was the day of the actual performance, and a great cloud was hanging over everything. Max spoke eloquently to the whole choir, apologising profusely for his dreadful behaviour, and expressing how he had no wish to pour scorn on the efforts of the children. This was the best he could do in the circumstances, and I think and hope that Max learnt a lesson from this experience. I also hope that the wider Orcadian public forgave him. I did not enjoy any of this one little bit,

(4)

The following year, 1992, saw another, but very different kind of emergency. Max was again conducting, and this time the orchestra was the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, and the programme was to be Beethoven *Coriolan* Overture, Max’s own *Trumpet Concerto* with the great trumpeter Håkon Hardenberger, and finally Beethoven’s *Symphony No. 5*. As Max always stayed with the Bevan family in Stromness, he needed to have somewhere to rest in between the morning rehearsal and the evening concert in Kirkwall. He used always to go to Marjorie Linklater’s house for this purpose. Marjorie was the widow of the writer Eric Linklater, and a staunch supporter of the Festival, and its’ Vice-President. Max, as usual, spent the afternoon with Marjorie, who lived just along the road from the cathedral where the concert was to take place. The weather was absolutely appalling, which was nothing new. It would seem that on the whole the characteristic Orkney weather during the Festival was dreadful. It was bucketing down. Even though it was only a very few yards from Marjorie’s house to the cathedral, Max, Marjorie and I were given a lift so that none of us wet. Max had changed into his tails for the concert at Marjorie’s house.

We duly arrived at the cathedral and rushed through the door. Everyone entered through the same door. That is to say, all the musicians and all the audience. The place was packed. Everyone was very excited. Then, with about five minutes to go before the start of the concert, Max said to me

- "I haven't got my glasses".

- "Where are they?" I asked him.

- "They should be somewhere in Marjorie's house, most probably in the bathroom".

Max could not possibly conduct the concert without his glasses. There was no way I would be able to find Marjorie in all the heaving mass of people. I flew out of the cathedral and along the street. I was drowned in the rain. I arrived at the front door. Well, by now you know the Orkney story. The front door is left open. Never was I so grateful for this. I dashed through the door and into the bathroom, and there, in the bathroom, just as Max had said, lay the missing glasses. Oh the relief. Now all I had to do was to get back. By this time I was so wet that it didn't make any difference if I got any wetter. I flew back along the street, and arrived at the cathedral door, only to find that it was SHUT. Now what? I banged furiously, and after what seemed to me like years, the door finally opened, and I was let in, pushing my way through the crowds down the aisle to where Max was waiting at the back, and I thrust the glasses into his hands, and he then walked to his position to commence the concert. It was a near thing. I don't remember anything about that concert at all, as I sat, soaked to the skin, gasping the whole way through it.

(5)

1996 was the year that the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra returned to the Festival. At this point, Max had already been the conductor/composer of the orchestra for several years. The Orchestra had commissioned Max to write a symphony to celebrate its fiftieth birthday, and the extraordinary thing was that the premiere was to take place at the Festival. This was now ten years after that first visit by the orchestra, with the *Violin Concerto*. It had been a very sad year. George Mackay Brown had died, and only five days later Dick Hughes, Glenys Hughes' husband, had also died. Everyone was reeling from these two hammer-blows which hit right at the heart of the Festival. Max had finished writing his symphony just exactly when George had died. Max had dedicated the symphony to George, and now here he was coming to present it to the festival, celebrating the twentieth Festival.

This concert with the symphony was to take place in the Phoenix cinema. The facilities there had in no way improved, but somehow or other; everyone seemed to accept the conditions. The soloist was to be [Joanna McGregor](#) playing Beethoven's *Piano Concerto No. 2*. Again Max took up residence at Marjorie Linklater house, and from there he would go over to [Glenys Hughes'](#) house, to go through the concerto with Joanna. Max, Michael and I arrived at Glenys' house, and we came through the front door, which, as always, was open. We entered into the living room, but Joanna was nowhere to be seen. Then, very quietly, she appeared from the piano room, which led off from the living room. But she did not come forward. She stayed where she was, rooted to the spot. Something was obviously wrong. What was it? She then

said that when she had entered into the house some while later, Glenys' dog, a beautiful white and tan cocker spaniel called Lucy, had bitten her. She was therefore hiding in the piano room.

This was bad news. The bite had been on Joanna's hand and had drawn blood. I knew that she urgently needed to go to the hospital to have an anti-tetanus injection. Although I knew most of Kirkwall pretty well, I had absolutely no idea where the hospital was. All I knew was that one existed. I didn't know who to ask. I phoned directory enquiry to obtain the telephone number of the hospital and they would give me the address. However, when I finally got the number and phoned the hospital, there was only an answering machine asking me to leave a message. This was no good at all. There was only one thing for it, and that was to go out into the street and try to find my way by asking someone. But Kirkwall is not a very populated place and you might not necessarily find someone to ask. It all seemed to take a very long time, although it turned out that Glenys' house was very near to the hospital. We arrived and managed to explain the predicament, and Joanna was given the anti-tetanus injection. But her finger was still sore, and was not exactly what was needed on the day she was playing a concerto. The media got hold of the story, which emerged something along the lines of "Artistic Director's dog bites soloist". I suppose you could call this an amusing incident, but it did not seem so at the time. I hope that Joanna does not harbour any grudge against the Festival.

Peter Maxwell Davies' Works for the St. Magnus Festival

The following list is in chronological order of the first performance;

1977

The Martyrdom of St. Magnus
Chamber opera in nine scenes

1978

Le Jongleur de Notre Dame
Masque for mime-juggler, baritone, instrumental ensemble and children's band

The Two Fiddlers
Opera in two acts for young performers

1979

Kirkwall Shopping Songs
Song-cycle for young children's voices and instruments

Solstice of Light

Cantata for tenor, SATB chorus and organ

1980

A Welcome to Orkney
For instrumental ensemble

Cinderella
Pantomime opera in two acts for young performers

The Yellow Cake Revue
For singer or reciter and piano

Farewell to Stromness
Piano interlude from *The Yellow Cake Revue*

Yesnaby Ground
Piano interlude from *The Yellow Cake Revue*

1981

The Rainbow
Music-theatre work for young performers

Lullaby for Lucy
For SATB chorus

The Medium
Monodrama for mezzo-soprano solo

The Well
Incidental Music to a play by George Mackay Brown

1982

Songs of Hoy
Song-cycle for children's voices and instruments

Organ Sonata
For organ solo

Bessie Millie's Wind Shop
Incidental music to a play by George Mackay Brown

1983

Into the Labyrinth
Cantata for tenor and orchestra

March: The Pole Star
Arranged for brass band

Tallis: Four Voluntaries
Arranged for brass band

Island of the Saints
Incidental Music to a play by George Mackay Brown

1984

Guitar Sonata
For guitar solo

1986

Concerto for Violin
For violin and orchestra

House of Winter
Song-cycle for AATBBB chorus or vocal sextet

Jimmack the Postie
Overture for orchestra

1988

Dances from The *Two Fiddlers*
Arranged for violin and piano

Six Songs for St. Andrews
Song-cycle for young children's voices and instruments

1989

The Great Bank Robbery
Music-theatre work for young performers

1990

Dangerous Errand

Music-theatre work for very young performers

1991

Witch

Incidental music to a play by George Mackay Brown

The Road to Colonnus

Incidental music to a play by George Mackay Brown

The Spiders' Revenge

Music-theatre work for young performers

1992

A Selkie Tale

Music-theatre work for young performers

1993

Seven Summer Songs

Song-cycle for young children's voices and instruments

1994

Cross Lane Fair

For Northumbrian pipes and orchestra

Thaw

For instrumental ensemble

1996

Symphony No. 6

For orchestra

1997

A Birthday Card for Hans

For mezzo-soprano and ensemble

1998

Mrs. Linklater's Tune

For violin solo

1999

Songs of Sanday

Song-cycle for children's voices and instruments

Litany - for a Ruined Chapel between Sheep and Shore

For trumpet solo

2000

Mr. Emmet Takes a Walk

Music-theatre work

Orkney Saga V: Westerly Gale in Biscay, Salt in the Bread Broken

For SATB and Orchestra

Symphony No. 7

For Orchestra

Grand Oratorio - The Meaning of Life

For SATB Barber Shop Quartet

2001

Lux in Tenebris

for double bass solo

2002

Barriers

Incidental music for Alan Plater's play

Six Sanday Tunes

For children's violin group

A Glass of Shiraz

For instrumental ensemble