John Casken
[dedicated to the Lindsay Quartet]

[1] I - with piquant verve 5.10
[2] II - with jazzy obstinacy 3.15
[3] III - with haunted fascination 7.42

Judith Weir
String Quartet (1990) [13.10]

[5] I – Serene 5.16
[6] II - Con moto 5.11
[7] III – Presto 2.45

Robert Saxton
[dedicated to the Chilingirian Quartet]

[8] I - gently flowing, singing 5.06
[9] II - light, dancing 4.58
[10] III - Still, calm, sustained (tempo giusto) 9.42
[12] V – dancing, quick 5.38

THE KREUTZER QUARTET
total CD duration 63.02
Robert Saxton's *Songs, Dances and Ellipses* has its origins in an earlier quartet, *Fantazia*, written to a commission from the John S. Cohen Foundation as a test piece for the 1994 London International String Quartet Competition. *Fantazia* explicitly refers to the great English viol composers of the mid-seventeenth century, but *Songs*... is much more catholic in its orientation, even though it draws on some of the same material. The 'tread' of the music in each piece is in large units, and both have dance-like qualities, but here the arcs of material are on a much grander scale. Perhaps the ellipses of the title suggest planetary orbits? (If they do, the cello is Neptune and the first violin Mercury!)

Although the piece has five movements with distinct beginnings, it is clearly conceived as a single structure. This became especially significant during the recording session, which began very slowly – always a source of some concern, even if one is not recording under time pressure. Despite having worked with Robert on the piece on numerous occasions and given many concert performances, Robert kept running out of the control room to come and tweak little things on the opening couple of pages: it started to feel like we might make little progress at all. However, the result of this almost obsessive attention to detail at the opening was that once we were set in motion the remainder of the recording ran almost uncannily smoothly. It became clear that Robert knew that once we were set on the right trajectories the rest of the structure would take care of itself.

Saxton's oscillating minor third opening makes explicit reference to the last movement of Ligeti's *String Quartet no. 2* (and hence also to Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde*) pointing to a direct engagement with both the quartet tradition and a much larger musical world, but its brilliant tonal ending is something of a surprise. John Casken's engagement with tradition speaks less to specific repertoires but more to an understanding of how quartets (both the pieces of music and the actual ensembles) have traditionally played with the physicality of the medium – perhaps no surprise given John's close association with the Lindsay Quartet over the years.
Curiously, Casken's quartet also opens with an oscillating minor third, but here it buzzes with energy, and the exchange of material and activity across the ensemble provides a sense of vitality that a quick glance at the score might not convey. Far from being mere means for controlling the shapes of material the frequent changes of time signature inject a powerful physical manipulation of momentum that underpins the sparkle and verve of the first movement. The 'jazzy obstinacy' of the second movement also results from a physical 'swing' that shapes the material, and John explicitly invoked jazz traditions in our rehearsals, though always with a strict sense of discipline. The third movement is more colouristic, muting the instruments but also drawing out the timbral differences between them (which are somewhat attentuated by the mutes, providing a sense of inwardness). The last movement seems to recall Beethoven in both its building of texture and its playful games with the material.

**Judith Weir**'s quartet appears to come from another world altogether: its spare textures, breakings off and repetitions suggest the isolated North or perhaps the distant past. The ensemble is frequently broken into pairs and the narrative unfolds in episodes that terminate as abruptly as they begin. There is no 'pause' between the movements in a traditional sense: one movement stops and the next starts after a strictly controlled gap – just as the material works within the movements. The extraordinary quality of the ensemble colour is partly a consequence of the spare fifth-based textures, but also the sharp definition of material, as for example in the extended viola solo of the first movement, in which the viola narrative is set in stark contrast to the biting secco framing of the ensemble. In fact, it is the viola's 'ancient' timbral quality that dominates the piece, with the quartet always orientated towards its centre. (The viola's timbral quality is nearest of the modern violin family to the viol as a consequence of the relationship between its proportions and register.) The final movement begins with a jolt of energy but disappears just as suddenly. Its terseness and charm offer an extraordinary vision of another world.

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Born in London in 1953, Robert Saxton began composing aged 6 having started the recorder at school, followed by both violin and piano. After advice and encouragement from Benjamin Britten over a period of 6 years, he studied, from the age of 16, with Elisabeth Lutyens, then with Robin Holloway during his final undergraduate year at Cambridge and subsequently with Robert Sherlaw Johnson during a postgraduate (B Mus) year at Oxford, also having lessons with Luciano Berio. He was awarded 1st Prize for Composition at the 1975 Gaudeamus Music Week in Holland and was the 1985-86 holder of the Fulbright Arts Award to the USA, where he was a visiting Fellow (at the invitation of Milton Babbitt) at Princeton University, and teaching assistant to Oliver Knussen at the Tanglewood Summer School (1986). He received a D Mus from Oxford in 1992.

Having been a lecturer at Bristol University, Robert Saxton was Head of Composition at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama throughout most of the 1990s, followed by a year as Head of Composition and Contemporary Music at the RAM, and is now Professor of Composition at Oxford and Tutorial Fellow in Music at Worcester College, Oxford, where he is currently Chairman of the Faculty. In the 1980s, he led several outreach education projects for the London Sinfonietta, Leeds Festival and Glyndebourne, both in the UK and abroad.

He has written works, amongst others, for the BBC (TV, Proms and Radio), LSO, LPO, ECO, London Sinfonietta, Nash Ensemble, Chilingirian String Quartet, St Paul Chamber Orchestra (USA), Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival/Opera North, Aldeburgh, Cheltenham, City of London, Three Choirs and Lichfield Festivals, Stephen Darlington and the choir of Christ Church Cathedral Oxford, Susan Milan, Susan Bradshaw and Richard Rodney Bennett, Edward Wickham and The Clerks’ Group, Teresa Cahill, Leon Fleisher, Steven Isserlis, Mstislav Rostropovich, John Wallace and Raphael Wallfisch and John York.

His music from 1972 until 1998 was published by Chester/Music Sales and since then, by the University of York Music Press, of which he is a director. Recordings have appeared on the Sony Classical, Hyperion, Metier, EMI and NMC labels.

Robert Saxton is currently working on a radio opera/dramatic myth, ‘The Wandering Jew’, commissioned by BBC Radio 3, a work for the Arditti String Quartet commissioned by the South
Bank Centre, London and then third piece in a trilogy commissioned by the Friends of Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford for Stephen Darlington and the cathedral choir. He is married to the soprano, Teresa Cahill.

**John Casken** was born in Yorkshire in 1949. After lectureships at the Universities of Birmingham and Durham, he was appointed Professor of Music at the University of Manchester in 1992. From 1971-72 he studied in Poland with Andrzej Dobrowolski, and began to have regular consultations with Witold Lutoslawski that developed into a close association and friendship.

His works have been featured at major international festivals, and his first opera Golem won the First Britten Award in 1990 and the 1991 Gramophone Award for Best Contemporary recording (on Virgin Classics). Since its premiere at the Almeida Theatre in London in 1989 the opera has seen six different productions in the UK, Germany and the USA. Sir Thomas Allen and the BBC Symphony Orchestra premiered the orchestral song-cycle Still Mine at the 1992 Proms and this work subsequently won the Prince Pierre de Monaco prize for Musical Composition in 1993.

From 1990-2001 John Casken was Composer-in-Association with the Northern Sinfonia, who gave the premiere his Cello Concerto with Heinrich Schiff and recorded it for Collins Classics. This work, along with Maharal Dreaming, Darting the Skiff and Vaganza (performed by the Northern Sinfonia and conducted by the composer) was recently re-released on the NMC Ancora label. His discography also includes a 2CD set of chamber works on Metier.

Dmitry Sitkovetsky premièred his Violin Concerto at the 1995 Proms and his second opera God's Liar was premièred in 2001 by Almeida Opera in London and Brussels, and received its Austrian premiere by Neue Oper Wien in the KlangBogen Festival in Vienna in the summer of 2004.

**Judith Weir**'s interests in narrative, folklore and theatre have found expression in a wide range of musical invention. She is the composer and librettist of three operas (A Night at the Chinese Opera, The Vanishing Bridegroom and Blond Eckbert). Folk music from the British Isles and beyond has influenced her extended series of pieces for the Schubert Ensemble. For many years she has written music for performances in England and India with storyteller Vayu Naidu; and she has worked on numerous film and music collaborations with Margaret Williams, the most recent being Armida, a one-hour television opera commissioned by Channel 4 and first shown in 2006. During a
period in the 1990s as resident composer with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, she wrote several new works for orchestra and chorus (including Forest and We are Shadows) and has also been commissioned by the Boston Symphony Orchestra (Music Untangled and Natural History) the Minnesota Orchestra (The Welcome Arrival of Rain) and Carnegie Hall (woman.life.song, a song cycle written for Jessye Norman).

Judith Weir was born into a Scottish family in 1954, but grew up near London. She was an oboe player, performing with the National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain, and had a few composition lessons with John Tavener during her schooldays. She attended Cambridge University, where her composition teacher was Robin Holloway, and on leaving there spent several years as a community musician in rural southern England. She then returned to Scotland to work as a university teacher in Glasgow. Since the 1990s she has been based in London, and was artistic director of the Spitalfields Festival for six years. She has continued to teach, most recently as Fromm Foundation Visiting Professor at Harvard University during 2004, and at present, as a Research Professor at Cardiff University.

The 2007-8 season has already seen the twelve premiere performances of I’ve turned the page… (for piano solo, the test piece for the Scottish International Piano Competition); and the world premiere of Winter Song for chamber orchestra, given by the Scottish Chamber Orchestra and Oliver Knussen in December 2007. CONCRETE, an extended motet written for the BBC Symphony Orchestra and Chorus in 2007 formed the finale of the BBC Barbican Weekend in January 2008 devoted to Judith Weir’s work of the last thirty years, during which there was also a performance of her 1990 opera, The Vanishing Bridegroom. A Night at the Chinese Opera will be in Scottish Opera’s 2008 repertoire, and there have been new productions of Blond Eckbert in Innsbruck, Vienna and Berlin during the 2007-8 season. A CD of her orchestral music recorded by the BBC Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Martyn Brabbins, and titled The Welcome Arrival of Rain has been released by NMC to coincide with the BBC/Barbican Weekend.

In December 2007, Judith Weir was presented with the Queen’s Medal for Music by HM The Queen and Sir Peter Maxwell Davies, Master of the Queen’s Music.

Judith Weir’s music is published exclusively by Chester Music Ltd. and Novello and Co. Ltd.
The Kreutzer Quartet has forged an enviable reputation as one of the Europe’s most dynamic and innovative string quartets. The ‘Independent’ newspaper summed up their playing as ‘Passion, Grace and Steel...’.

They are the dedicatees of numerous works, and over many years forged creative partnerships with composers including Sir Michael Tippett, David Matthews, Michael Finnissy, Judith Weir, and Haflidi Hallgrimsson. They have a particularly strong relationship to a cross-section of leading American composers, having collaborated intensively with the great George Rochberg in the last few years of his life, as long as working closely with figures as Elliott Schwartz, and the prolific symphonist Gloria Coates.

As recording artists they have won critical acclaim for their discs on the Naxos, Metier, and Chandos labels. Their work in collaboration with art galleries has garnered much attention, and large audiences, particularly their annual residency at the Tate Gallery, St Ives. In 2008 they appeared at several Festivals including the Venice Biennale, and the Montpelier Festival. They are ‘Artists in association’ at York University.

The performers on this CD are:

- Peter Sheppard Skærved  violin
- Gordon MacKay  violin
- Bridget Carey  viola
- Neil Heyde  cello
“Northern Lights” was recorded at St. John’s Church, Loughton, Essex
17 January 2002 (Casken), 20 September 2000 (Weir) and 13 December 1999 (Saxton)
Recording engineer/producer/digital editing: David Lefeber (Metier Productions)
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MSVCD 92053  Sadie Harrison: Taking Flight (with other artists)
MSVCD 92055  Chamber music by Sir Peter Maxwell Davies (with Ian Pace, piano and Guy
Crowley, clarinet)
MSVCD 92058  Wilfred Josephs: Music for Clarinet (with Linda Merrick, clarinet and
Benjamin Frith, piano)
MSVCD 92105  Quartet Choreography (audio)  MSVDX 101 (DVD)
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