

Michael Finnissy

Six Sexy Minuets Three Trios and other works

Kreutzer Quartet

Linda Merrick **clarinet**



métier

Michael Finnissy

Civilisation	19:59
1 I —	2:13
2 II —	5:01
3 III —	4:11
4 IV —	2:49
5 V <i>Largo tranquillo</i>	3:26
6 VI <i>Vivace assai</i>	2:18
7 Contrapunctus XIX	6:26
Clarinetten-Liederkreis †	14:46
8 I <i>Poco allegretto</i>	4:06
9 II <i>Largo appassionato</i>	4:35
10 III <i>Folklorico: quasias parlando</i>	2:44
11 IV <i>Vigorouso</i>	1:44
12 V <i>A capriccio</i>	1:37
13 Mad Men in the Sand	2:05
Six sexy minuets three trios	24:58
14 I <i>Piuttosto sostenuto</i>	1:48
15 II <i>Grazioso e con dignità</i>	1:32
16 III —	2:03
17 IV <i>Allegretto capriccioso</i>	1:30
18 V <i>Quasi allegretto, un poco minaccioso</i>	1:05
19 VI —	3:58
20 VII <i>Affettato</i>	1:25
21 VIII <i>Adagio — Allegretto</i>	3:16
22 IX <i>Andante malinconico</i>	8:20
Total Duration including pauses	68:21

Kreutzer Quartet | **Linda Merrick** clarinet †

On playing Michael Finnissy Quartets

– a performer's view

The Kreutzer Quartet enjoys a long and happy friendship with Michael Finnissy. We have been privileged to premiere a number of his pieces and to study, play, and live with all of his works for our medium. It is, of course, a given that Michael is one of the great composers, but, perhaps he has never settled into a fixed approach to the string quartet. Instead, every work that he has written, stretches, twists and reconfigures the mechanism and meaning of this most archetypal ensemble. Every piece forces us to reconsider who we are, what we are doing, how we are doing it and why, both as ensemble and individuals.

Michael is sparing with the use of the title of 'String Quartet' for his works. To date, he has assigned the moniker to only three pieces (two of which, were written for the Kreutzers). He has given the title to none of the works scored for quartet on this disc. Naturally, I would not expect his Bach 'continuation' to be named 'String Quartet', and *Mad Men in the Sand* is a free standing miniature. However, '*Civilisation*' and *Six Sexy Minuets Three Trios* engage the medium head on, so it is tempting to suggest that, in part, that these are pieces 'about' the string quartet, rather than 'being' quartets.

One should not expect Michael Finnissy to use the title *Civilisation* without a quizzical look, a raised eyebrow. This six-movement work seems to ask us where we stand? – whose civilisation is 'civilised'? – or are none of them? I enjoy benefits of living in a country which profited from imperialism, on the oppression of those once defined as 'uncivilised'. How do I look at myself in the mirror?

The first movement is a sort of 'pastoral', with the expected lilting, compound bucolic rhythm. It is divided into two sections, the first marked 'primitivo', the second 'colto', which can mean 'cultured', but also 'literate' or 'learned'. The 'primitive' sections are played 'sul ponticello' (on the bridge), and with equally rough, plucked interjections. Midway through the movement, the sound

'transforms'(or perhaps is 'civilised') to the 'colto' section, marked 'naturale'. Ah, blandishments, the benefits of civilisation. But this 'cultured', 'literate' material proves unsustainable. It splinters, and ends in spluttering incoherence.

It is with a certain sense of relief we turn to movement two, which again begins 'primitivo' (and *sul ponticello*). But what was earlier presented as the crude parody in the first movement, now seems ideal; an elegant, glinting conversation between the violins, accompanied by bell-like pizzicato and harmonics in the viola and cello. It seems as if we might be hearing exactly how Johann Wolfgang von Goethe described an ideal string quartet to Carl Friedrich Zelter:

'Man hört vier vernünftige Leute sich untereinander unterhalten, glaubt ihren Diskursen etwas abzugewinnen und die Eigentümlichkeiten der Instrumente kennen zu lernen (One listens to four rational people in conversation amongst themselves, and believes that something may be wrong from their discourse).'ⁱ

Again, the 'civilisation' (apparently Germanic) is followed; the transformation to 'colto' and 'naturale' happens within a very short time. The quartet, finds itself playing, or playing with, the Lydian-mode material from Beethoven's *Heiliger Dankgesang eines Genesenen an der Gottheit, in der Lydischen Tonart* from his *Op 132 Quartet*. This movement might be seen as a possible high point, if you like, of Goethe's expectations of the string quartet. But this Beethoven-ian dialogue dissipates, to over-complicate itself, and like the previous movement, races to chaos, or perhaps entropy. The quartet is fractured.

In movement three, the quartet is indeed broken; split. Cello and viola play a tightly-wrought, buzzing duo, while the violins wrap the whole thing in a halo-like, four-part 'quasi chorale'. There is no reconciliation between the earthy low instruments, and the high-minded, angelic polyphony suspended overhead. The fourth movement returns to the 'primitivo'-'colto' structure. But this time, the transitional, 'shared' material takes up the core of the movement.

ⁱ Letter November 9th 1929

Something, maybe, has been learnt. Indeed, instead of babbling incoherence, the movement ends in shared singing, with more than an echo of Wagner.

The fifth movement is another duo for viola and cello, this time more lyrical. This time the two violins contribute four-part tremulous 'cloudbursts', which gradually step away from A Major (which may be a reference to the Beethoven quartet referenced earlier).

Come the sixth movement, there is a genuine sense of joy and playfulness, both in mood and structure. Finnissy returns to the sound-world of Haydn often in his quartet writing; at the beginning of this movement, the first violin finds its dancing material (drawn from the earlier 'primitivo') is accompanied (in the true sense, that it has company) by the rest of the quartet playing music which might have tumbled from Haydn's workbench whilst he was writing his 'Lark' Quartet Op. 64 No 5 – a piece which provided material for Michael's 2nd and 3rd Quartets (both written for the Kreutzers). Jaunty optimism is in the air, as the quartet finds its way back to 'sul ponticello'. But this time, the score bears no mention of 'colto' or 'primitivo'. Perhaps, Michael might be saying, we can all learn something. The quartet trots off happily to the distance:

 '...the wisdom of humility; humility is endless.
 The houses are all gone under the sea.
 The dancers are all gone under the hill.'ⁱⁱ

Michael insists that his 'continuation' of Bach's *Contrapunctus XIX* should not be seen as a 'completion'. This modesty aside, this is a jaw-dropping achievement – one of the most astonishingly cumulative pieces of four-part counterpoint I have ever played. My wife, the writer Malene Skærved, long ago pointed out the link between Finnissy's way of writing and Bach, most particularly the contrapuntal writing which can be heard in the *Sonatas & Partitas*. Both, she noted, never allow the ear or imagination of listener or player to rest, to get comfortable; she hears in both composers an indefatigable quest, for riches that lie in the gaps between

ⁱⁱ P24, East Coker, T S Eliot, *Four Quartets*, Faber & Faber 1979

the music. As Emily Dickinson noted: 'Split the Lark – and you'll find the music'. This is what, crudely, can be heard and seen in Finnissy's completion; by both increment and leap, splits and stretches of Bach's harmony, the result is an ever-increasing outpouring of energy. Each performance has an upward curve which is unique: accordingly the performance is one take – no edits.

Clarinetten-Liederkreis (Clarinet-song cycle) was written at the invitation of Linda Merrick, and commissioned with funds from the Ida Carroll Trust. She notes:

'From the outset of our conversations, the concept Michael had in mind for his new clarinet quintet was a lyrical one that would explore the full range of expressive colour of the five instruments, rather than exploiting technical virtuosity for its own sake.'ⁱⁱⁱ

The first thing that struck me, on studying the score, is that it seemed to be in a 'divertimento/serenade' form and mood. This is reflected in a lightness of touch in the treatment of the instruments, which might be a reaction to, or even against, the chamber music written for clarinet from Mozart onwards. This has emphasised (or has been played thus) the darker side of the instrument, and by extension, the medium. The title, *Liederkreis*, alludes to Robert Schumann's *Liederkreis* Op 39. This suggestion of *Lieder* hints that the clarinet will be a vocal soloist. In the first movement, this expectation is met, but then things begin to shift. The Schumann reference also suggests a particular notion of the clarinet, linked to storytelling, enchantment and fantasy. Schumann's great works for clarinet, *Drei Fantasiestücke* Op 73, and *Märchenzahlungen* Op 133, are inevitably, never far from the performers' minds.

But it is not that simple! Dance is also a constant throughout the work. The first movement, whilst songlike, has the air of a 'concealed minuet'; near the opening, in a $\frac{5}{8}$ section, the two violins play $\frac{3}{4}$ in the time of the 5 quavers, whilst cello and

ⁱⁱⁱ Letter to PSS, April 2018

viola play waltz-like 'Wiener-isch' accompaniment figures (whilst remaining in five!).

In the second movement, the separation of the string players and clarinet is frozen, even rendered chronic. Whilst the quartet explores warm, almost Brahms-ian weavings, the clarinet sings, treacherously high, long notes, which happen to be in the same landscape that her colleagues are singing together, but no more. Linda writes:

'Michael was keen for the clarinet to interrupt the strings in a persistent manner, emphasising the disjuncture between their roles, the extreme range of the clarinet writing and the almost eerie harmonic tension created.'^{iv}

Finnissy speaks of this as a 'fissure' in the material.

After the grace and elegance of the relationship between the players in the first movement, there is the feeling that something has been broken, that the '-Kreis' (literally, 'circle') of musicians has failed. Sure enough, in the third movement, the quartet falls silent. But, it seems, the clarinet has found a way home. A clue as to how is found in the title 'Folklorico: quasi parlando'. The 'way home', it seems, is in the good earth, the shared simplicity of the vernacular, the folk, and most importantly, not in singing but talking, 'parlando'. The quartet may be silent, but they are still in the room, and the clarinet is talking to them. There's no question that the folklore to which Michael alludes is that of Eastern Europe, and both in this movement and the next we are, unquestionably in the world that the clarinet made its own in the 20th Century. These movements usher in the clarinet, and then the string players of Kodály's *Dances of Galánta*, Stravinsky's *Soldier's Tale*, and Bartók's *Contrasts*.

Movement four is a 'verbunkos' – the 'recruiting march' so beloved of Bartók. I have the feeling that we are in the presence of Pieter Breughel, Albrecht Dürer, and T. S. Eliot's peasants:

^{iv} Letter to PSS, April 2018

'Lifting heavy feet in clumsy shoes,
Earth feet, loam feet, lifted in country mirth
Mirth of those long since under earth
Nourishing the corn. Keeping the time,
Keeping the rhythm in their dancing. ...'^v

In Movement five for the only time in the work, all five players are reconciled, share exactly the same material, and crescendo to a shared *ffff*. But this is achieved by marking 'Each performer independently', and 'a capriccio'. True unity, it seems, can only come from absolute freedom; 'E pluribus unum' indeed, but 'many', nonetheless.

Mad Men in the Sand is subtitled 'en rythme Molossique'. It is the closest to a 'traditional' work for string quartet on this disc, and has much in common with other 'scherzos' for quartet by Charles Ives, Mendelssohn and Hugo Wolf. Michael describes it as:

'...skittish - referencing Alkan (a quartet fragment in the British Library, and his piano prelude evoking a mad woman singing on the seashore, and a classic piece of 70s erotica called *Boys in the Sand*, so much information for a 2-minute capriccio!).'^{vi}

Six Sexy Minuets Three Trios is, perhaps, the most unclassifiable of Michael's works for string quartet. It is scored for quartet and a free selection of household objects; talking with Michael, he asked: 'Please include some china, leather and plastic along with the metal... I am sure you already thought of that: *thé dansant*...'

Our final selection included teacups, a leather covered notebook, chopsticks, metal espresso cups, and a thick miniature score of *The Marriage of Figaro*. As might be expected, each of the sections teases at the various associations and elements of the classical 'minuet and trio'. The three 'trios' revert to the original form, which was forgotten quite early in the use of Minuets and Trios; that they

^v P22, East Coker, T S Eliot, *Four Quartets*, Faber & Faber 1979

^{vi} Letter to PSS, 16th March 2018

should be in three parts. The first violin plays throughout, which is perhaps the most classical gesture of all, but in each 'trio' movement, one colleague is silent. This 'red line' of silencing that runs through the piece finds a counterpoint in the move of various players to the 'household' percussion and the games with solos and duos played throughout.

The first movement *Piuttosto sostenuto* is a game with rubato, between a dramatic range of extreme tempi (from $\text{crotchet}=66$, to =168). The result is that whilst the players see and very much feel the three-in-a-bar 'minuet' form, the audience will not hear it, after the beginning. The cello plays percussion throughout.

Movement two is audibly a minuet, teetering between allusions to Haydn and Mozart, as if the two of them were playing in the quartet, as they did, with Vanhall and von Dittersdorf. Every so often, the quartet bursts into a peal of harmonics, as if it had stumbled upon bits of the John Cage 1950 *Quartet*.

Movement three is the first 'trio' (though it is salutary to note the Finnissy never marks that, or describes these movements, thus). The viola is silent (or silenced), and remaining players only play percussion. For a moment, near the beginning, the three play their rhythms together (swinging against an unheard and unseen 'Taktus'. Second violin and cello continue thus, but the first violin takes a musical 'u-turn' and inserts a repeat, resulting in a split which is never 'visible', as this whole piece has no score, and the effects are the results of playfully inserted repeat signs. That's an important point about much of Finnissy's music. You can't hear it by reading it; you have to find out what it sounds like, by doing it. If it isn't 'done', then it isn't!

Movement four, *Allegretto Capriccioso*, is a virtuoso conversation for viola and cello, whilst the violins play with the cutlery like naughty children, at a Lyons Corner House.

Movement five is marked *un poco minaccioso*, or, 'a little threatening'. Of course, slightly threatening can be more menacing than the overt, and the malevolence in this movement is only increased by its extreme quiet, and high tessitura. 'Minaccioso' did not come into wide use in musical notation until the end of the

19th century. Composers who have used it include Medtner, Ligeti and Kurtág; for all of them, the veiled threat is always more effective, musically.

The sixth movement is the second trio (Violin 2 is silent). On paper, it appears to be a *concertante* for first violin who plays firm, striding $\frac{3}{4}$, while viola and cello arrange their (more complex) parts around the violin part (of which they have just the rhythmic cues on their parts). But the listener is not aware of this hierarchy, and cannot hear the simple pulse, just the wrestling heterophony of all three.

Movement seven, in which everyone plays, returns to the classical grace of movement two. There's very much the sense of a musical joke; it's full of Haydn-esque silences (which pertain far more to his symphonies than his quartets), plus nods and winks to the audience in the form of cheeky pizzicati and spiccati.

Movement eight is the last trio; cello remains mute, whilst the viola plays percussion. All three parts are independent, but should end roughly at the same time (Bear in mind that there is no score). Adding a layer of danger and complexity, the two violin parts are arranged in Yeats-ian 'gyre-form'. The first violin begins *Adagio* and ends *Vivace*, and the second does the opposite. The challenge of coordination is all the greater, as they both have to repeat their material, whilst the viola does not. This results in an incremental increase in tension as the end approaches in performance, and the question of ending together (you are not allowed to cheat) looms large!

The last movement is miraculous... Dramatically, it reminds me of the revelation in Thornton Wilder's *Our Town* when the past is suddenly revealed, apparently more vivid than the present. It would be easy to say that the aching longing, the tragedy, of this extraordinary movement evokes other composers, and of course, there are echoes of some of the great slow movements of the past 150 years. But the truth is that this movement is true Finnish. He is one of the very few artists who can show us the richest grief of our shared humanity, and do it with the lightest touch, with love and care.

Peter Sheppard Skærved © 2018



**Kreutzer Quartet, Linda Merrick and Michael Finnissy
at the recording session**

The composer

Michael Finnissy was born in London in 1946. From age 4 until 18 he taught himself about composing by listening to Antony Hopkins talking about music on the radio and visiting the local libraries. In sixth form he was much encouraged by the example of the poet Alan Brownjohn, who was his form-master.

He was awarded a Foundation Scholarship to study at the Royal College of Music, where his principal, most impactful tutors were Bernard Stevens and Anthony Milner. His work had significant initial exposure at Gaudeamus Music Weeks 1969-73 and at the Festival d'Art Contemporain de Royan. He had occasional teaching posts and played the piano for dance-classes until the early 1980s, when he had visiting-artist residencies in Australia, at the Victorian College of the Arts (Melbourne) 1982 and the City of Caulfield 1983. He has since taught at the Royal Academy of Music in London, the University of Sussex and University of Southampton, and many other colleges and universities across the world.

His work is significantly influenced by Art-Cinema: Pasolini, Godard, Warhol, Brakhage, Jack Smith, Gregory Markopoulos and Stan Brakhage. He has written three full-length stage-works: Undivine Comedy; Thérèse Raquin; Mankind. Five works for full orchestra: Offshore; Sea and Sky; Red Earth; Zortziko; Janne. A large number of works for mixed chamber ensembles and solo instruments, particularly for piano: English Country-Tunes; Verdi Transcriptions; Gershwin Arrangements; 23 Tangos; Folklore; The History of Photography in Sound; Beat Generation Ballads; Beethoven's Robin Adair.



above: **The Kreutzer Quartet** recording 'Six Sexy Minuets'
below: **Performing the Minuets at Deptford**



The performers

Kreutzer Quartet

Peter Sheppard Skærved | **Mihailo Trandafilovski – Violins**
Clifton Harrison – Viola | **Neil Heyde – Cello**

The **Kreutzer Quartet** has collaborated with Michael Finnissy for over 20 years, and he has been a significant influence on all their work as a group.

The quartet has been critically acclaimed for its performances and recordings of works from our time and from the great quartet literature. This has resulted in cyclic performances and recordings of works ranging from Anton Reicha and Beethoven to Michael Tippett and Roberto Gerhard. They are the dedicatees of hundreds of new works. Composers who have written for them include Gloria Coates, Hans Werner Henze, Michael Finnissy, Hafliði Hallgrímsson, Poul Ruders, Edward Cowie, Jörg Widmann, and George Rochberg, and in 2018 they will present new works by composers including Robert Saxton, Laurie Bamon, Elliott Schwartz, Peter Dickinson, Roger Redgate, Robin Holloway, Jeremy Dale Roberts, Gary Carpenter, David Matthews, Paul Pellay and Rosalind Page, to name just a few.

The Quartet are Ensemble in Residence at Goldsmiths College London. The Quartet has a truly international career, playing at venues ranging from the Concertgebouw Amsterdam, to Wilton's Music Hall, their London 'home', and regularly appearing at festivals including the Bergen International Festival and the Venice Biennale. The Quartet is honoured to record for Metier and to be part of this most important cycle of recordings of Michael Finnissy's work.

The performers

Linda Merrick

Linda Merrick holds the position of Principal and Professor at the Royal Northern College of Music and has established an international profile as a clarinet soloist, recording artist and teacher.

Her catalogue of over 30 solo recordings includes new concertos by Gary Carpenter, Nigel Clarke, Martin Ellerby, Kit Turnbull and Guy Woolfenden (Polyphonic), Philip Sparke (Anglo Records), Stephen McNeff (Campion), John McLeod (Chandos), Edwin Roxburgh (NMC), and Philip Spratley (Toccata).

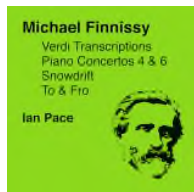
Linda's chamber music output includes premiere recordings of four new clarinet quintets with the Navarra Quartet (Naxos), a new clarinet quintet by John McCabe with the Kreutzer Quartet (Guild), Wilfred Joseph's Clarinet Quintet and Robert Crawford's Clarinet Quintet (Metier), chamber works by Malcolm Arnold and John Ireland (Maestro) and Martin Ellerby (ClassicPrint), and new works for clarinet and electronics with Chris Thorpe (Voiceprint).

Linda has broadcast for BBC Radio 3, Radio France, DRS1 Switzerland, CKWR Canada and Arte TV South Korea, and performed as a concerto soloist across America, Asia, Australia, Europe, South America, the UAE, and throughout the UK.

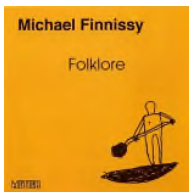
She is a founder member of the contemporary ensemble 'Sounds Positive', with whom she has premiered over 70 works by British composers, and released 3 CDs.

Linda is currently Chair of Conservatoires UK and a member of the International Advisory Council for the Creative Industries Federation.

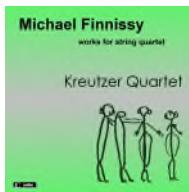
The Michael Finnissy collection from Métier & Divine Art Records



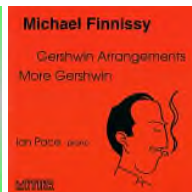
MSVCD 92027 (2CD)
Verdi Transcriptions
Ian Pace (piano)



MSVCD 92010
Folklore II + other works
Michael Finnissy (piano)

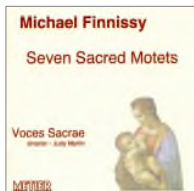


MSVCD 92011
Music for String Quartet
Kreutzer Quartet

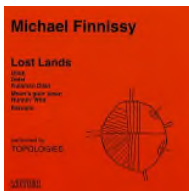


MSVCD 92030
Gershwin arrangements
Ian Pace (piano)

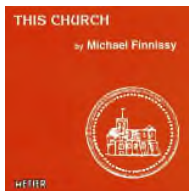
MSVCD 92023
Seven Sacred Motets
Voces Sacrae



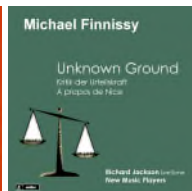
MSVCD 92050
Lost Lands
Topologies

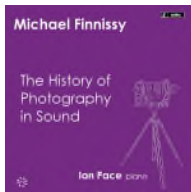


MSVCD 92069
This Church
Ixion



MSV 28536
Unknown Ground
New Music Players

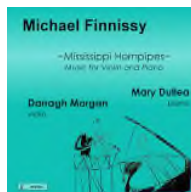




MSV 77501 (5CD)
The History of Photography in Sound
Ian Pace (piano)



MSV 28541
Grieg-Finnissy Piano Quintets
Roderick Chadwick (piano)
Kreutzer Quartet



MSV 28545
'Mississippi Hornpipes'
Darragh Morgan (violin)
Mary Dullea (piano)



MSV 28557
'Singular Voices'
Clare Lesser (soprano)
David Lesser (piano)

Other works by Michael Finnissy can be found on Métier and Divine Art albums.
Also check out many other recordings by Linda Merrick and the Kreutzer Quartet



Michael Finnissy at the piano at rehearsal with the Quartet

Linda Merrick



Recorded at St. Michael's Church, Highgate, London
'Civilisation' and Clarinet Quintet on 13 July 2017, all other works on November 7, 2017
Recording, editing and mastering by Jonathan Haskell (Astounding Sounds)
All works published by Neue Musik Verlag (Berlin)
Booklet and packaging design: Stephen Sutton
Front cover image: historic South American Indian drawings, supplied by Michael Finnissy
Recording and rehearsal session and performance photographs: Malene Skærvæd
All images are copyright and used with permission. All rights reserved
© + © 2018 Divine Art Ltd (Diversions LLC in USA/Canada)



DIVINE ART RECORDINGS GROUP



Over 500 titles, with full track details, reviews, artist profiles and audio samples, can be browsed on our website. Available at any good dealer or direct from our online store in CD, 24-bit HD, FLAC and MP3 digital download formats.

UK: Divine Art Ltd.
email: uksales@divineartrecords.com

USA: Diversions LLC
email: sales@divineartrecords.com
www.divineartrecords.com

find us on facebook, youtube and twitter

WARNING: Copyright subsists in all recordings issued under this label. Any unauthorised broadcasting, public performance, copying or re-recording thereof in any manner whatsoever will constitute an infringement of such copyright. In the United Kingdom, licences for the use of recordings for public performance may be obtained from Phonographic Performance Ltd, 1, Upper James Street, London W1R 3HG.



métier

msv 28581

08909730858123

LC 15631

Michael Finnissy

