

A POCKET FULL OF TUNES

David Hackbridge Johnson – Solo Works



Peter Sheppard Skærved, viola & violin



A POCKET FULL OF TUNES

David Hackbridge Johnson – Solo Works

Three Disused Stations Opus 463 (2025) *

- | | | |
|----|---------------------|------|
| 1. | Beeches Halt | 3:38 |
| 2. | Brill | 3:40 |
| 3. | Evercreech Junction | 3:34 |

Six Preludes for 'Charles II' Opus 392 (2020)

- | | | |
|----|--------------|------|
| 4. | Flessibile | 1:13 |
| 5. | Allegro | 1:51 |
| 6. | Andante | 2:13 |
| 7. | Allegramente | 1:26 |
| 8. | Lento | 2:27 |
| 9. | Vivace | 2:01 |

- | | | |
|-----|-------------------------------------------------|------|
| 10. | Divisions on Mr Simons' Prelude Opus 408 (2021) | 6:33 |
|-----|-------------------------------------------------|------|

A Pocketful of Tunes Opus 437 (2023)

- | | | |
|-----|---------------------|------|
| 11. | Tooting Hey | 0:55 |
| 12. | The Graveney Gyp | 1:55 |
| 13. | Upper Fool's Stomp | 1:01 |
| 14. | Amen Corner | 1:15 |
| 15. | The Antelope | 1:18 |
| 16. | Tooting Hobby Horse | 1:46 |

Seven Versets Opus 395 (2020) *

- | | | |
|-----|-----------------------------------------|------|
| 17. | Moderato | 1:52 |
| 18. | Allegro | 1:05 |
| 19. | Lento e rubato | 1:20 |
| 20. | Allegretto – alla danza | 1:22 |
| 21. | Charles Péguy – Chemin de Croix – Lento | 1:47 |
| 22. | Tempo di valse – malizioso | 1:24 |
| 23. | Moderato | 2:09 |

24. **Alleyway, Pastoral, River Falls Op 439 (2023)** 3:15

Three Preludes for the Jacob Rayman Viola 1641 Op 393 (2022) *

25. Moderato flessibile 3:11

26. Allegretto 1:15

27. Poco lento 3:31

Will Rosin of Wapping (with words from Tatler Volume 1709) Op 429 (2024)

28. 'This degenerate age....' 2:08

29. 'For she is a woman....' 2:38

30. 'For her gallant, Mr Ezekial Boniface....' 1:25

31. 'Far gone in that distemper....' 2:34

32. 'The occasion of her melancholy....' 2:47

33. 'A perjured wretch....' 0:49

34. 'Laughed at all over Wapping....' 1:09

35. 'Here is a man of tranquillity....' 1:20

36. 'Who would believe....' 2:49

Total Playing Time 76:57

Peter Sheppard Skærved, violin - viola*
David Hackbridge Johnson – Speaker (Tracks 28-35)

THE VIOLIN IN MY LIFE

by David Hackbridge Johnson

Beginnings

When I was about seven years old my parents took me to Christ's Hospital School where two of the music masters performed over several Sunday afternoons the complete sonatas for piano and violin by Beethoven. I have no idea what my parents' connection to the school was but there we were, sitting in a row listening to the music unfold. My memory tells me that the wood of the violin and the piano was mirrored in the panelling of the performance space. Although we didn't know each other at the time I later found out that my great friend Richard McDonald was already at the school as a junior and was in that very room for those concerts.¹ From time to time I was chided by my mother for fidgeting but I don't think this was out of irritation or boredom since many years later my mother told me how excited I was by the music and how, when the series finished, I asked her if I could have a violin. There had always been a violin in the family. On the mantelpiece before me is a framed photograph of a lady relative in Victorian dress, playing a violin. The family story goes that it was this instrument that was given to either my grandmother or grandfather on my mother's side before ending up in the possession of my mother, as if lying in wait for me. Being a full size violin, I couldn't hope to play it at the age of seven, so my parents bought a half size and I subsequently began lessons with Ursula Richardson. Getting to Miss Richardson's house involved my mother driving me after school once a week to Coudsdon via the wooded areas and small-holdings of Carshalton and Woodmansterne. After the lesson I often fell asleep in the back of the car and watched the sun go down and the shadows thrown by the canopy of trees. In winter the darkness completely enclosed us as we sped home. The lessons were no joke. There was a notebook, sadly no longer in my possession, in which instructions were written. I only recall one terse sentence: *please do as I ask!* After Ursula I had two other teachers: Marie Clements and Louis Rutland. Between them they got me to a decent standard. My mother supervised daily practice. I was not allowed to watch any television until I had done at least half an hour's work. Fridays were particularly fraught since my main interest was in watching the Friday Western on BBC 2. But on no account could I relax to the horsey-antics of Audie Murphy or John Wayne before I had done my scales and arpeggios, or my Herbert Kinsey studies². I had become a rather reluctant fiddler after my initial enthusiasm. Something clicked when I was

1 – Richard McDonald (1960 – 2025). Educator, jazz saxophonist, playwright, cricketer, martial artist, experimental poet, much missed friend and maker of mischief.

2 – Herbert Kinsey (born Kinze) 1885 – 1966. British violinist, particularly important as a chamber musician. I can still recall with pleasure some of his tuneful violin studies.

eleven, and again, Beethoven was the culprit. For my birthday that year I was taken to a department store – probably Shinnors in Sutton – to choose a present.³ I was very much taken with a reproduction of J.M.W. Turner's *The Fighting Temeraire* but I had also spied in the record browsing racks an LP of Beethoven's *Violin Concerto*, a piece I knew from having heard it on the radio several times. I was thrown on the horns of a dilemma. My parents didn't let me suffer too long before agreeing that I could have both presents as long as I kept up my violin practice! The following Christmas: Beethoven again, this time I was gifted the complete sonatas in the Peters edition – the very works that had sparked my interest four or five years previously. I played through these pieces obsessively and badly for months on end. I no longer stopped for gunfights in saloon bars. Since then the violin has been more or less a constant companion. I graduated from small violins to the one that my grandfather played and before him the Victorian relative whose name alas no one seems to be able to recall – but she has my nose! Inside the violin is a label: 'Manufactured in Dresden Imitation of Berlin Antonius Stradivarius'. Why is the label in English? Perhaps for the same reason that the best quality German beer steins from the Kannenbäckerland region often have 'Made in Germany' stamped on their bases.



My violinist forebear. Peter Sheppard Skærved notes her German bow hold, as typified by Joachim

3 – After modest beginnings, Ernest Shinner opened his biggest store in 1935 and it lasted until 1979. The restaurant was notable for having a resident piano player.

I spent my teenage years taking part in as many concerts as I could as a member of the various youth orchestras in our area of South London: the Sutton Schools Orchestra, the Croydon Youth Philharmonic Orchestra and the Stoneleigh Youth Orchestra. For some years, both towards the end of my school days and after, I played professionally in pit orchestras for the many amateur choral and operatic societies that operated in the nearby London boroughs. For this purpose my parents bought me for my 17th birthday a fine violin of unknown Bavarian provenance – one of a particular type of high-quality violins produced in their hundreds by anonymous makers in Germany in the 19th century. I was never completely serious about becoming a professional violinist however. I was already composing prolifically and being in orchestras gave me an inside track on how to compose. In my late teens I was a regular player in barn dance ensembles and I joined a repertoire string quartet as second violinist. The other members were Leonard Silver, first violin; Sarah Bailey, viola; and Alicia Spriggs, cello. We played together for more than ten years and during that time must have played over a hundred works. Each rehearsal began with an amusing ritual. The question arose: what shall we start with? We all looked to Leonard. He would ponder and ponder and murmur a few possibilities before finally saying, why don't we start with Haydn? And so we did for the entire duration of the quartet's existence. From the second violin desk I gained further hints on how music is composed. In more recent decades I gave a series of concerts featuring neglected songs and violin sonatas in which I performed with the pianist Yeu-Meng Chan in various venues but mainly in the old British Music Information Centre at Stratford Place. Later the world of jazz violin claimed me. I remember hearing Stéphane Grappelli as a child and have never lost my enthusiasm for his wonderful playing. If I go out to play at all these days it is usually to perform in groups in the Reinhardt/Grappelli tradition. Incidentally it was Len Silver who encouraged my interest in jazz violin. He could solo effortlessly in jazz style on both the violin and the piano – when he sat at the latter he could emulate the styles of Fats Waller and Art Tatum. Once composing had become a compulsion for me it was inevitable that the violin would feature prominently in my work list. There is a very early prelude in B flat which I remember writing at the edge of the cricket pitch at Wallington High School for Boys during the house cricket competition in the summer of 1981. A little while later I wrote a rather avant-garde sonata for solo violin. Since that time I have amassed a large body of work for the instrument: 4 violin concertos, a tone poem for violin and orchestra inspired by a Jewish song of ascent, 7 violin and piano sonatas, 5 solo violin sonatas, and the recent cluster of solo violin and solo viola pieces, a number of which are included on this disc.

Violins And Cobblestones: Talking With Peter

If in the early evening you were to drift into one of the London churches, the chances are you might happen upon a recital being given by Peter Sheppard Skærved. He

will have the details, but the number of concerts he has given in London churches must run into dozens. Peter doesn't give concerts as if they are hair-shirted affairs requiring reverence and submission – on the contrary he is as interested in the historical context of the music he plays as in playing the music itself. His concerts might be called lecture recitals – but 'lecture' sounds too strong a word, too formal – they are more like chats, as in The Chats Series of books first published in the early 20th century – *Chats on Old Glass*, or *Chats on Old Copper and Brass* – just to mention two of these delightful volumes on my shelves. Behind the informality, lies Peter's deep interest in the people who wrote for the violin, the lives they led, the instruments they played, and the buildings they played in. It is impossible to divorce his concerts from their surroundings. This means he is likely to talk about the work of the wood and stone carvers that worked on the churches he plays in, the instrument makers of London that may have had their workshops just around the corner, the personalities saintly or otherwise of well-known performers, the sudden appearance of an Italian master, the mysterious appearance and disappearance of one Mr Simons....blink and you miss his fleeting presence in the historical record. It was when Peter played a beautiful G minor prelude by Nicola Matteis on a specific instrument that I conceived the idea of music written not just for a player but for a named violin. Out of this idea came the *Six preludes for 'Charles II'*, the title referring to a violin that Peter sometimes uses in recitals that has the stamp of the Stuart monarch on its belly. Another set of pieces, *Seven Versets* for viola, was inspired by the warm-toned instrument made by Jacob Rayman – it is the oldest English viola that has come down to us. To hear this instrument played in a church contemporaneous with its making, reinvigorates history, foolproofs against lazy nostalgia, makes the instrument sing in spaces it recognises. Since those early pieces, Peter and I have come to realise that discussions about music are sometimes the very least of our concerns. Much of what we explore is about aspects of the 17th and 18th centuries in general. We might range through the aesthetics of Hogarth, to the eternally relevant satire of Alexander Pope – that crippled Catholic banished from the city, and end up in the contemplation of the original pillars and wrought iron structures of Wapping station – something about which I have been happily tutored by Peter. One illustration of Peter's enthusiasm for artefacts that one might otherwise pass by: we were walking from his flat towards Wapping station. We had just passed an Indian restaurant which he recommended, when we came upon roadworks. The pavement was up and exposed were the original cobbles deeply set into what was probably very ancient cement. Some of these cobbles had been damaged in the process. Peter picked one up – a sett he called it – and asked one of the workers if it was okay to take it. Yes, was the answer. Peter could then tell me to the nearest decade when this road had been thus laid. For an instant I had a flashing picture of a thousand horses and carts trundling across that road – heavy loads of beer barrels, fodder, sacks of grain. Stones can conjure up the things that have rolled over

them. It follows from this brief flavour of our time together that our collaboration is not just musical – we have connected on so many different levels so as to enrich those moments where music is to the fore.

My Solo Works for Violin And Viola

In the pieces on this disc I have followed the Muse down the winding stairway to the past. Apart from the piece which uses Mr Simons' only known composition as the basis for a set of variations, the music is allusive in tone rather than aiming for pastiche. As well as evoking dance movements of the Baroque and Rococo eras, the pieces adopt a wide range of techniques including those known as extended. Peter has written about these pieces elsewhere in this booklet but here are a few composer perspectives.

Three Disused Stations Opus 463 (2025)

When I was a boy we didn't have a model train set at home but my Preston grandparents, Arthur and Jane (née Loxham) did. Whenever we went up to see them, which was about three or four times a year, my brother Chris and I could hardly restrain ourselves from rushing up to the attic in order to unpack the train set from its enormous cardboard box. Lovingly we laid out the track on granddad's trestle table that he used mainly for decorating. We were most fortunate in that the attic window afforded us a perfect view of the old Preston and Longridge railway line which was still running up until 1967, with goods trains running to Red Scar Works thereafter until 1980. How well do I remember the coal trucks meandering past as we looked down from that window! We were able to perform a parallel choreography as my brother would indicate to me the speed of the locomotives passing beneath him, which I would then mimic on the track that we'd laid out. In this manner entire afternoons would pass. Neither of us knew then that the shrinking of the railways had been going on for decades.

Dr Beeching gets a bad press. Find yourself a copy of Bradshaw prior to his cuts of the railway network, and weep – dozens and dozens of the railway stations listed are doomed! In fact network shrinking was well underway before Beeching became the scapegoat for the rage of enthusiasts. Stations fascinate me. It feels like I've waited half my life on their platforms. I like the architecture of stations, whether they be the solid brick and iron structures of the Victorian period, or the high-tech steel and chrome of the recent stations on the Elizabeth Line. I like trains themselves and their scale models. I can hold my own at the Hornby Railway Collectors Association, Mellow Branch, and on the plethora of railway forums on social media. I was absurdly enthused when at Clapham Junction I captured on video Class 33/884 (Cepheus), otherwise known as The Grim Reaper, carry off a rake of 455 Electrical Multiple Units

(EMUs) to the scrap yard. My subsequent posting on the internet of still photographs from the video brought forth a procession of emojis with sad faces. For over 40 years those frankly rather garishly-liveried units have travelled South Western Railway routes. Were people always so keen on them, or did the announcement of their removal from service trigger a hitherto hidden nostalgia? 455 die-hards are already complaining about the new Arterio replacements – they are too clinical, the blue/grey interiors feel cold and uninviting, hospital waiting rooms on wheels – yet it won't be long before a new love will develop, as it does with all trains in the end. Even those bone-shaking railbuses the Pacers (Classes 140 – 144) have their fans.

From disused trains to disused stations. Illusions of ghostly travel. Forgotten routes. Abandoned signal boxes. Station buildings turned into fabulously priced cottages. I was delighted to find that Peter is also an unashamed train and station buff. His enthusiasm for trains is such that he talks about old locomotives as present and living concerns. His nearest station Wapping is a case in point; although it carries the recently built trains of the Windrush Line, these trains run through an enduring Brunel engineering miracle: the Thames Tunnel, built between 1825 and 1843 by Marc and Isambard of that remarkable family of engineers. I wrote *Three Disused Stations* for solo viola to create some sonic commentaries on abandoned or entirely absent railway architecture. The first piece commemorates Beeches Halt a little station that was upgraded in 1925 to Carshalton Beeches station. It was from here that my father left for work every morning to reach the City where he worked for Eagle Star Insurance. It is still a much used commuter station to this day but I like to think of it in its early years as Beeches Halt – semi-rural, hidden by trees, a bird-thronged Adlestrop nearer to home.⁴ Strictly speaking then, it is the name of the station not the station itself that is 'disused'. The second piece commemorates the station of Brill. This was the terminus of a small railway line called the Brill Tramway. Although privately owned by the 3rd Duke of Buckingham it briefly became a terminus of the London Underground. The Brill Tramway ceased operations in 1935 and nothing now remains of the former buildings except a few railway cottages. My piece is a somewhat mournful evocation of what is an almost complete absence. The third piece is named for Evercreech Junction, a station featured in a wonderful film narrated by John Betjeman, *Let's Imagine: A Branch Line Railway*, first broadcast in 1963, the year of my birth. The poet's exquisite narration is also an obsequy – that very year the Beeching report announced the closure of the line from Evercreech Junction to Burnham-on-sea. The station at Evercreech was gone by 1966. My piece falls into two sections with a fast, jolting jig followed by a siciliana which is itself interrupted by the screeching of locomotive brakes. The whole suite is dedicated to two Peters: Peter Sheppard Skærved and Peter

4 – See the Edward Thomas poem. Adlestrop Station was a Beeching victim, closing in 1966.

Lutton. The latter, who in inviting me to join his fellow collectors at Merrow Village Hall, started me on a somewhat slippery slope.

Six Preludes for 'Charles II' Opus 392 (2020)

The Charles II violin, 1664, by an anonymous maker. It was hearing Peter play the aforementioned prelude by an Italian visitor to these shores, Nicola Matteis (1650 – 1714) that triggered a series of pieces around the idea of specific instruments and their journeys through time. 'Charles II' is small in proportion, yet able to fill a large church with its silvery sweetness. My piece is in part an homage to the maker, in this case a person unknown. Might it have been Edward Pamphilon in partnership with John Hare, known makers of instruments for the king? Although the six movements of my piece don't have Baroque dance titles, taken together they form a suite such as might have been written by a composer of that time. The last of the preludes is a *double* of the first, inspired by similar pairings found in Bach's *Partita in B minor*.

Divisions on Mr Simons' Prelude Opus 408 (2021)

We don't know anything about Mr Simons other than that he wrote an exquisite prelude for which I have made a set of divisions (variations). The violinist is instructed to tune the G string down a tone to an F, a *scordatura* tuning that Peter had not come across before. It allows the violinist to plumb the depths of Mr Simons' F minor tonality. Mr Simons' piece is plaintive, elegant, his only musical footprint, a precious survival. The first division is a slip jig, the second is in the manner of a bourrée, the third is of a grand character, and the fourth and last division makes use of rapid string crossings to make a rippling effect.

A Pocketful of Tunes Opus 437 (2023)

Inexhaustible pleasure is to be had from playing the tunes and reading the instructions for the dances they accompanied to be found in *The Dancing Master* by John Playford, first published in 1651. The edition I have is the 12th, printed in 1703 and edited by Henry Playford, John's youngest son. The titles of the tunes in the book are striking – some examples: *Bobbing Joe*, *Hang Sorrow*, *Cuckolds all arow*, *The Mock Hoby-Horse* – as are the dance instructions. Those for *An old Man a Bed full of Bones* set the starting orientation of the dancers at the head of the score: 'Longways for as many as will'. Below the tune we get, 'Lead up all a D. forward and back, set and turn S – That again' – and so on, until the entire dance sequence is explained. Dancing masters in the 1600s and 1700s were musicians too, often playing tunes on a little violin called a pochette. As soon as Peter played on one of these instruments in one of his concerts I knew what I must do – write another suite of pieces. In keeping with the tune titles of Playford's day, commemorating who knows what topical events and characters virtuous or deplorable, I have made my own titles for a set of dances as might be

performed on the pavements or in the green spaces of Tooting. If Percy Grainger can have shepherds going 'hey' I feel that folk in Tooting, though lacking sheep, might do similarly. The Graveney is a largely culverted tributary of the River Wandle. Presumably there is a Lower Fool as well as an Upper Fool. Amen Corner is in Tooting and is also the name of a jazz album I made by multi-tracking 20 instruments played by myself. The Antelope is a Tooting pub. Tooting Hobby Horse makes homage to that character that appears in May Day celebrations and mummer's plays. This horse is prone to stamping.

Seven Versets Opus 395 (2020)

These pieces alternate between sonorous explorations of the Jacob Rayman viola and dance movements. The third verset is like a ghost emerging from the instrument's *f*-holes. The fifth has a subtitle: 'Charles Péguy – Chemin de Croix'. Péguy (1873 – 1914), that remarkable poet who straddled symbolism, Catholic mysticism and nationalism in a heady mixture, guaranteed his death during the first weeks of fighting in the First World War by charging forward into a beetroot field at the head of his troop, to be greeted by withering fire from German machine guns. I was first introduced to his life and work by reading Geoffrey Hill's remarkable book *The Mystery of the Charity of Charles Péguy*. My piece is a lament that draws on a series of suspensions hinting as those made by Couperin in the 'Troisième leçon' from his 1714 *Leçons de ténèbres*. The sixth verset alternates between pizzicato and bowed notes, as if remembering those passages in the slow movement of Elgar's *Sonata for Violin and Piano*. The final verset is an inverted form of the first but ends with another ghost – an apparition, or a whiff of incense from a gently swung thurible.

Alleyway, Pastoral, River Falls Op 439 (2023)

Peter's journeys around the world compel him to create a multi-media diary of the sights and sounds, the people and places. Hardly a day goes by without a photograph, a watercolour or crayon sketch, a rehearsal report, or an 'at-the-desk' recording of work in progress. Sometimes something will land in my inbox that sparks a response. So it was when in 2023, Peter posted a photograph with the title that I used for my spontaneous response to its forms of shape and light.

Will Rosin of Wapping

Space forbids the inclusion here of the complete tale of Will Rosin as related in the December 1709 edition of Tatler. Suffice it to say in summarising Richard Steele, that 'the fiddler of Wapping' is 'lately entangled in so many intricate and unreasonable distresses' as to make him 'the most wretched of all mortals'. We find poor Will arrested and pleading for his 'kind masters and mistresses' to save him from gaol. His wife, a young and domineering widow, is vexed and melancholy at the thought

of losing her lover, Mr Ezekiel Boniface, who is surely soon to be married to Mrs Winifred Dimple. The distraught wife confesses to her husband and furthermore announces her intention to declare to the world her infidelity in order that Mr Boniface be disgraced. Will is furious: 'I find you intend me laughed all over Wapping.' The wife, undeterred, proclaims the affair and the bans of the Boniface/Dimple match are forbidden. The father of Boniface then brings an action of defamation against Will. But his good friends relieve him of distress by their each giving a halfpenny to save him from the bailiffs. In my suite of pieces I have sought to evoke the seething vitality of early eighteenth century London – a Hogarthian mini-opera, if you will.



Composer and performer with the Charles II violin at St Margaret Lothbury for the premiere of 'Preludes for Charles II'

A POCKET FULL OF TUNES:
composition, collaboration, conversation, cups of coffee
by Peter Sheppard Skærved

My collaboration with David Hackbridge Johnson began, it seemed, *in media res*, at full pace. From the moment that we began to talk, exchange music, ideas, writing, meeting over endless cups of tea and coffee, it seemed our new conversation was already running, that we simply picked up where it had been left off, somewhere else. The work on David's music flowered amid discussions about other music that we loved, from the 17th to 21st centuries, from Nicola Matteis to Michael Hersch. So, there is a certain haziness, about exactly when our work together, or more truthfully, our play, actually started.

In fact David wrote poetry for me, before music. He is, as is well known, an extraordinary writer. In the year before the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, he came to one of my series of concerts inspired by the 17th century churches of London's 'Square Mile'. This one, celebrating the great Italian virtuoso, Nicola Matteis, took place in the Wren/Hawksmoor St Michael's Cornhill. David wrote a beautiful poetic portrait of Matteis. It includes this verse:

The road from Naples to Cornhill
parched earth driving rain
a ground with several divisions
wayside halt and under his overcoat
a case for a violin
his only possession
his art.¹

This would sum up something of the solo works which he would write me over the following 5 years, and heard here. But the collection on this album represents just one aspect of our work together, away from the bewildering array, and diversity, of his chamber music: violin/piano sonatas, pieces for violin and harpsichord, string quartets, quintets.... But, as often the case, the solo medium offered the two of us, a chance to embark on a kind of 'shared journaling', reaching out to our fascination with various transformations. The music explores what can happen, when composer,

1 – ANDAMENTO MALINCONICO/Baroque Variations on a theme of Nicola Matteis/ (for Peter Sheppard-Skærved) 18.i – 26.i - 2019

performer, and audience are translated, aspire to become, to morph ideas, people, music, places, things from the past and present. It is, if you like, shared *metempsychosis* (the transferral of souls), where one can inhabit, even become, a lost 17th century composer, or delve into the soul of an ancient English viola, or even find a purchase in a cold Wisconsin back-alley. There is a sense of playfulness, but also of mystery, of connection, and occasionally, 19th century East End and South London table-tapping. For David and I are both passionate Londoners, allowing for the fact that we hail from the opposite ('wrong') sides of the River Thames – he lives in Tooting, I am in Wapping. Our chitchat often meander off to the our latest (often muddy or grimy) discoveries in the local histories, pavements and 'psychogeography' of our respective neighbourhoods, and our delight in the miraculous mundane, from granite setts (cobblestones) to cast-iron coalhole covers.

At the beginning of 2023, I introduced David to a comic story published in the December 1709 edition of Richard Steele's (then) short-lived *Tatler* magazine. It spoke of another (like me) Wapping violinist, 'Will Rosin (who is the Corelli of the Wapping-Side, as Tom Scrape is the Bononcini of Redriffe).'

A few days later he wrote to me:

'Dear Peter, Will Rosin of Wapping has not left my mind since we met on Thursday, so.... a new suite! - you can say the titles before each movement or longer extracts from the priceless story. And if you'll accept the dedication, I am very happy. First Mr Simons and now Mr Rosin and not forgetting Mrs Rosin and Mrs Dimple! - they live again, (but they were never very far away....) St Mary Aldermary deserves a dedication too for that glorious space from where the sounds started.'²

Not long after, the *Will Rosin* suite, was premiered in Christopher Wren's wonderful rebuilding of St Mary Aldermary, where our initial discussions had begun (the church is a café on weekdays). David's music dragged me, Will, and the story, into the worlds of Butler's *Hudibras*, of Hogarth's *Idle Apprentice* (based on one my ancestors). And in doing so, he gave me a new point of view on my 'hood. When we recorded it, I demanded he read the extracts serving as capitals for each movement: his 'extreme-Cockney', as you will hear, is so much better than mine – 'not arf it is!'

Like many travellers, I have temporary homes: one of these is the St Croix River Valley, which marks the border between Minnesota and Wisconsin, North to South, from Pansy Landing, south to Prescott, where the river flows into the Mississippi. Thanks

2 – Facebook Message, 14th January 2023

to the conductor and amateur, friend Kris Tjørnehoj, I often collaborate with the community of musicians at nearby University of Wisconsin River Falls. So, the back ways between my digs when I stay there, and the nearest drinkable espresso are familiar to me. One chilly late autumn morning in 2023, I found myself with coffee, walking in an outrageously beautiful sunrise: cold or not, I tried to draw, whilst balancing rapidly cooling caffeine on an icy fence post. A few hours later, David saw my photo of the street on social media: he responded with an exquisitely *drawn* miniature. I printed, learnt, and premiered it, that evening to a delighted audience at the nearby (excellent) Kleinpell Auditorium. This was a happy example of our delight in the quotidian. It also afforded me, a new, musical view of this part of the Midwest that I love so much (the drawing is the cover for this disc).

In July 2021, David heard 'Mr Simons' *F minor Prelude* at one of my City Church concerts. This was the post-plague moment that concert-giving was finally finding its feet, as we all were, after the 18 months of lockdowns and disruptions in the UK. David wrote to me that he was:

[...] absolutely spellbound by everything - the music, the space, the whole experience of being in that part of London again after 18 months. Now....of course.... I have been dreaming of Mr Simons. You knew that. That beautiful F minor thread reaches out to us over the centuries. I imagine him as a teacher and performer - perhaps in the shadow of 'the greats' but making his small and as it happens indelible mark on London. I heard some divisions on his prelude and I've attached them. For you to play with thanks!³

'Mr Simons' himself, as David hinted, is a mystery. I realised the beauty of his solitary-surviving prelude back in 2013, playing it in the 'Enlightenment Gallery' at the British Museum. The magic of the piece was certainly heightened by my surroundings: I had Dr Dee's rock crystal 'shew stones' at my back, and the astonishing 'Piranesi Vase' looming over me. David recognised the exquisite melancholy of this sole survivor of 'Mr Simons' work, caught somewhere between Dowland and late Mozart. He responded with a set of time-travelling 'divisions', in a language and tuning Nicola Matteis or Purcell (both Simons' contemporaries), would have applauded, but also, very much of our time. As Ovid put it:

'In nova fert animus mutatas dicere formas / corpora' (my mind is made up to tell of the changing of bodies into new forms.)⁴

3 - Facebook Message 7/24/21, 12:37 PM

4 - Check reference in Loeb

Transformation, metempsychosis indeed. It was eventually premiered in quite another part of London, in Chiswick, next to William Hogarth's grave and monument. (The original Simons *Prelude* can be heard on the Divine Art Album *Florish in the Key: the solo violin in London 1650-1700* ATH 23211).

In 2024, after I recorded some of David's music on the instruments of the Metropolitan Museum in New York City, David wrote:

'I find myself increasingly drawn to the sound of individual instruments and the spaces in which they are sounded. Inspired by Peter Sheppard Skærved's advocacy of early violin and viola music I have written a series of pieces for specific instruments as played by Peter in the glorious surrounds of various London churches. One such series was triggered by hearing the Jacob Rayman viola of 1641, the oldest viola in England. This brought forth from me *Seven Versets* for solo viola written in April 2020 and premiered soon after by Peter. Taking their cue from the dark, woody tone of this ancient instrument, the pieces emphasise a sinewy expressivity, yet are not averse to the conjuring of ghosts, perhaps whispering through the *f holes* to hidden confreres in the lofty galleries of Wren or Hawksmoor.⁵

The enchantment of any musical instrument ranges from sound to history. Nowhere is this truer than with the glorious Jacob Rayman viola. I am profoundly grateful to the luthier/historian Ben Hebbert, who has taught me more about the history and aesthetics of the violin than anyone: the moment he put this viola in my hands, I experienced *shift* in my understanding of what an instrument can do, be, represent. This viola was made in Southwark, in 1641, by Jacob Rayman, in the atelier of the great London gamba-maker, Henry Jay. Jay had established his business there in the first decade of the 1600s. The location was practical. By the ascent of James I, the 'South Bank' was London's entertainment hub, ever since 1598, when Shakespeare's company, the Lord Chamberlain's Men, had dismantled their Shoreditch 'Theatre' and taken its framework over the Thames to Southwark, where it was reborn as 'The Globe'. The consequent cluster of theatres, bear-baiting rings, cockpits, plus attendant bawdyhouses and hostelrys needed music. The musicians needed instruments and those instruments needed making and maintaining. Hence the nearby *Jay lutherie*. I immediately felt that this instrument is a direct link, a portal even, to London's greatest theatrical age, to the thunderous musicks of Shakespeare, Webster, and even the sad echo of Marlowe, victim of the assassin's shank in Deptford six years since.

David first heard the viola at the beginning of the Covid-19 crisis. He immediately began writing *Versets*. I was recording and broadcasting from home, like many artists.

5 - Footnote 5 'Metropolitan Museum YouTube Channel - <https://shorturl.at/PwwXE-01/24/24>



Luthier/historian Ben Hebbert with the Jacob Rayman Viola

On the 16 March 2020, David wrote to me:

'I can't seem to stop that viola coming into my head! I promise I will stop at 7 - a week's work and then rest! It is amazing what you are doing just from the desk at home'⁶

Unsurprisingly David is not only composer inspired by this viola. To date, David Matthews, Stan Link, Martin Ellerby and Nigel Clarke have all been drawn to its sound and magic.

Seven Versets was premiered in the oldest church in central London, St Pancras 'Old Church' (dating back as far as the 7th Century CE). J C Bach, and C F Abel are buried in its wooded graveyard, almost hidden behind the hulk of St Pancras Station. Two years later, David returned to the instrument and dedicated three preludes to the Rayman: a rare occurrence but one which makes total sense to me. Once heard, and once played, it is difficult to escape Rayman's sorcery.

6 – Facebook Message - 4/16/20



Rehearsing for the premiere of Seven Versets in St Pancras Old Church

The very first pieces that David wrote for me, were also inspired by a particular London violin, made in 1664. By the Restoration of Charles II in 1660, luthiers clustered in the streets and alleyways between Old St Pauls and London Bridge (some had workshops on the Bridge itself). In the years after the Great Fire of 1666, these included the greatest names of British making – Richard Meares, Barak Norman, and later, Daniel Parker. They built up businesses in the burst of building and rebuilding that followed the inferno. It was the intersection between these makers, the revival of London music publishing, and the army of builders and craftspeople working for and with Wren, Hooke, Hawksmoor and Vanbrugh, that inspired my concert series in the surviving ‘City Churches’. At one of these concerts, David heard me play an anonymous 17th century English violin, inlaid and branded with the arms and crown of Charles II, and a date, ‘1664’. On the 9th of December 2019, he wrote:

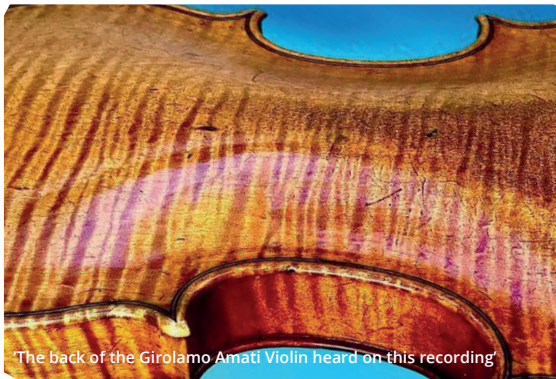
‘... Just haunted by ‘King Charles II’ so wrote the first 2 of 6 preludes which could hopefully be suited to the instrument. Just the notes and a few bowings - the rest is for you to decide! Hope you like them!’

It seems likely this violin was made for Charles II's 'Private Music' and might have been played by the great 'Lubicker', Thomas Baltzar, who became the King's leader on the 23rd of December 1661.



Composer and performer with the instruments heard on this recording at Hastoe Village Hall

The building in which David first heard the violin was where these pieces were later premiered – St Margaret Lothbury (dwarfed now by the hulk of John Soane's Bank of England). After fire, the medieval church was rebuilt by Wren with a tower by the polymath Robert Hooke. It is a treasure chest of 17th century woodwork – filled with exemplars of Grinling Gibbons' mastery. David's *Six Preludes* balances these various pasts and the present. On this recording, they are played on an even earlier instrument, made by the great Girolamo Amati, in Cremona in 1629, just before he died, with most of his family, in the terrible plague which swept through Lombardy that year.



The back of the Girolamo Amati Violin heard on this recording

Which brings me to *A pocketful of Tunes*. Today's classical violinists are queasy, snobbish even, about dance music. Playing for dancing was the most important function of our instrument: the surest way to understand the development and changes made to string instruments and music over the past 4 centuries, is to understand that they were driven by the changing fashions and mores of the ballroom, country-dance, and hop. The greatest of all violinists, Giovanni Battista Viotti, loved to play for domestic dancing, and referred to himself in this function as 'le racleur' ('the scraper'). The Irish poet and folk-song lyricist, Thomas Moore, remembered his apparent forbearance at an evening at Fairmead Lodge, Loughton, the country house rented by the poet/soldier William Sotheby: Sotheby

"...Begged Viotti...to bring his violin- the latter promised he would &, on his arrival, Botherby the barbarian, exclaimed 'I am glad you are come- you've brought your fiddle, I hope- now, girls- where are your partners? Stand up- here's Mr. Viotti- what dance will you have?'- Viotti, to the immortal credit of his good-nature, played country-dances for them the whole night."

Consequently, most published works for violin alone, from Playford in the 17th century, to reels, jigs, and sl atter today, are dance collections: *A pocketful of tunes* continues that tradition. It was actually inspired by a French dancing-master's pochette, premiered on a 1685 Stradivarius 'violino piccolo'; and is played here on the 'full-size' Amati. And

you will feel the dust raised, as this fiddler raises the roof, and stamps the beat on the floorboards. Charles Dickens described the violinist's essential function in *A Christmas Carol*: his 'Mr Fezziwig', who organised the dance would be delighted with these pieces:

'In came a fiddler with a music-book, and went up to the lofty desk, and made an orchestra of it, and tuned like fifty stomach-aches.'⁸

8 – Page 36, *A Christmas Carol*, Charles Dickens, Bradbury & Evans, London, 1858

DAVID HACKBRIDGE JOHNSON, composer

David Hackbridge Johnson initially took violin lessons with Louis Rutland, piano lessons with Martin Wilson and singing lessons with Fabian Smith and Arthur Reckless, before becoming a jazz musician for fifteen years, in which capacity he appeared in festivals at Montreux, Glion and Hay-on-Wye. As a conductor and recitalist, he has specialised in performing neglected composers, among them Ina Boyle, Havergal Brian, Ruth Gipps and Joseph Holbrooke. Among his 600 or so compositions are eighteen symphonies, over a dozen tone-poems and concertos, and hundreds of songs and chamber pieces. His most recent commissions have been operatic: *Madeleine*, written for the 50th anniversary of Surrey Opera, and *Blaze of Glory!*, written for the 75th anniversary of Welsh National Opera. Currently in pre-production is a third opera, *Victim*, to a libretto by Jonathan Butcher. Four volumes of his orchestral music have been released on Toccata Classics, the first three conducted by Paul Mann, the most recent featuring the 18th Symphony and the 3rd Piano Concerto with Jonathan Powell, piano, and the Moravian Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by the composer. The Steinway label has issued an album of his piano music played by Lowell Liebermann. His poems and essays have appeared in *The Guardian*, *PN Review*, *Angel Exhaust*, *The Fortnightly Review*, and *Shearsman* magazine. He is involved in the publication of experimental poetry through The Loxham Press. He holds degrees from the Royal Academy of Music, Trinity College of Music, the University of Surrey and the University of Kingston. The last of these institutions awarded him a Ph.D. in 2016. He is in his fourth season as conductor of Streatham St Bart's Chamber Orchestra.

PETER SHEPPARD SKÆRVED, violin & viola

Peter Sheppard Skærvéd is acclaimed internationally for performances of a vast range of solo repertoire. His repertoire stretches from the late 16th century to hundreds of works written for him: these include major works by composers by established 'greats' such as Hans Werner Henze and George Rochberg, to the many young composers with whom he collaborates worldwide.

Peter is a Grammy-nominated recording artist, with over one hundred critically acclaimed albums to his name. These range from concerto discs with orchestras including the Vienna Radio Symphony Orchestra to the complete Tartini Solo Sonatas, 24 Telemann Fantasies, cycles of Beethoven, Mozart, and Schubert Sonatas, eight discs of solo works from the 1600s and many recordings of the works dedicated to him. Peter is currently performing, filming, and recording on great instruments in the collections of the Library of Congress, Washington DC, the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, the Metropolitan Museum, New York City, and the Paganini violins kept at the City of Genoa. Peter is Honorary Professor at the Royal Northern College of Music, Manchester, Fellow of the Royal Academy of Music, London, Artist in Residence at Lund University, Sweden, and visiting Research Fellow at Goldsmiths, University of London. He regularly gives masterclasses and workshops at schools across the USA, including Peabody Conservatoire, Mannhattan School of Music, Eastman Rochester, Vanderbilt University, Middlebury College, Cornell University and many more.

Peter's wide ranging 'Knowledge Exchange Violin' Project brings together institutions ranging from the National Gallery of Art Washington DC through to the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds in the UK, with a linked series of concerts, recordings, residencies, films, recordings, podcasts and much more.

Website: www.peter-sheppard-skaerved.com

Youtube Channel (over 600 films, recordings and talks):
www.youtube.com/@PeterSheppardSkaervedviolin

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Instruments

Violin – Girolamo Amati 1629 (with thanks to the Royal Academy of Music, Principal Jonathan Freeman Attwood)

Viola – Jacob Rayman 1641 (with thanks to Ben Hebbert)

Bows by Stephen Bristow

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