

Bach in Blue (2004)

Peter Dickinson

“As a piano solo, this piece was one of a number of tributes to Michael Berkeley in his tenth and final season as Director of the Cheltenham Festival. Lyle Williams gave the premiere at the Pittville Pumpnickels Room on July 10, 2004. There are new recordings of it as a piano solo (the composer), as a trio for violin, clarinet, and piano (the Verdehr Trio), and as a work for clarinet, violin, piano, and strings (BBC National Orchestra of Wales). Several composers, notably Gounod and Arvo Pärt, have become involved with the first prelude in Bach’s Forty-Eight. I felt that there must be a blues lurking somewhere beneath Bach’s chords and found it here.”

–Peter Dickinson

Peter Dickinson (born 1934, Lytham St. Anne’s, Lancashire) is an English composer, musicologist, author, and pianist best known for his experimental musical compositions and writings on American music. He studied organ at the Leys School, Cambridge on a music scholarship and was a John Stewart of Rannoch Scholar at Queens’ College. In 1958, as a Rotary Foundation Fellow, he went to the Juilliard School of Music and spent three years based in New York. It was during this period that he met Cage, Varèse, Cowell, and Carter and became interested in American music of all kinds.

Dickinson returned to England in 1961 and taught in London and Birmingham. In 1974, he became the first Professor of Music at Keele University, Staffordshire where he set up the department and created an important center for the study of American music and pioneered the teaching of popular music and jazz. In 1991, he was named Chair of Music at Goldsmiths College, University of London, and from 1996-2004, he served as a Fellow and Head of Music at the Institute of United States Studies in London. For over thirty years, he was a regular contributor to BBC Radio and a critic on Gramophone.

A regular visitor to the United States, Dickinson has written widely on American music subjects. His books include studies of Lennox Berkeley (two), Billy Mayerl, Aaron Copland, John Cage, Lord Berners, and Samuel Barber. In 2016, he published *Peter Dickinson: Words and Music*.

Dickinson’s musical compositions are written for a great variety of musical ensembles, from full orchestra to a single instrument, and there are many keyboard works, solo songs, and pieces for various choral ensembles. His modern works for historical instruments are also notable. His music includes experimental and aleatoric elements and often reflects the influence of ragtime, blues, and jazz. He layers both serious and popular or past and present musical styles together to create what he calls a style modulation. He has written for some of the leading international performers, and CDs of his music are available on Albany (4), Naxos (3) and Heritage (6). *Bach in Blue* has been recorded by the Verdehr Trio along with Dickinson’s other works written for them: *American Trio* and *Celebration Trio*.

As a pianist, Dickinson had a twenty-five year partnership with his sister, the mezzo-soprano Meriel Dickinson. Their international recitals, broadcasts and recordings include commissions from Berkley, Panufnik, Crosse and Harvey. They represent a wide range of composers—Erik Satie, Lord Berners, George Gershwin, John Cage—and also reflect Dickinson’s literary interests in settings of poets such as W.H. Auden, E.E. Cummings, Dylan Thomas, Emily Dickinson, Philip Larkin, Thomas Blackburn, and Stevie Smith. Their CD *American Song* contains first recordings of Carter, Copland, Cage, and Thomson.

Dickinson is now Emeritus Professor of the University of Keele and the University of London. He also serves as chair of the Bernarr Rainbow Trust for which he has edited several books on music education. He is a member of the Royal Society of Musicians, a board member of Trinity College of Music, and a founding member of the Association of Professional Composers.

Additional information is available at www.foxborough.co.uk.