

PERTH EASTER FESTIVAL of CLASSICAL MUSIC

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90-93FM

Maria Włoszczowska, *violin*
Maximiliano Martin, *clarinet*
Philip Higham, *cello*
Steven Osborne, *piano*

Messiaen: *Quatuor pour la fin du temps* (Quartet for the end of time)

Olivier Messiaen was very clear about the inspiration behind his wartime masterpiece *Quatuor pour la fin du Temps* (Quartet for the End of Time):

And I saw another mighty angel come down from heaven, clothed with a cloud: and a rainbow was upon his head, and his face was as it were the sun, and his feet as pillars of fire [...] and he set his right foot upon the sea, and his left foot on the earth [...] And the angel which I saw stand upon the sea and upon the earth lifted up his hand to heaven, and swore by him that liveth for ever and ever [...] that there should be time no longer: But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished...

Messiaen quoted that text from The Book of Revelation in the preface to the score. For him, as a devout catholic, God was everywhere and in everything — even in the German prison camp where he found himself after capture in 1940. Like Ravel, he was a medical orderly in the French army and one of thousands of French soldiers taken prisoner after the fall of Verdun on 15 June. They were held in a temporary camp in a field near Nancy and there he met the cellist Étienne Pasquier and the clarinettist Henri Akoka.

Transferred to the large prison camp at Görlitz in Silesia (then in Poland, now in Germany) they soon found other musicians, including the violinist Jean le Boulaire.

The story of Messiaen's time as Prisoner No. 35333 in Stalag VIII A and his composition of the quartet for himself and these other three musicians to play has acquired the status of legend. The camp was not an extermination camp. It was spartan, extremely overcrowded and especially grim in the very cold winter of 1940-41, but basic Geneva Convention rules about the treatment of prisoners of war were adhered to.

Music and other cultural activities were encouraged and Messiaen and his friends were even able to get hold of some instruments. They were allowed to rehearse regularly and a music-loving guard procured some manuscript paper for Messiaen to compose on. In fact, the *Quatuor* was already partly written: he had written the solo clarinet movement for Akoka to play after they were first captured in France, while the two *Louanges*, the solo cello and solo violin pieces, were re-writes of earlier pieces.

It's a measure of the strength of Messiaen's artistic vision and of his religious faith that even in the desperate circumstances of his incarceration he was able to produce such a large-scale and ground-breaking work. In the preface to the score, Messiaen describes its musical language as 'essentially transcendental, spiritual, catholic'. It was organised around 'certain modes' which 'draw the listener into a sense of the eternity of space or time'. This last point refers to one of the key innovations which would dominate his work thereafter - a deliberately ambiguous treatment of rhythm (partly based on rhythm patterns in Indian classical music) that removes the sense of 'marking time' as traditionally understood. The music is in constant flux and sometimes seems suspended in time, especially when very slow, becoming a meditation on eternity and the infinite nature of God.

That music of such sophistication and ambition should have been performed for the first time on poor quality instruments in front of an audience of 400 half-starved, captive soldiers in the freezing hut that served as the camp 'theatre' is extraordinary enough. That they listened in rapt silence, whether or not they understood what they were hearing, and that many seem to have been deeply moved is miraculous. One witness to the premiere on 15 January 1941 later recalled: 'On that cold night...squeezed onto the benches in Hut 27, we listened — some with an unexpected intensity, others irritated by unfamiliar rhythms and sonorities — to the birth of the quartet which Messiaen hoped was a 'great act of faith'...'

Messiaen wrote a description of each movement for the published score:

I. *Liturgie de cristal* (Crystal liturgy) for the full quartet. Between three and four in the morning, the awakening of birds: a solo blackbird or nightingale improvises, surrounded by a shimmer of sound, by a halo of trills lost very high in the trees. Transpose this onto a religious plane and you have the harmonious silence of Heaven.

II. *Vocalise, pour l'Ange qui annonce la fin du Temps* (Vocalise, for the Angel who announces the end of time) for the full quartet. The first and third parts (very short) evoke the power of this mighty angel, a rainbow upon his head and clothed with a cloud, who sets one foot on the sea and one foot on the earth. In the middle section are the impalpable harmonies of heaven. In the piano, sweet cascades of blue-orange chords, enclosing in their distant chimes the almost plainchant song of the violin and cello.

III. *Abîme des oiseaux* (Abyss of birds) for solo clarinet. The abyss is Time with its sadness, its weariness. The birds are the opposite to Time; they are our desire for light, for stars, for rainbows, and for jubilant songs.

IV. *Intermède* (Interlude) for violin, cello, and clarinet. Scherzo, of a more individual character than the other movements, but linked to them nevertheless by certain melodic recollections.

V. *Louange à l'Éternité de Jésus* (Praise to the eternity of Jesus) for cello and piano. Jesus is considered here as the Word. A broad phrase, 'infinitely slow' on the cello magnifies with love and reverence the eternity of the Word, powerful and gentle, 'whose time never runs out.' The melody stretches majestically into a kind of gentle, regal distance. 'In the beginning was the Word, and Word was with God, and the Word was God.'

VI. *Danse de la fureur, pour les sept trompettes* (Dance of fury, for the seven trumpets) for the full quartet. Rhythmically, the most characteristic piece of the series. The four instruments in unison imitate gongs and trumpets (the first six trumpets of the Apocalypse followed by various disasters, the trumpet of the seventh angel announcing consummation of the mystery of God). Use of added values, of augmented or diminished rhythms, of non-retrogradable rhythms. Music of stone, formidable granite sound; irresistible movement of steel, huge blocks of purple rage, icy drunkenness. Hear especially all the terrible fortissimo of the augmentation of the theme and changes of register of its different notes, towards the end of the piece.

VII. *Fouillis d'arcs-en-ciel, pour l'Ange qui annonce la fin du Temps* (Tangle of rainbows, for the Angel who announces the end of time) for the full quartet. Recurring here are certain passages from the second movement. The angel appears in full force, especially the rainbow that covers him (the rainbow, symbol of peace, wisdom, and all luminescent and sonorous vibration). In my dreams, I hear and see ordered chords and melodies, known colours and shapes; then, after this transitional stage, I pass through the unreal and suffer, with ecstasy, a tournament; a roundabout compenetration of superhuman sounds and colours. These swords of fire, this blue-orange lava, these sudden stars: there is the tangle, there are the rainbows!

VIII *Louange à l'Immortalité de Jésus* (Praise to the immortality of Jesus) for violin and piano. Large violin solo, counterpart to the violoncello solo of the 5th movement. Why this second eulogy? It is especially aimed at the second aspect of Jesus, Jesus the Man, the Word made flesh, immortally risen for our communication of his life. It is all love. Its slow ascent to the acutely extreme is the ascent of man to his God, the child of God to his Father, the being made divine towards Paradise.

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Biographies

Maria Włoszczowska, violin

Polish violinist Maria Włoszczowska performs as a soloist, chamber musician and guest concertmaster worldwide. She is recognised for her versatile musicianship, having won the First Prize and Audience Prize at the XXI Leipzig International Johann Sebastian Bach Competition in 2018, as well as numerous prizes at the XV International Henryk Wieniawski Violin Competition.

The 2020/21 season sees several UK and international engagements including projects leading the Chamber Orchestra of Europe and the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, violin concertos by Sibelius and Bruch, as well as performances at international chamber music festivals including Musikdorf Ernen in Switzerland, IMS Prussia Cove, Festival Resonances in Belgium, Lewes Chamber Music Festival, Budleigh Festival, Alderney Chamber Music Festival, The Enghien International Musical Encounters, New Paths Festival in Yorkshire as well as chamber concerts in Scotland with members of the Scottish Chamber Orchestra.

Maria gave her debut recital at the Wigmore Hall with pianist Alasdair Beatson in 2016. She has appeared as soloist with several international ensembles since, including the Janáček Philharmonic Ostrava, Concerto Budapest and several of Poland's symphonic and chamber orchestras. She regularly performs at festivals around Europe where her chamber music partners have included Robert Levin, Philippe Graffin, Nobuko Imai, Amy Norrington, Paolo Giacometti, Bengt Forsberg, Matthew Hunt, Alasdair Beatson, Dinis Sousa and the Doric String Quartet amongst others.

Recipient of the Royal Philharmonic Society's Emily Anderson Prize, the Hattori Foundation Senior Award and Poland's Minister of Culture and National Heritage Prize, she based herself in the UK after studying at the Conservatoire Royal de Bruxelles with Leonid Kerbel, the Royal Academy of Music in London and completing her studies at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama with Hungarian violinist and conductor András Keller.

Maximiliano Martin, clarinet

Spanish clarinetist, Maximiliano Martin has made his debut as a soloist and chamber musician in many of the world's most prestigious venues and international festivals including the BBC Proms and Wigmore Hall in London, Library of Congress in Washington, Mondavi Centre in San Francisco, Mozart Hall in Seoul, Laeiszhalle Hamburg in Germany, Durban City Hall in South Africa and Palau de la Música in Barcelona.

Principal Clarinet of the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, Maximiliano is also in constant demand as a soloist, chamber musician and teacher. As a concerto soloist he has performed with orchestras such as the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, Real Filarmonía de Galicia, European Union Chamber Orchestra, Orquesta Sinfónica de Tenerife and Orquesta Filarmónica de Gran Canaria under conductors like Brüggem, Ticciati, Schuldt, Manze and Antonini. In May 2017 Maxi premiered a new Clarinet Concerto "*Llanto*" specially written for him and SCO by New Zealand composer Lyell Creswell to great critical acclaim. In July 2018 he premiered a new commissioned clarinet Concerto, *Travesía*, by Spanish composer Gustavo Trujillo.

As a chamber musician, Maxi is a member of the London Conchord Ensemble and has collaborated with Cuarteto Casals, Christian Zacharias, Julian Milford, François Leleux, Jack Liebeck and Kris Bezuidenhout among others.

Often invited as a guest principal clarinettist, Maxi has frequently appeared with Chamber Orchestra of Europe, Orquesta de Cadaqués, Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra and City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra and worked with conductors such as Abbado, Haitink, Colin Davis, Mackerras, Marriner, Ticciati, Krivine and Litton.

His extensive discography includes *Mozart and Weber Clarinet Concertos* with SCO (LINN), two recital discs, *Fantasia* and *Vibraciones del Alma* (LINN), *Divertimento SCO Wind Soloists* (LINN), Messiaen's *Quartet for the end of the Time* with Hebrides Ensemble (LINN), *Brahms Clarinet Sonatas* with Julian Milford (CHR), *Mozart and Brahms Clarinet Quintets* with the Badke Quartet (CHR) and two discs with London Conchord Ensemble, *From Vienna* (CHR) and *St Petersburg* (Orchid Classics). Future recordings include R. Strauss Duet Concertino with Peter Whelan and Robin Ticciati (LINN) and a Stephen Dodgson's chamber music disc (NAXOS).

Maxi is also active in the education field giving masterclasses all over the world, recent places include Royal College of Music, Royal Northern School of Music, Conservatorio Superior de Canarias, Malmo Academy of Music (Sweden) and University of Kangnam (Seoul, South Korea). He is one of the Artistic Directors of the Chamber Music Festival of La Villa de La Orotava, held every year in his home town.

Born in La Orotava (Tenerife), he studied at the Conservatorio Superior de Musica in Tenerife, Barcelona School of Music and at the Royal College of Music in London where he held the prestigious Wilkins-Mackerras Scholarship, graduated with distinction and received the Frederick Thurston prize. His teachers have included Joan Enric Lluna, Richard Hosford and Robert Hill. Martin was a prizewinner in the Howarth Clarinet Competition of London and at the Bristol Chamber Music International Competition.

Maximiliano Martin is a Buffet Crampon Artist and plays with Buffet Tosca Clarinets.

Philip Higham, cello

Philip Higham enjoys a richly varied musical life: a passionate chamber musician, equally at home in concerto, duo and unaccompanied repertoire, he especially relishes Classical and German Romantic music, in which he is frequently and happily immersed as principal cellist of the Scottish Chamber Orchestra. He has appeared frequently in recital at Wigmore Hall - including a notable performance of the six Bach suites there in 2017 - and at other prominent venues and festivals both at home and abroad, and is regularly broadcast on BBC Radio 3. His two solo recordings for Delphian Records, *of the Britten* and *Bach solo Suites*, have received considerable praise, the Britten chosen as 'Instrumental disc of the month' in *Gramophone Magazine* during 2013. He enjoys collaborations with pianists Alasdair Beatson and Susan Tomes, violinists Erich Höbarth and Alexander Janiczek, the Navarra and Benyounes string quartets, Hebrides Ensemble, and, as concerto soloist, with Royal Northern Sinfonia, the Philharmonia, the Hallé and Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra. He also draws considerably on his musical experiences with conductors Emmanuel Krivine and Robin Ticciati.

Born in Edinburgh, studied at St Mary's Music School with Ruth Beauchamp and subsequently at the RNCM with Emma Ferrand and Ralph Kirshbaum. He also enjoyed mentoring from Steven Isserlis, and was represented by YCAT between 2009 and 2014. In 2008 he became the first UK cellist to win 1st prize at the International Bach Competition in Leipzig, and followed it with major prizes in the 2009 Lutoslawski Competition and the Grand Prix Emmanuel Feuermann 2010.

Philip plays a cello by Carlo Giuseppe Testore, made in 1697. He is grateful for continued support from Harriet's Trust.

Steven Osborne, piano

Winner of the Royal Philharmonic Society's Instrumentalist of the Year in 2013, pianist Steven Osborne is one of Britain's most treasured musicians. Celebrated for his insightful interpretations, his musicality and technique, Osborne is much sought after as soloist, chamber musician and recitalist. His residencies at London's Wigmore Hall, Antwerp's deSingel, the Bath International Music Festival, the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra and, this season, at the Royal Scottish National Orchestra are a testament to the respect with which he is held.

Described by The Observer as "always a player in absolute service to the composer", Steven Osborne recently released a much praised recording of Beethoven's last three piano sonatas for Hyperion. During the Beethoven anniversary year, Osborne will present his illuminating take on these late works across the UK, the Far East, and North America as well as part of his RSNO residency for which he'll also play Beethoven's *Fourth Piano Concerto* and Mozart's *Piano Concerto No. 27*. Other orchestral highlights during the new season include more Beethoven and Mozart with the Finnish Radio Symphony and BBC National Orchestra of Wales, as well as Ravel with the BBC Philharmonic and Brahms with the Antwerp Symphony Orchestra.

Steven Osborne has given recitals in all the UK's most prestigious venues as well as internationally at the Musikverein and Wiener Konzerthaus, Royal Concertgebouw, Berlin Philharmonie, Tokyo's Suntory Hall and Carnegie Hall. His carefully devised programmes this season juxtapose Schubert and Rachmaninov for solo recitals across the UK including a performance at the Wigmore Hall; and Fauré, Poulenc, Debussy, Stravinsky and Ravel for joint recitals with Paul Lewis with whom he tours the UK – including a second appearance at the Wigmore Hall - Europe and North America. For his fourth International Piano Series concert at the Royal Festival Hall, Osborne plays *Vingt regards sur l'enfant-Jésus* by Messiaen, another composer who he been closely associated with since the release of his 2002 recording.

In 2020, Steven Osborne released Prokofiev's *War Sonatas* marking his 30th recording for Hyperion. A label artist since 1998, Osborne's 29 recordings have accumulated numerous awards in the UK, France, Germany and the USA including two Gramophone Awards, three Preis der Deutschen Schallplattenkritik Awards and a clutch of Recordings of the Year from The Daily Telegraph, The Guardian, The Times and The Sunday Times.

Steven Osborne studied with Richard Beauchamp at St. Mary's Music School in Edinburgh and Renna Kellaway at the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester. He won first prize at the prestigious Clara Haskil International Piano Competition (1991) and the Naumburg International Competition (1997), and was one of the first BBC New Generation Artists.

Steven Osborne is Visiting Professor at the Royal Academy of Music, Patron of the Lammermuir Festival and as of 2014, a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh.



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