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Quartet for the End of Time

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Music

AT EASTERN

Monday, June 3, 2019
2 pm
Music Building Recital Hall

"Quartet for the End of Time"

Quatour pour la Fin du Temps

O. Messiaen

(1908-1992)

- I. Liturgie de cristal ("Crystal liturgy")
- II. Vocalise, pour l'Ange qui annonce la fin du Temps ("Vocalise, for the Angel who announces the end of Time")
- III. Abîme des oiseaux ("Abyss of the Birds")
- IV. Intermède ("Interlude")
- V. Louange à l'Éternité de Jésus ("Praise to the Eternity of Jesus")
- VI. Danse de la fureur, pour les sept trompettes ("Dance of Fury, for the Seven Trumpets")
- 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")
- VIII. Louange à l'Immortalité de Jésus ("Praise to the immortality of Jesus")

Dr. Jane Ellsworth, clarinet

Ethan Seid, violin

Timothy Gales, cello

Davis Hill, piano

From the composer's preface:

I. "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. "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. "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. "Scherzo, of a more individual character than the other movements, but linked to them nevertheless by certain melodic recollections."

V. "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 the Word was with God, and the Word was God.'" (quoted from John 1:1, KJV)

VI. "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. "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 colors 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 colors. These swords of fire, this blue-orange lava, these sudden stars: there is the tangle, there are the rainbows!"

VIII. "Large violin solo, counterpart to the violoncello solo of the 5th movement. Why this second eulogy? It is especially aimed at 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 divine towards Paradise."