

Amici Ensemble

Joaquin Valdepeñas, clarinet
Patricia Parr, piano
Scott St. John, violin
David Hetherington, cello

Joaquin Valdepeñas

In addition to his duties as principal clarinetist of the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, Joaquin Valdepeñas appears internationally as a soloist, chamber musician and conductor. He has performed at festivals throughout the world, including those of Aspen, Banff, Casals, Edinburgh, Marlboro, Mostly Mozart, Vancouver and Nagano, Japan. He has performed with musicians such as Kathleen Battle, Glenn Gould, Cho-Liang Lin, Rudolf Serkin, Richard Stoltzman and Pinchas Zukerman, and has collaborated with the American, Muir, Orford, St. Lawrence, and Ying String Quartets, as well as the Kalichstein-Laredo-Robinson Trio, and the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center. Joaquin Valdepeñas made his European debut with the BBC Welsh Symphony Orchestra on BBC Television, and has recently recorded Mozart's *Clarinet Concerto* with the English Chamber Orchestra.

Patricia Parr

Since her debut with the Toronto Symphony at the age of nine, the Canadian pianist Patricia Parr has appeared as a soloist with major orchestras including Toronto, Cleveland, New York, Philadelphia and Pittsburg under such conductors as Eugene Ormandy, William Steinberg and Walter Susskind. She is internationally renowned for her sensitivity and the integrity of her playing, and her outstanding qualities as a chamber musician have resulted in invitations to numerous festivals, including the prestigious Marlboro Music Festival, and collaborations with many ensembles, among them the Guarneri, Orford and Vermeer String Quartets. She has toured Europe, Australia, Mexico, the United States and Canada, and frequently performs as a duo recitalist. Patricia Parr is a graduate of the Curtis Institute of Music, where she studied with Isabelle Vengerova and Rudolf Serkin. Since 1974, she has been a professor at the University of Toronto Faculty of Music, teaching piano and chamber music.

Scott St. John

Canadian born, Scott St. John, a graduate of the Curtis Institute of Music, has made his career both as a violinist and as a viola-player. He has received critical acclaim for his performances, his impeccable taste and profound musical instincts. Recent concerts with the Toronto Symphony, featuring the Stravinsky *Violin Concerto*, were broadcast live across Canada on CBC Radio. Playing violin and viola in the same concert with the Cincinnati Chamber Orchestra led to his debut with the Boston Pops under the direction of Keith Lockhart in July 1995; he has since collaborated with the same conductor on several occasions. An avid chamber musician, Scott St. John is a regular participant at the Marlboro Music Festival in Vermont and was the Founder and Artistic Director of Millennium, a series of contemporary music concerts in Toronto and on tour. He is professor of violin, viola and chamber music at the University of Toronto.

David Hetherington

A native of St. Catharines, Ontario, the cellist David Hetherington received his musical training at the Royal Conservatory of Music and the University of Toronto, furthering his studies in New York, Italy and Germany with Claus Adam, André Navarra and Paul Tortelier. Currently the assistant principal cellist of the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, David Hetherington teaches the cello and chamber music at the Royal Conservatory of Music. Much in demand as a chamber musician, he collaborates with several small ensembles, including his own string quartet, Accordes. Through this group he has developed a keen interest in contemporary music, performing regularly for New Music Concerts and other contemporary music organizations. In addition to his recording activities with Amici, David Hetherington has recorded for CBC Records, and the Canadian Music Centre's Centrediscs.



MESSIAEN

DDD
8.554824

Quartet for the End of Time Theme and Variations

Amici Ensemble



Olivier Messiaen (1908-1992) Quartet for the End of Time • Theme and Variations

Olivier Messiaen was one of the most original and profound composers of the twentieth century. Born in Avignon in 1908, he studied organ and composition in Paris, and became a professor at the Paris Conservatoire in 1942. Messiaen's musical excellence extended beyond composition into the areas of performance and education: he was a brilliant organist who held a post at the Church de la Sainte Trinité in Paris for almost fifty years, and a highly influential teacher who taught many of the leading composers of the post-war generation. His compositional style is characterized by a complete integration of emotional expressiveness, deeply religious devotion, and a highly organized means of intellectual control. Despite their complexity his works have attracted favourable attention everywhere and inevitably invoke a deep emotional response from the listener.

The *Thème et variations* was composed in Paris in 1932 for Messiaen's first wife, the violinist and composer Claire Delbos. The chamber music setting for violin and piano and his use of the classical theme and variations form are both unusual in Messiaen's output. Although based on convention, it is one of the most significant of his early works and representative of the compositional techniques he had developed at this point in his career. The theme is tender and lyrical, consisting of a floating melody in the violin supported by chords in the piano. The first three of five variations move at increasingly quicker speeds, while the fourth builds up to what is simultaneously a fifth variation and a restatement of the theme, now an octave higher and accompanied by fuller chords in the piano. One of Messiaen's pupils, the composer and conductor Pierre

Boulez, recalled an almost chance hearing of the *Thème et variations* and its impact early in his career: "It was enough to inspire me with an immediate wish to study with him. I felt the force of his attraction immediately, as I say, at a single hearing."

Messiaen wrote the *Quartet for the End of Time* while he was a German prisoner-of-war in Silesia in 1940-42. He had managed to keep with him some music paper, and the act of composition provided him with a means of sustaining his psychological well-being. The unusual instrumentation of the quartet was determined by the fact that among his fellow prisoners were three musicians, a violinist and a clarinetist who had managed to keep their instruments, and a cellist whom the Germans eventually provided with an instrument, albeit with one string missing. Messiaen wrote the piano part for himself although there was no piano available at the time. Finally, after the work had been completed, an upright piano – sadly out of tune and with many keys that stuck – was brought into camp. The first performance was given in the Stalag VIII A on 15th January, 1941 in atrociously cold weather. The audience included five thousand prisoners from all levels of society: priests, doctors, shop-keepers, professional soldiers, workers, peasants. "Never", Messiaen later recalled, "have I been heard with as much attention and understanding."

Following the quotation from the *Book of Revelations*, chapter X, verses 1 to 7, on which the quartet is based, is the composer's description of the music: "And I saw another mighty angel come down from heaven, clothed in 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. He set his right foot upon the sea and his left foot on the earth, and, standing upon the sea and upon the earth lifted up his hand to heaven and swore by Him that liveth for ever and ever, saying: "There shall be Time no longer: but on the day of the trumpet of the seventh angel, the mystery of God shall be finished."

- I. Crystal Liturgy: Around five o'clock in the morning, a lone bird improvises, surrounded by fine fragments of sound, by a halo of harmony lost high in the trees. Transposing that to a religious level, you have the harmonious silence of heaven. The piano plays a rhythmic ostinato based on three Hindu rhythms; the clarinet spins out the song of a bird.
- II. Vocalise, for the Angel Announcing the End of Time: The first and third parts (both very short), evoke the power of this strong angel, crowned with a rainbow and clothed in clouds, one foot on the sea and the other on land. The central section deals with the impalpable harmonies of heaven, the piano playing soft cascades of chords: blue and mauve, gold and green, red-violet, blue-orange; all of this dominated by steel-grey. These chords, faraway chimes, surround the plainchant-like melody of the violin and cello.
- III. The Abyss of the Birds: Clarinet solo. The abyss is time, in its sorrows and lassitudes. The birds offer a contrast, symbolizing our yearning for light, stars, rainbows and jubilant voices. The piece begins in sadness. Notice the long tones: *pianissimo*, *crescendo molto* to the most atrocious *fortissimo*. The bird-songs are written in the gay and fanciful style of the blackbird. The

return to desolation is manifested in the dark timbre of the clarinet's lower register.

- IV. Interlude: Scherzo. Of a more outgoing character than the other movements, but related to them nonetheless by various melodic references.
- V. Praise to the Eternity of Jesus: Jesus represents, in this context, the word of God. One long, extremely slow phrase by the cello glorifies with tenderness and reverence the eternity of this powerful and gentle Word. Majestically the melody unfolds like a distant memory, tender and all encompassing. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."
- VI. Dance of Wrath, for the Seven Trumpets: Rhythmically the most idiosyncratic movement of the set. The four instruments in unison give the effect of gongs and trumpets (the first six trumpets of the Apocalypse attend various catastrophes; the trumpet of the seventh angel announces the consummation of the mystery of God). Music of stone, formidable sonority; movement as irresistible as steel, as huge blocks of livid fury or ice-like frenzy. Listen particularly, toward the end of the piece, to the terrifying *fortissimo* of the theme in augmentation and with change of register of its different notes.
- VII. Tangle of Rainbows, for the Angel Announcing the End of Time: This movement is dedicated to the angel, and even more so, to the rainbow covering him (a rainbow symbolizing peace, wisdom, and all luminous and resonant vibration). In my coloured dreams I hear and see ordered melodies and chords, familiar hues and forms; then, following this transitory stage I pass

into the unreal and submit ecstatically to a vortex, a dizzying interpenetration of superhuman sounds and colours. These fiery swords, these rivers of blue-orange lava, these sudden stars: Behold the cluster, behold the rainbows!

In Praise of the Immortality of Jesus: A broad violin solo, balancing the cello solo of the fifth movement. Why this second tribute? It addresses more specifically the second aspect of Jesus—

Jesus the man, the Word made flesh, raised from the dead and immortalized to make His life known to us. This movement is pure love. It ascends gradually toward an intense peak, the ascension of man towards God, of the Son of God toward his Father, of the creature become divine towards paradise.

J. Drew Stephen