

St
Martin
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the
Fields

Quartet for the End of Time: Melvyn Tan and Friends

RESOUND

*Live, Saturday 19 June, 7.00pm
Recorded for broadcast on
Tuesday 22 June, 7.30pm*

*Available for online concert ticket holders to watch as many times
as you like and available for 30 days.*

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PROGRAMME

Quartet for the End of Time — Olivier Messiaen (1908-1992)

- i. Crystal liturgy*
- ii. Vocalise, for the Angel who announces the end of time*
- iii. Abyss of the birds*
- iv. Interlude*
- v. Praise to the eternity of Jesus*
- vi. Dance of fury, for the seven trumpets*
- vii. Tangle of rainbows, for the Angel who announces the end of time*
- viii. Praise to the immortality of Jesus*

PROGRAMME NOTES

by Sarah Maxted

Olivier Messiaen (1908-1992) was an esteemed French organist and one of the defining composers of the twentieth century. He was born into a literary family in Avignon, south-eastern France, and exhibited an early interest in music, teaching himself to play piano and eagerly following the publication of new works by contemporary French composers Debussy and Ravel. He spent the years of the First World War living in Grenoble with his mother and younger brother, then relocated to Nantes after his father returned from the war. Shortly after this, Messiaen enrolled at the Paris Conservatoire in 1919, at the age of eleven. His initial studies in harmony, composition and piano displayed his precocious talents and earned him an array of prizes. By 1927 his flair for piano improvisation had attracted the attention of the organ master Marcel Dupré, himself a former child prodigy, who tutored Messiaen towards almost instant virtuosity on the instrument. In 1931 Messiaen was appointed organist at Église de la Sainte-Trinité in the elegant ninth arrondissement of Paris, a position he would hold (at least in title) for the remaining six decades of his life.

When World War Two broke out, Messiaen was drafted as a medical auxiliary in the French army. In May 1940 he was captured at Verdun and transported to Stalag VIII-A, a German prisoner-of-war camp located near Görlitz on the modern German-Polish border along the River Neisse. The labour camp was grimly overcrowded with Belgian and French captives, crammed into unsanitary and inadequate facilities where they endured epidemics and freezing winters. During his internment, Messiaen found common ground with three fellow prisoners who were also professional musicians: clarinettist Henri Akoka, violinist Jean le Boulaire and cellist Étienne Pasquier. After obtaining pencil and paper from a sympathetic guard, Messiaen composed a short trio for these instruments. With the addition of a piano part for himself, Messiaen developed the trio into the ***Quartet for the End of Time*** (original French: *Quatuor pour la fin du temps*). The title of the work has a triple meaning, invoking the biblical Book of Revelation and capturing the apocalyptic feeling of Europe under Nazi invasion, whilst also referencing Messiaen's irregular approach to rhythm and metre, the musical measures of time. It was first performed on 15 January 1941 to an audience of several hundred prisoners and guards in the camp. Pasquier captured the atmosphere of this remarkable premiere:

“Everyone listened reverently, with an almost religious respect, including those who perhaps were hearing chamber music for the first time. It was ‘miraculous.’ These people, who had never before heard such music, remained silent. These people, who were completely musically ignorant, sensed that this was something exceptional. They sat perfectly still, in awe. Not one person stirred. No doubt, these people reassumed their original personalities afterward, but there they were subject to a miracle: the miracle of the performance of this music.”

Messiaen himself later remarked, “Never was I listened to with such rapt attention and comprehension”. Unlike so many of his fellow prisoners-of-war, Messiaen was fortunate to survive his incarceration and was released from the camp a few months after the premiere of the *Quartet*. This was partly thanks to his former organ tutor Marcel Dupré, who had applied his full cultural heft in an entreaty for Messiaen’s urgent release. (The other three musicians who premiered the *Quartet* also survived the war, but Akoka never performed the work again and le Boulaire abandoned music in favour of an acting career.)

The *Quartet for the End of Time* was shaped by the extraordinary circumstances of its genesis, but also incorporates two other sources of inspiration that profoundly influenced Messiaen throughout his compositional career: his fascination with birdsong and his Roman Catholic faith. When the *Quartet* was published, Messiaen’s preface cited the Revelation of Saint John as a direct influence for the work: “I saw a mighty angel descending from heaven, clad in mist, having around his head a rainbow. His face was like the sun, his feet like pillars of fire. He placed his right foot on the sea, his left on the earth, and standing thus on the sea and the earth he lifted his hand toward heaven and swore by Him who liveth for ever and ever, saying: “There shall be time no longer, but at the day of the trumpet of the seventh angel the mystery of God shall be consummated.” (Revelation 10: 1-2, 5-7)

Structured in eight movements, the *Quartet* begins with imitations of birdsong in *Liturgie de cristal* (*Crystal liturgy*). The clarinet plays the improvisatory chirping of a blackbird whilst the violin imitates the timeless beauty of a nightingale’s song. The second movement *Vocalise, pour l’Ange qui annonce la fin du Temps* (*Vocalise, for the Angel who announces the end of time*) depicts the dramatic descent of the “mighty angel” and the shimmering mysteries of the heavenly plane. In the third movement *Abîme des oiseaux* (*Abyss of birds*), the solo clarinet presents joyous birdsong as an antidote to the eternal melancholy of time’s abyss. The fourth movement is a brief and flowing *Intermède* (*Interlude*) for the trio of violin, cello and clarinet. In *Louange à l’Éternité de Jésus* (*Praise to the eternity of Jesus*) the pace changes abruptly and time feels elongated as the cello and piano share a broad and reverential duet.

The apocalyptic climax of the piece is the rhythmically charged *Danse de la fureur, pour les sept trompettes* (*Dance of fury, for the seven trumpets*). Messiaen exploits metrical irregularity, with augmented and diminished rhythms, to convey uncertainty, terror, ecstasy and disaster. The penultimate movement *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*) returns to the exquisite colours of the celestial realm introduced in the second movement. However, this serenity is interrupted by the turbulent bouts of suffering that must be endured on the path to transcendence, the thunderstorms that herald rainbows. For the final movement, Messiaen again reduces the texture to a tender duet, this time between violin and piano. Titled *Louange à l’Immortalité de Jésus* (*Praise to the immortality of Jesus*), this concluding movement explores the relationship between Christ and humanity, humanity and God, as the violin soars resolutely towards paradise.

The *Quartet* is unanimously recognised as one of the most influential chamber works of the twentieth century and has been widely admired, analysed and written about. However, Messiaen’s music speaks more eloquently on humanity and eternity than anything that can be expressed in writing; as Messiaen himself wrote in his preface to the work, “All this [commentary] is mere striving and childish stammering if one compares it to the overwhelming grandeur of the subject!”

RESOUND

PERFORMERS

Piano Melvyn Tan
Clarinet Sacha Rattle
Violin Michael Trainor
Cello Jessie Ann Richardson

Melvyn Tan has established his international reputation in the 1980s with pioneering performances on fortepiano and continues to cast fresh light on music conceived for the piano's early and modern forms.

Melvyn Tan (c. Graham de Lacy)



His work as recitalist, chamber musician and concerto soloist has been heard at many of the world's leading concert halls, from the Amsterdam Concertgebouw, Vienna Konzerthaus AMUZ in Belgium, London's Wigmore Hall and Royal Festival Hall and New York's Lincoln Center, and at major festivals including Salzburg, Edinburgh, La Roque d'Anthéron as well as Bath's Mozartfest, City of London Festival and Hatfield House Chamber Music Festival.

Recent and forthcoming appearances include performances with MDR Leipzig Radio Symphony Orchestra and Dennis Russell Davies, the Orchester Wiener Akademie in Vienna, a return to Wigmore Hall, a Beethoven Marathon in Belgium, recitals for Oundle International Festival and South Downs Summer Music Festival, as well as performances in Singapore, France, Italy and South Africa. During the COVID-19 Melvyn was privileged to perform as part of the first Wigmore Hall and Radio 3 series of live streamed concerts with cellist Guy Johnston, as well as specially devised digital concerts for Bath MozartFest, Hatfield House Chamber Music Festival the National Gallery Singapore.

With violinist Paul Boucher, he has also continued his role in devising Music and Word at Charleston, a combination of music and readings in the unique setting of the East Sussex Farmhouse made famous by artists Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant.

Since his highly praised 2009 solo debut at Berlin's Philharmonie, **Sacha Rattle** has become an established soloist. Noted for his immense sensitivity, warm character and unique sound, his career has developed rapidly with performances throughout Europe, including festival appearances at the Schleswig-Holstein Musik Festival, Spannungen Festival, Gidon Kremer's Kammermusikfest, Lockenhaus and Italy's AnimaMundi Festival. He made his Asian debut in 2011 as soloist with the Taiwan National Symphony Orchestra, performing works by Copland and Debussy.



Sacha Rattle (c. Kaupo Kikkas)

Sacha Rattle is also a much sought-after chamber musician, having collaborated with artists such as Isabelle Faust, Lars Vogt, Katia and Marielle Labèque, François Leleux, Pascal Moragues, Guy Braustein and Peter Donohoe. He performs regularly in recital with duo partner Zeynep Özsuca. Sacha is also a founding member of the wind quintet and piano sextet, Berlin Counterpoint, an award winning ensemble which has been performing worldwide since 2010.

In 2005, Sacha Rattle received his Performance Diploma at the Oberlin Conservatory of Music under Professor Richard Hawkins, and then moved to Berlin to study with Karl-Heinz Steffens at Hochschule für Musik 'Hanns Eisler', Berlin, completing his studies with Wenzel Fuchs and Ralf Forster in 2010.

Recent highlights include his Wigmore Hall debut, Prussia Cove OCM and tour, concerts with O/Modernt, USA debut tour with Berlin Counterpoint, a residency with the Linien Ensemble in Madrid, double concerto with Peter Donohoe and guest principal with Mahler Chamber Orchestra.

Michael Trainor is a distinguished young violinist from Northern Ireland. His solo performances have included many BBC radio broadcasts and the standout performances have included Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto and a world premiere of Philip Hammond's 'Concertino,' both with the Ulster Orchestra.

Michael Trainor (c. Benjamin Harte)



He is leader and founding member of the Piatti Quartet. They won multiple prizes at the International Wigmore SQ Competition in 2015 and have since performed at major venues around Europe. They are in high demand as recording artists and have made discs for Hyperion and Nimbus Records during this last disrupted season. The quartet are also renowned for their commissions and performances of works by leading UK composers.

He was acting leader of the RTÉ Concert Orchestra (Dublin) for a season whilst still at the RAM and has been invited for concertmaster performances with different orchestras around the UK and Ireland since then. His most recent concertmaster invitations have included the BBC Philharmonic Orchestra, the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, the John Wilson Orchestra, and the RTÉ National Symphony Orchestra.

Jessie Ann Richardson has established herself as both a soloist and chamber musician around the UK and Europe, having thrilled audiences with her virtuoso and sensitive musicianship. Chosen by the Park Lane Group for their prestigious Young Artist Series, Jessie made her London Purcell Room Debut in January 2011.

Having studied at the Purcell School, then at the Royal Academy of Music with David Strange and Moray Welsh, she won the Herbert Walenn Prize for cello and graduated with the highest honours. Musical inspirations include the late Bernard Greenhouse, whom she was very fortunate to have studied privately with at his invitation in Cape Cod, USA and Lluís Claret, Barcelona.



Jessie Ann Richardson (c. Malcom Crowthers)

Jessie Ann Richardson is a founding member of the renowned Piatti Quartet, which has won many prizes including multiple awards at the 2015 International Wigmore Hall SQ Competition and winning the inaugural St. Martin-in-the-Fields Competition. Debuts at major European venues, radio broadcasts, highly acclaimed recordings and commissions from leading UK composers have all been hallmarks of their time together.

She currently plays a Celoniatus Cello made in 1741 around Turin kindly lent to her by a patron of the Beares International Violin Society.

Our thanks to The National Lottery Heritage Fund, for supporting the ReSound concert series at St Martin-in-the-Fields.

The performers and technical crew carefully adhere to all current government regulations for COVID-19.

ReSound

ReSound is a brand new concert series from St Martin-in-the-Fields, aiming to put St Martin's at the heart of music-making in the capital. The series is focused around an exciting range of online concerts, some of which can also be attended in-person.

The concerts are streamed through our online platform, StMartins.Digital, and are available to watch as many times as you like for 30-60 days. We also have the opportunity for you to be a part of the audience for some of our concert recordings. Explore our range of in-person and online events by visiting the links below.

Voices in the Crypt, available [online](#) until Wednesday 21 July

St Martin's Voices with Simon Russell Beale



Shall I compare thee to a Summer's day

Love bade me welcome

Long live fair Oriana

Paddington Bear's First Concert

Available [online](#) until Wednesday 21 July



Rachel Podger: The Guardian Angel

Available [online](#) until Wednesday 23 June

St Martin's Voices: Brahms Requiem

Available [online](#) until Thursday 24 June



**Will Todd Ensemble and St Martin's Voices:
Songs of Love**

Available [online](#) until Sunday 27 June

The Wind in the Willows

Available [online](#) until Friday 30 July





Benson Wilson and James Baillieu

Available online until Wednesday 7 July

Academy of St Martin in the Fields: Miniatures

Available online until Saturday 10 July



Quartet for the End of Time:

Melvyn Tan and Friends

Available online from Tuesday 22 June

Attend in-person, Saturday 19 June, 7.00pm

St Martin's Voices with Anna Lapwood:

Upon your heart

Available online from Wednesday 23 June

Attend in-person, Monday 21 June, 7.00pm



Organ Recital: Rachel Mahon

Available online from Saturday 26 June

Organ Recital: Ben Giddens

Available online from Saturday 26 June

The Hermes Experiment

Available online from Monday 28 June

Attend in-person, Friday 25 June, 7.00pm





Vivaldi and the Osperia del Pieta

Available online from Tuesday 29 June

Attend in-person, Saturday 26 June, 7.00pm

I Fagiolini: The ache, the bite and the banger

Available online from Wednesday 30 June

Attend in-person, Thursday 24 June, 7.00pm



Free, non-ticketed events

The Song and The Story, in-person only, Sundays, 3.30pm



The Passing of the Year, Sunday 20 June

In youth is pleasure, Sunday 27 June

Festival Evensong
In-person, Sunday 27 June, 5.00pm,
and live-streamed



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