

Messiaen: Quatuor Pour La Fin Du Temps – Et Exspecto Resurrectionem Mortuorum (2011)

Written by bluesever

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Quatuor pour la fin du temps for violin, cello and piano: 1. *Liturgie de crystal* 2. *Vocalise, pour l'Ange qui annonce la fin du temps* 3. *Abime des oiseaux* 4. *Intermede* 5. *Louange a l'eternite de Jesus* 6. *Danse de la fureur, pour les sept trompettes* 7. *Fouillis d'arcs-en-ciel, pour l'Ange qui annonce la fin du temps* 8. *Louange a l'immortalite de Jesus*.

Vera Beths – violin Anner Bylsma – cello George Pieterse – clarinet Reinbert de Leeuw - piano Et Exspecto resurrectionem mortuorum for wind orchestra and metallic percussion:

9. *Des profondeurs de l'abime je crie vers toi, Seigneur: Ecoute ma voix!* 10. *Le Christ, ressuscite des morts, ne meurt plus* 11. *L'heure vient ou les morts entendront la voix du Fils de Dieu...* 12. *Ils ressusciteront, glorieux, avec un nom nouveau* 13. *Et j'entendis la voix d'une foule immense...*

Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra Bernard Haitink - conductor

This work is one of the most significant and famous chamber music compositions of the twentieth century. In his early thirties, Messiaen was already known as one of the most brilliant and individual young French composers and organists. It was at Verdun that his army unit was captured during the German Army's lightning advance in 1940. Two members of Messiaen's company were also musicians: cellist Etienne Pasquier and clarinetist Henri Akoka. As the latter had his clarinet, Messiaen wrote a piece for him, which became the third movement of this quartet. The soldiers were transferred to Stalag VIII-A outside Görlitz, Silesia. Pasquier was assigned as a cook, enabling him to keep well fed and smuggle extra food to Messiaen. Messiaen met another musician, Jean Le Boulaire, a violinist who also had his instrument. Pasquier hoarded money he got by selling extra potatoes and was permitted to buy a cello from a local instrument maker. Messiaen wrote a trio for them, which became the fourth movement. Messiaen discovered a piano in a corner of a hut used as a church. He quickly wrote the quartet and the four musicians premiered it on January 15, 1941, before an audience of several thousand prisoners and the camp Kommandant and his staff. "Never was I listened to with such rapt attention and comprehension," Messiaen wrote. The keys to the piano were sticky, and the musicians had to overcome the cold, but Pasquier says it is not true -- as the composer remembered -- that he had only three strings on his cello, adding that it simply can't be played

on fewer than the standard four. The quartet meant freedom for the players. The Germans thereafter listed them as musician-soldiers. The Wehrmacht's bureaucracy took this to mean they were noncombatant bandsmen, and released them back to France.

Messiaen, a devout Catholic, drew his title and musical imagery from Revelations 10:1-7, concerning the Angel that announces the end of time. It is thought that hunger resulted in kinesthesia, Messiaen's ability to see musical sounds as visual colors, and intensified his interest in bird calls. The eight movements are: "Liturgy of Crystal" (a blackbird's call surrounded by trills, translated to a "religious plane" as the harmonious silence of Heaven); "Vocalise for the Angel Who Announces the End of Time"; "Abyss of Birds" (where the eternity of birdcalls overcomes and Abyss of Time); "Interlude"; "Eulogy to the Eternity of Jesus" (featuring an "infinitely slow" and majestic cello solo); "Dance of Frenzy for the Seven Trumpets" (a remarkable movement written entirely in unison); "Tumult of Rainbows for the Angel Who Announces the End of Time"; and "Eulogy to the Immortality of Jesus," a timeless violin solo that ascends in register as Christ (and Mankind) ascend to the Father. --- Joseph Stevenson, Rovi

Messiaen's *Et exspecto resurrectionem mortuorum* (I Await the Resurrection of the Dead) is for an instrumental ensemble of 18 woodwinds, 16 brass, and a metallic percussion ensemble. The work was commissioned by André Malraux, the French Minister of Cultural Affairs. At Malraux's request, *Et exspecto* received a private premiere in the Sainte-Chapelle in Paris before the public premiere in front of General de Gaulle in the Chartres Cathedral. The stained glass lining both cathedrals created a fitting aura in which to witness the work, although Messiaen also envisioned it being performed outdoors at the foot of mountain ranges, which he hoped would enhance the music's monumental, timeless, and natural imagery. Although Messiaen acknowledged the existence of death and suffering -- himself a prisoner of war in Silesia -- he refused Malraux's request to write a requiem commemorating the outbreak of the two World Wars and those who died. Instead, he wrote *Et exspecto* to emphasize his belief in the Resurrection. In contrast to *Chronochromie* (1960), Messiaen's previous large-scale work which imagines a natural world of birds, mountains and motionless time, *Et exspecto* looks ahead to a world that is to come.

The piece unfolds from five large, block-like sections, each relating to quotations from the Catholic Scriptures. The first begins with a monophonic prayer theme emerging from the lowest depths of the orchestra. The second section revolves around three motives: a six note, "lightning flash" -- the first four notes of which are related by retrograde to the prayer theme --

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which is transformed into vertical chords, questions and answers heard in the woodwind duets, and a chorale led by the trumpets. The third section is also a three part structure. Here Messiaen used two bird songs, including the Amazonian uirapuru -- traditionally heard at the moment of death -- to symbolize Christ's inner voice waking the dead from their sleep; signaling an impending resurrection. The virtuosic singing of the calandra lark symbolizes celestial joy and the gift of agility. The bird songs are heard in the full ensemble of woodwinds, the ringing of the tubular bells, and then as massive orchestral chords. In the fourth section, the crashing of tam tams, heard in recurring cells of three strokes, represents the moment of resurrection as bells ring, trumpets chant, and the lark sounds from the woodwinds. In the final section, prayer melodies from the first section and a long sequence of colorful chords form the closing chorale.

---Rovi

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