

EDINBURGH
UNIVERSITY
CONCERTS

1973-74

THE CLARINA ENSEMBLE
KEITH PEARSON *clarinet*
LOUIS CARUS *violin*
JOAN DICKSON *cello*
WIGHT HENDERSON *piano*

Reid Concert Hall, Thursday 7 March 1974

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BEETHOVEN 1770-1827

Trio in B flat for clarinet, cello and piano, opus 11

Allegro con brio

Adagio

Allegretto (tema e variazioni)

In Beethoven's clarinet trio there is none of the mellow charm of Mozart's clarinet quintet, none of the autumnal *Sehnsucht* of Brahms' similar work; here is the young pupil of Salieri, establishing himself in a still vital and aristocratic Vienna. The trio was published in 1798.

Although Beethoven's prowess as a pianist and improviser was already known, this work was probably written at the request of a clarinetist, and the piano writing is restrained. It is noteworthy, however, that the most Beethovenian feature in the first movement—the leap, at the start of the transition, from a dominant chord to a wholly new theme, pianissimo, in D major—is given to the pianist. The remainder of this straightforward movement is derived, more or less closely, from the opening unison gesture with its chromatic 'hammerstrokes' and falling arpeggio.

The beautiful theme of the *Adagio*, propounded by the cello, is closely related to that of the menuetto of Beethoven's septet, another work of these early years, which reappears in the piano sonata, opus 49 no. 2. The sketch for this theme shows that the resemblance was originally much closer; perhaps the composer deliberately altered one of these themes to reduce its similarity to the other.

The last movement is a set of variations on a trio from the opera *L'Amor marinaro* of Weigl, performed in 1797. A variation for piano solo follows the theme; then one for clarinet and cello, without piano. Henceforth there is an exuberant sequence of variations, exploiting standard effects of rhythm, texture and modality, with no hint of the cumulative intensity of Beethoven's later sets of variations. This is more like one of Mozart's numerous sets of piano variations: expert persiflage. R.M.

THOMAS WILSON b.1927

Complementi

Commissioned by the Clarina Ensemble with the aid of the Scottish Arts Council, the work was first performed on 22 February 1973, in the University of Glasgow.

The piece is in one continuous movement. At the outset

clarinet, violin, piano and cello in turn present musical ideas of varied character—cadenza-like (clarinet), brittle scherzo (violin), latent, uneasy power (piano), and expressive melody (cello). The remainder of the work is concerned with the development of these ideas and how they complement and interpenetrate one another. T.W.

INTERVAL

MESSIAEN b.1908

Quatuor pour la Fin du Temps (Quartet for the end of Time)

'I saw a mighty angel come down from Heaven, clothed with a cloud with a rainbow upon his head. His face was as the sun, and his feet as pillars of fire. He set his right foot upon the sea, and his left upon 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 in the day of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound the trumpet, the mystery of God shall be finished.' (The Revelation of St. John, Chapter X.)

Conceived and written during my captivity, the *Quartet for the end of Time* was given its first performance in Stalag VIII A on the 15th of January 1941, by Jean Le Boulaire (violin), Henri Akoka (clarinet), Etienne Pasquier (cello) and myself (piano). It was directly inspired by this passage from *Revelation*. The musical language it uses is essentially ethereal, spiritual and Catholic. The use of modes to achieve, melodically and harmonically, a sort of tonal ubiquity gives the listener a feeling of eternity in space, or infinity. Special rhythms, completely independent of bar-lines, contribute powerfully towards banishing the temporal. (All this remains aspiration and stammering when one thinks of the overwhelming magnitude of the subject!)

The Quartet is in eight movements. Why? Seven is the perfect number, the creation of six days sanctified by the divine Sabbath; the seven of this repose is prolonged into eternity and becomes the eight of indefectible light, of peace everlasting.

1. Crystal liturgy.

Between three and four in the morning, the awakening of the birds: a blackbird or a nightingale improvises a solo, surrounded by particles of sound and a halo of trills which are

- lost high up in the trees. Transpose this onto the religious plane: you have the harmonious silence of Heaven.
2. Vocalisation for the Angel who announced the end of Time. The first and third parts (very short) evoke the power of this mighty angel, clothed in cloud and with a rainbow around his head, one foot on the sea and the other on the earth. The middle section depicts the impalpable harmonies of Heaven. Soft cascades of blue-orange chords on the piano surround with their distant chimes the plainsong-like chant of the violin and cello.
 3. Abyss of birds. Solo clarinet. The abyss is Time, with its sorrows, its lassitudes. The birds are the opposite of Time; they represent our desire for light stars, rainbows and jubilant vocalisations!
 4. Intermezzo. This is a Scherzo, more extrovert in character than the other movements, but still related to them by a number of thematic 'reminders'.
 5. Song of praise to the eternity of Jesus. Jesus is here considered as the Word. A great cello melody, infinitely slow, magnifies with love and reverence the eternity of this Word, both powerful and gentle. 'The word of the Lord endureth for ever.' Majestically, the melody spread out, into a distant tenderness and grandeur. 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.'
 6. Dance of fury for the seven trumpets. Rhythmically, the most characteristic piece of the series. The four instruments in unison play in the style of gongs and trumpets (the six first trumpets of the Revelation which are followed by various catastrophes, and the trumpet of the seventh angel announcing the end of the mystery of God). Use of the added value, augmented and diminished rhythms, non-retrogradable rhythms. Music of stone, formidable sonorous granite; relentless movement of steel, of enormous blocks of purple fury, of glaciers of frozen intoxication. Listen particularly to the terrible fortissimo of the theme in augmentation and with extended registrations of pitch, near the end of the piece.
 7. Tangle of rainbows for the Angel who announces the end of Time. Here certain passages of the second movement are reintroduced. The Angel full of strength appears, and dominating everything the rainbow which covers him (the rainbow,

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symbol of peace, wisdom, and all vibrations of light and sound)—In my dreams I hear and see familiar chords and melodies, known colours and shapes; then, after this transitory phase, I pass into the unreal, and experience with ecstasy a whirling, a gyratory compenetration of supernatural sounds and colours. These swords of fire, these blue-orange outflows of lava, these sudden stars: this is what makes up the tangle of rainbows!

8. Song of praise to the immortality of Jesus.

Expansive violin solo, forming a pendant to the cello solo of the fifth movement. Why this second song of praise? It is more particularly addressed to the second aspect of Jesus, Jesus-Man, the Word made flesh, resurrected immortal in order to communicate his life to us. It is all love. Its slow rise to an extremely high pitch is the ascension of man towards his God, of the Son of God towards his Father, of Man, defied, towards Paradise.

And I repeat once again what I said above; all this remains aspiration and stammering, when one thinks of the overwhelming magnitude of the subject!

Olivier Messiaen
(Tr. Penny Harper)

Next concert: Thursday 18 April

COLIN KINGSLEY piano

Music by Fricker and Fauré
