



**GREAT MUSIC  
IN IRISH HOUSES**

## **New Year's Eve Concert**

**available online until Friday January 15th 2021 at 6.00 pm**



Great Music in Irish Houses is proud to dedicate this concert to the memory of Alison Casey who sadly died on Christmas Day. Alison and her beloved and loving husband Frank, President of the GMIHF, have been part of the fabric of this festival since its beginning in 1970, and pillars of musical life in Ireland. A forthright, generous and gently humorous lady who will be sadly missed. We extend our deepest sympathy to Frank, daughters Philippa and Jane, grandchildren and sister Kerry. Alison is a sad loss to our community. Ar dheis Dé go raibh a h-anam.

## Music: A Message of Hope

Presented in partnership with the  
Office of Public Works  
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the French Embassy in Ireland  
and the Embassy of the Federal Republic of  
Germany Dublin

In difficult times, in music there is hope. With that thought in mind, the **Great Music in Irish Houses Festival** is closing this particularly difficult year with a special New Year's Eve concert recorded in the magnificent setting of Dublin Castle's Chapel Royal. Featuring violinist Katherine Hunka; cellist, William Butt; clarinettist John Finucane, and pianists Finghin Collins, Fionnuala Moynihan and Hugh Tinney, this concert will include movements from Messiaen's evocative and inspiring *Quartet for the End of Time* performed alongside works for solo piano by German composers, Clara and Robert Schumann.

First performed on a brutally cold January night in 1941, the *Quartet for the End of Time* gave a measure of comfort to the composer's fellow prisoners at the Stalag VIIIA prisoner-of-war camp, in Görlitz, Germany during World War II. A similar measure of "of unflinching light, of immutable peace" (Messiaen) is wished for the Festival's audiences as we leave this challenging year and look to the next with hope.

This concert will be free to view until Friday, January 15th at 6.00 pm, the 80th anniversary of the first performance of Messiaen's seminal work.

**The Great Music in Irish Houses Festival is funded by The Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon and the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media**

## OLIVIER MESSIAEN (1908-1992) *Quatuor pour la fin du temps*

Finghin Collins, *piano*  
Katherine Hunka, *violin*  
William Butt, *cello*  
John Finucane, *clarinet*

Olivier Messiaen, one of the most influential composers of the last century, wrote his *Quatuor pour la fin du temps* (Quartet for the end of time) in the latter months of 1940 and the early days of 1941, while a prisoner of war in Germany. In June of 1940, the composer-turned-infantryman had been marching with his column on the road from Verdun to Nancy when advancing German forces apprehended them. They were taken to Toul, just west of Nancy, and interned. It was here that Messiaen met the clarinettist Henri Akoka and cellist Étienne Pasquier.

The following month they were transported to Silesia and incarcerated in Stalag VIII-A, situated near the town of Görlitz, close to the Polish border. Conditions in the overcrowded camp were primitive but were less devastating than those in the concentration category. It was here that Messiaen met the violinist Jean Le Boulaire and would write his Quartet, although four of the eight movements were reworkings of some earlier material.

Olivier Messiaen recalled the première in his memoirs, "[The first performance] was preceded by a speech which I made on the Apocalypse [Revelation] of Saint John, in front of priests among the prisoners, who approved of what I had to say. An upright piano was brought into the camp, the keys of which seemed to stick at random [...] On this piano I played my *Quatuor pour la fin du temps*, in front of an audience of five thousand people - the most diverse mixture of all classes in society - farm workers, labourers, intellectuals, career soldiers, doctors and priests. Never have I been listened to with such attention and such understanding."

The composer, whose faith was deeply immersed in the Catholic tradition, provided a comprehensive explanation of his Quartet in the preface to its published score. As his comments are unlikely to be improved upon, they are reproduced herewith in full: -

"I saw a mighty angel descending from heaven, clad in mist; having around his head a rainbow. His face was



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An Roinn Turasóireachta, Cultúir,  
Ealaíon, Gaeltachta, Spóirt agus Meán  
Department of Tourism, Culture,  
Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media



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like the sun; his feet were like pillars of fire. He placed his right foot on the sea, his left foot 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 on the day of the trumpet of the seventh angel, the mystery of God shall be consummated." [*Book of Revelation*, Chapter 10, verses 1 to 7.]

"Conceived and written in the course of my captivity, *Quatuor pour la fin du temps* was performed for the first time in Stalag VIII-A on 15 January 1941, by Jean Le Boulaire, violin; Henri Akoka, clarinet; Étienne Pasquier, cello and myself at the piano. It is directly inspired by this excerpt from *The Revelation of St John*. Its musical language is essentially transcendental, spiritual and catholic. Certain modes, realising melodically and harmonically a kind of tonal ubiquity, draw the listener into a sense of the eternity of space or time. Particular rhythms, existing outside the measure, contribute importantly toward the banishment of temporalities. (All this is mere striving and childish stammering if one compares it to the overwhelming grandeur of the subject!)

The Quartet contains eight movements. Why? Seven is the perfect number, the creation of six days made holy by the divine Sabbath; the seventh in its repose prolongs itself into eternity and becomes the eighth, of unending light, of immutable peace.

*Liturgie de cristal (Liturgy of crystal)*. Between the morning hours of three and four, the awakening of the birds: a thrush or a nightingale soloist improvises, amid notes of shining sound and a halo of trills that lose themselves high in the trees. Transpose this to the religious plane: you will have the harmonious silence of heaven.

*Vocalise, pour l'Ange qui annonce la fin du Temps (Vocalise, for the Angel who announces the end of Time)*. The first and third parts (very short) evoke the power of that mighty angel, his hair a rainbow and his clothing mist, who places one foot on the sea and one foot on the earth. Between these sections are the ineffable harmonies of heaven. From the piano, soft cascades of blue-orange chords, encircling with their distant carillon the plainchant-like recitativo of the violin and cello.

*Abîme des oiseaux (Abyss of the birds)*. Clarinet solo. The abyss is Time, with its sadness and tediums. The birds are the opposite of Time; they are our desire for light, for stars, for rainbows and for jubilant outpourings of song!

*Intermède (Interlude)*. Scherzo. Of a more outgoing character than the other movements but related to them, nonetheless, by various melodic references.

*Louange à l'Éternité de Jésus (Praise to the Eternity of Jesus)*. Jesus is here considered as one with the Word. A long phrase, infinitely slow, by the cello expatiates with

love and reverence on the everlastingness of the Word, mighty and dulcet, "which the years can in no way exhaust." Majestically the melody unfolds itself at a distance both intimate and awesome. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

*Danse de la fureur, pour les sept trompettes (Dance of fury, for the seven trumpets)*. Rhythmically, this is 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 announces the consummation of the mystery of God). Use of extended note values, which, read from right to left, remain the same. [This is] music of stone, formidable sonority; movement as irresistible as steel, as huge blocks of livid fury or ice-like frenzy. Listen particularly to the terrifying fortissimo of the theme in augmentation and with change of register of its different notes, toward the end of the piece.

*Fouillis d'arcs-en-ciel, pour l'Ange qui annonce la fin du Temps (Cluster of rainbows, for the Angel who announces the end of Time)*. Here certain passages from the second movement return. The mighty angel appears, and in particular the rainbow that envelops him (the rainbow, symbol of peace, of wisdom, of every quiver of luminosity and sound). In my dreamings 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 interpretation of superhuman sounds and colours. These fiery swords, these rivers of blue-orange lava, and these sudden stars: Behold the cluster! Behold the rainbows!

*Louange à l'Immortalité de Jésus (Praise to the Immortality of Jesus)*. [This is an] expansive violin solo balancing the cello solo of the fifth movement. Why this second glorification? It addresses itself more specifically to the second aspect of Jesus – to Jesus the man, to the Word made flesh, raised up immortal from the dead so as to communicate His life to us. Its slow rising to a supreme point is the ascension of man toward his God, of the Son of God toward his Father, of the mortal newly made divine toward paradise.

And I repeat anew what I said above: All this is more striving and childish stammering if one compares it to the overwhelming grandeur of the subject!"

This online New Year's Eve recital will include only three of the eight movements of the *Quatuor pour la fin du temps* - *Louange à l'Éternité de Jésus (Praise to the Eternity of Jesus)* played by William Butt (cello) & Finghin Collins (piano); *Abîme des oiseaux (Abyss of the birds)* with John Finucane (clarinet) & *Louange à l'Immortalité de Jésus (Praise to the Immortality of Jesus)* with Katherine Hunka (violin) and Finghin Collins (piano).

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## CLARA SCHUMANN (1819-1896) Variations on a Theme by Robert Schumann Op 20

### Fionnuala Moynihan, *piano*

A remarkable woman in the history of music, Clara Josephine Wieck, born in Leipzig, became one of the finest pianists of her time. She was the support and comfort of her husband Robert Schumann and the constant counsel to Johannes Brahms. She also reared seven children and was a gifted composer.

Possibly caused by a troubled family background, Clara did not speak until she was four giving the impression she was deaf. However, her music teacher father, Friedrich Wieck, determined she would be a piano virtuoso. He began tutoring her and by the age of nine she was giving public performances. Two years later she was playing throughout Germany and visiting Paris and Vienna where the Emperor honoured her with the title *Royal and Imperial Chamber Virtuosa*.

Falling in love with Robert Schumann exasperated her father and he did everything in his power to stop their marriage. It took a court order to allow it to take place on 12<sup>th</sup> September 1840. The union was not without its difficulties but Robert encouraged her to compose even having some of her songs published privately. But, in deference to him, Clara set her compositions aside with her resultant legacy limited mainly to piano music and songs. Clara appeared in Dublin's Antient Concert

Rooms on 30<sup>th</sup> May 1856 in a concert with the city's Philharmonic Society.

Written in 1853, Clara chose the theme of her Op 20 Variations on the fourth of Robert's *Bunte Blätter* (Coloured leaves) – a collection of fourteen pieces composed between 1834 and 1849 and published in 1852.

Robert marked his piece *Ziemlich langsam* (Rather slowly), which Clara saw no reason to change when she states the somewhat sombre, but stately, theme. Her first variation brings an infusion of life and a sense of 'Romantic warmth' while staccato semiquavers in the second enlivens matters further and even suggests the spirit of Chopin.

Variation three returns to the mournful atmosphere of the theme before the brief and lively fourth variation, where the theme in the left hand supports triplet figures in the right hand. The agitated Poco animato nature of the fifth variation - the only one to show a tempo marking on the score - is still rather grandiose and has a touch of Brahms about it before the penultimate variation returns to the demeanour of the theme itself.

The elegant final variation is the longest of the set. Full of spread chords and arpeggios, it maybe reveals more colour and depth than any of its siblings before it wafts into silence.

Clara's dedication to Robert on his 43<sup>rd</sup> birthday read, 'To my beloved husband on 8<sup>th</sup> June 1853, this weak attempt once more from his old Clara'. Interestingly, on hearing Clara's Variations, Brahms chose the same theme for a set of his own (Op 9) in honour of Robert.

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## ROBERT SCHUMANN (1810-1856) Drei Fantasiestücke Op 111

*Sehr rasch, mit leidenschaftlichem Vortrag*  
*Ziemlich langsam*  
*Kräftig und sehr markiert*

### Hugh Tinney, *piano*

Having been appointed conductor of Düsseldorf's subscription concerts by its previous incumbent, Ferdinand Hiller, Schumann moved there in the late summer of 1850. However, difficulties arose almost from the start with the orchestra and its committee soon becoming aware of his unsuitability for the position due to his mental instability.

The anguished Schumann found solace in composition and certainly 1851 proved particularly fertile for him. Besides the Three Fantasy Pieces Op 111, written in August of that year, Schumann completed his two Violin Sonatas Opp 105 & 121, his Piano Trio Op 110, numerous songs and, among other things, the revision of his D minor Symphony Op 120. This was a time when, as Schumann scholar, the late Joan Chissell believed, 'his creative

powers seemed to have taken on a new lease of life'. As the composer indicated *attaca* at the close of the second Fantasy, he obviously meant the three to be played consecutively with the idyllic *Ziemlich langsam* (rather slowly), that has something of a Schubertian air to it and even if it has an agitated middle section, providing the perfect contrast between the turbulence of the opening piece and the virility of the march implied by the finale.

The dramatic outer movements relish the key of C minor while the evocative central one, in A flat major, brings with it a relaxation of tension, although it also slips into a minor key for a while.

Punctuated by offbeat chords, the robust opening theme of the final *Kräftig und sehr markiert* gives way in time to a section that is almost unearthly in feeling. However, this eventually leads back to the vigorous opening ideas. For all that, Schumann opts to end this last Fantasy with material from its somewhat enigmatic central section.

Writing in her diary about these Fantasies, Clara Schumann mentions Robert composing three pieces 'of a very serious and passionate character, which pleases me'.