

# MESSIAEN

Fantaisie · Thème et variations · Quatuor pour la fin du temps



Ensemble Nordlys

## **OLIVIER MESSIAEN – fornyende modernist og troende katolik**

Messiaens musik er overvældende og forførende. Den henrykker sanserne og udfordrer tanken. Den vækker blide og voldsomme følelser, den gør tiden til en flydende tilstand og skaber et mangedimensionalt rum af nuancerede klange og harmoniske farver. Den omfatter store kontraster, fra sødmefyldte harmonier til provokerende støjeflekter. Enkle melodier står side om side med komplekse musik i mange lag. Toner stiger til ekstreme højder og falder til afgrundens dybder.

Olivier Messiaen (1908-92) fornyede den vest-europæiske musik ved at opfinde nye skalaer, rytmer og harmonier og eksperimenterede med at give hver enkelt tone præcise karakteristiske egenskaber. Som professor ved Pariserkonservatoriet fik han afgørende betydning for flere generationer af det tyvende århundredes komponister.

**Fantasi** for violin og klaver komponerede Messiaen i 1933 til sin første hustru, Claire Delbos, som var violinist og komponist. De opførte stykket for første gang i marts 1935. I mange år var værket glemt, først i 2007 blev manuskriptet fundet i Messiaens efterladte papirer og udgivet. Det er musik med præget af romantisk harmonik og dynamik, skrevet til at opføre på koncert med virtuositet og følsomhed. Indledningens markante tema kommer igen i mange skikkelser i begge instrumenter: robust, yndefuldt og ekstatisk. Dette tema brugte Messiaen også, med visse ændringer, i anden sats af sit værk om Kristi Himmelfart, *L'Ascension*, komponeret ved samme tid.

**Tema og variationer** for violin og klaver var den 23-årige Olivier Messiaens bryllupsgave til Claire Delbos. De blev gift i juni 1932 og uropførte værket i november samme år. Et stilfærdigt tema i violinen følges af fire variationer med stigende tempo og intensitet, og i den lange afsluttende variation manifesterer violintemaet sig med stor klarhed i højt register. I denne musik er Messiaen på vej fra den franske musiks tradition til sine personlige nyskabelser i rytme, melodi og harmoni. Her høres for første gang en af de skalaer, som Messiaen opfandt, hans tredje modus. Da den unge Pierre Boulez i 1943 hørte *Tema og variationer*, blev han slået af forundring. Boulez fortæller, at han aldrig havde troet at en sådan musik kunne eksistere, og han besluttede, at Messiaen skulle være hans første lærer.

**Kvartet til tidens ende** er komponeret, mens Messiaen var tysk krigsfange. En tysk officer skaffede ham nydepapir, og sammen med tre andre krigsfanger opførte Messiaen kvartetten i januar 1941 i fangelejren Stalag VIII A. Koncerten fandt sted i en hytte, der fungerede som lejrens teater. Det var hård frost udenfor, og der lå sne på taget.

Kvartetten er inspireret af en vision fra Johannes' Åbenbaring i Bibelen:  
"Jeg så en engel fuld af styrke stige ned fra himlen, klædt i en sky og med en regnbue på hovedet. Hans ansigt var som solen, hans ben som søjler af ild. Han satte sin højre fod på havet og sin venstre fod på jorden, og stående over havet og jorden loftede han sin hånd mod Himlen og svor ved Ham der lever i århundreders århundreder, idet han sagde: Der skal ikke være Tid mere; men den dag hvor den syvende engels trompet lyder, skal Guds mysterium fuldbyrdes."

I partituret beskriver Messiaen de enkelte satser:

1. *Krystal-liturgi*. Mellem klokken 3 og 4 om morgenen vågner fuglene. En solsort eller en nattergal improviserer solo, omgivet af klingende støv, af en glorie af overtoner der fortaber sig højt oppe i træerne. Overfør dette til det religiøse plan: Så har De himlens harmoniske stilhed.

2. *Vokalise til Englen der bebuder Tidens ende*. Første og sidste del (begge meget korte) skildrer denne stærke engels magt, englen klædt i skyer med en regnbue på hovedet, som sætter en fod på havet og en fod på jorden. Midterstykket er himlens uahåndgribelige harmonier. Klaveret spiller blide kaskader af blå-orange akkorder, som med deres fjerne klokkeklang omgiver violinens og celloens melodi, der minder om gregoriansk kirkesang.

3. *Fuglens afgrund*. Klarinet solo. Afgrunden, det er Tiden med dens sorger og træthed. Fuglene er det modsatte af Tiden, det er vores længsel efter lyset, stjernerne, regnbuerne og jublende vokaliser!

4. *Intermezzo*. En scherzo, som har mere udadvendt karakter end de andre satser, men som alligevel er knyttet til dem med nogle melodiske erindringer.

5. *Lovprisning af Jesu evighed*. Jesus betragtes her i sin egenskab af Guds Ord. En stor, uendelig langsom frase i celloen lovpriser med kærlighed og ærbødighed dette magtfulde og blide Ords evighed, hvis år aldrig skal få ende. Majestætisk breder melodien sig ud i en blid og suveræn fjernhed. ”I begyndelsen var Ordet, og Ordet var hos Gud, og Ordet var Gud”.

6. *Raseriets dans, for de syv trompeter*. Rytmask er det den mest karakteristiske sats. De fire instrumenter spiller unison med klang af gonger og trompeter (de seks første trompeter i apokalypsen fulgt af forskellige katastrofer, og den syvende engels trompet der forkynder fuldbyrdelsen af Guds mysterium). Anvendelse af uregelmæssige rytmer med tilføjede nodeværdier, forstørrede og formindskede rytmer, symmetriske rytmer, der er ens forfra og bagfra. Musik af sten, formidabel klanglig granit, en uimodståelig sats af stål, enorme blokke af purpurfarvet raseri, af isnende rus. Lyt især, mod satsens slutning, til det frygtelige fortissimo hvor det augmentedede temas toner bliver forskudt til høje og dybe registre.

7. *Virvar af regnbuer*, til Englen der bebuder Tidens ende. Her kommer visse passager fra andensatsen igen. Den kraftfulde Engel viser sig, og fremfor alt regnbuen der dækker ham (regnbuen der er symbol for fred, visdom og alle former for lysende og klingende vibrationer). I mine drømme hører og ser jeg bestemte akkorder og melodier, velkendte farver og former. Efter denne flygtige tilstand bevæger jeg mig ind i uvirkeligheden og gennemlever i ekstase en hvirvlen, svimlende gennemtrængt af overmenneskelige lyde og farver. Disse sværd af ild, disse strømme af blå-orange lava, disse pludselige stjerner, det er virvarret, det er regnbuerne!

8. *Lovprisning af Jesu Udødelighed*. Stor violinsolo, en pendant til cellosoloen i femte sats. Hvorfor endnu en lovprisning? Den retter sig mere specifikt mod det andet aspekt af Jesus. Ordet som blev kød, Menneskesønnen Jesus, opstanden fra de døde og udødeliggjort for at bibringe os sit liv. Den er ren kærlighed. Dens langsomme stigning mod det

allerhøjeste register, det er menneskets opstigning mod sin Gud, Guds barns opstigning mod sin Fader, den guddommeliggjorte skabnings opstigning mod paradiset.

Erik Christensen

### **OLIVIER MESSIAEN – Modernist innovator and devout Catholic**

The music of Messiaen seductive. It delights the senses and challenges the mind, emoting both peaceful and violent emotions. It dissolves time into a floating state and creates a multidimensional space of subtle sounds and harmonic colours. The music of Messiaen encompasses great contrasts, from luscious harmonies to harsh cacophonous effects. Simple melodies stand side by side with complex music in many layers. His music possesses delicate nuances and provocative clashes, integrating tones that rise to extreme heights and fall to bottomless depths.

Olivier Messiaen (1908-1992) innovated Western European music through his inventions of new scales, rhythms and harmonies, as well as experiments aimed at assigning precise characteristic features to each single tone. As a professor at the Paris Conservatoire, he was of paramount importance to several generations of 20th Century composers.

Messiaen composed *Fantasy* for violin and piano in 1933 for his first wife Claire Delbos, who was a violinist and composer. They performed the work for the first time in March 1935. For many years, the work was forgotten. The manuscript was rediscovered among Messiaen's papers and published as late

as 2007. Written to display virtuosity and sensitivity in concert performances, this music bears the mark of romantic harmony and drive. The piece begins with a distinctive theme in piano octaves which returns in many guises in both instruments; robust, graceful and ecstatic. Messiaen applied the same theme, slightly modified, in the second movement of his work *The Ascension*, composed at approximately the same time.

*Theme and Variations* for violin and piano was the 23-year-old Olivier Messiaen's wedding present to Claire Delbos. They married in June 1932, and premiered the piece in November the same year. A quiet theme played by the violin is followed by four increasingly vivid and intense variations. In the final extended variation, the violin displays the theme with great clarity in high register. In this music, Messiaen gravitates away from the French musical tradition toward his personal innovations in rhythm, melody and harmony. One of Messiaen's inventions, the scale known as his third mode, appears here for the first time. The young Pierre Boulez was struck with wonder when he heard *Theme and variations* in 1943. Boulez states that he had never believed that such a music could exist, and he decided to choose Messiaen as his first mentor.

*Quartet for the End of Time* was composed while Messiaen was in German captivity during World War II. A German officer provided him with music paper, and Messiaen performed the quartet with three other French prisoners of war in January 1941 in the POW camp Stalag VIII A. The concert took place in a hut that served as the camp theatre. It was bitterly cold outside, with snow covering the rooftops.

The quartet is inspired by a vision from *The Book of Revelations*, Chapter X: "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 when the trumpet of the seventh angel shall begin to sound, the mystery of God shall be finished."

In his score, Messiaen describes the single movements:

1. *Crystal Liturgy*. Between three and four o'clock in the morning, the awakening of the birds: a blackbird or a nightingale improvises solo, surrounded by sonorous dust, by a halo of trills lost high in the trees. Transpose this to the religious level: Then you have the harmonious silence of heaven.

2. *Vocalise, for the Angel announcing the end of Time*. The first and third parts (both very short) evoke the power of this strong angel, the angel clothed in clouds with a rainbow upon his head, who sets one foot on the sea and one foot on the earth. In the middle section, the impalpable harmonies of heaven. The piano plays soft cascades of blue-orange chords, enveloping in their distant chimes the plainchant-like melody of violin and cello.

3. *Abyss of the birds*. Clarinet solo. The abyss is Time, with its sorrows and weariness. The birds are the opposite of Time. They represent our yearning for light, stars, rainbows and jubilant voices!

4. *Intermezzo*. Scherzo, of a more outgoing character than the other movements, but linked to them nonetheless by melodic recollections.

5. *Praise to the Eternity of Jesus*. Here, Jesus represents the Word of God. One long, extremely slow cello phrase glorifies with love and reverence the eternity of this powerful and gentle Word, whose years shall never be exhausted. Majestically the melody unfolds in a sort of distance, gentle and supreme. "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 in the series. The four instruments in unison give the effect of gongs and trumpets (the first six trumpets of the Apocalypse followed by various catastrophes, the trumpet of the seventh angel announcing the consummation of the mystery of God). Use of irregular rhythms with added values, rhythms augmented or diminished, symmetrical patterns of rhythms, similar forwards and backwards. Music of stone, formidable sonorous granite, an irresistible movement of steel, enormous blocks of crimson fury, of frozen frenzy. Listen particularly, toward the end of the piece, to the terrifying fortissimo where the tones of the augmented theme are dislocated to high and deep registers.

7. *Tangle of rainbows, for the Angel announcing the end of Time*. Certain passages from the second movement recur here. The powerful angel appears, and above all the rainbow that covers him (the rainbow that is the symbol of peace, wisdom, and all luminous and resonant vibrations). In my dreams I hear and see ordered chords and melodies, familiar hues and forms; then, following

this transitory stage I pass into the unreal and in ecstasy submit to a vortex, a dizzying interpenetration of superhuman sounds and colours. These swords of fire, these blue-orange lava flows, these sudden stars: behold the tangle, behold the rainbows!

8. *Praise to the Immortality of Jesus*. A broad violin solo, counterpart to the cello solo of the fifth movement. Why this second encomium? It addresses more specifically the second aspect of Jesus; Jesus the man, the Word made flesh, raised from the dead, immortalized to grant us his life. This movement is pure love. Its slow ascent toward the extreme peak is the ascension of man toward his God, of the child of God toward his Father, the deified creation ascending toward paradise.

Erik Christensen

## Ensemble Nordlys

Christine Pryn – *violin*  
Viktor Wenzes – *clarinet*  
Øystein Sonstad – *cello*  
Kristoffer Hyldig – *piano*

**Ensemble Nordlys** har gjort det til sin mission at nedbryde skellene mellem de forskellige tidsaldres musik. De fire instrumenter – klarinet, violin, cello og klaver – kan kombineres på et utal af måder, hvilket giver en unik mulighed for at variere klang, udtryk og repertoire. Koncertprogrammerne indeholder ofte musik fra flere århundreder, og der spindes en rød tråd på tværs af stilarterne.

Ensemble Nordlys blev dannet i 1997 og har siden turneret i over 20 lande i Europa, Asien og USA med koncerter i bl.a. New York (Carnegie Hall), London, Berlin, Warszawa, Stockholm, Tel Aviv, Athen mv.

Herhjemme er Ensemble Nordlys ”ensemble in residence” ved Rudersdal Sommerkoncerter og har endvidere givet koncerter bl.a. i Radiohusets Koncertsal og Musikhuset Århus, samt ved festivaler såsom Frederiksværk Musikfestival og Schubertiaden i Roskilde.

Siden 2006 har Ensemble Nordlys haft en årligt tilbagevendende koncertrække i København, hvoraf flere koncerter er blevet transmitteret af Danmarks Radio. Kvartetten var i 2005 udnævnt til H.C. Andersen-ensemble og har endvidere repræsenteret Danmark ved Den Internationale EU Musikfestival. Derudover har der været samarbejdet med bl.a. Warsaw Autumn Festival, Svenska Rikskonserten og Music Network Ireland. Kvartetten har uropført over 70 værker og danske og udenlandske komponister.

De fire prisbelønnede musikere i Ensemble Nordlys har valgt at prioritere kammermusikken højest i deres karriere, hvilket giver mulighed for at gå i dybden med sammenspillet og tage på adskillige udlandsturneer hvert år.

**Ensemble Nordlys** (The Northern Lights Ensemble) is committed to breaking the boundaries between music from different epochs. A concert typically includes music from several centuries.

The four instruments – clarinet, violin, cello and piano – form a traditional piano trio set-up with additional clarinet, but can be combined and mixed in countless different ways. This provides a unique opportunity to vary sound and expression and allows for a very broad repertoire ranging from the baroque to contemporary music, even crossing into other genres. Several composers from both Denmark and abroad have provided more than 70 works specifically for the Northern Lights Ensemble.

The ensemble was founded in 1997 and has since toured in more than 20 countries throughout Europe, Asia and the USA, including cities like New York (Carnegie Hall), London, Berlin, Warsaw (Autumn Festival), Athens, Jerusalem, and others.

In its native Denmark the group performs regularly at venues like the Danish Radio Concert Hall, the Music House in Århus, and at festivals like Frederiksværk Musikfestival and the Schubertiade in Roskilde.

Since 2010 the Northern Lights Ensemble has been ensemble in residence at Rudersdal Sommerkonserter, and since 2006 it has presented a concert series in Copenhagen, from which the Danish Radio has broadcast several events. During the 200th anniversary of famous author Hans Christian Andersen in 2005, the group was designated as official H.C. Andersen Ensemble. It has also represented Denmark at The International EU Music

Festival in Warsaw as well as toured with Svenska Rikskonserten and Music Network Ireland.

The four award-winning members of the ensemble regard chamber music as the most important aspect of their musical careers. This has made it possible to probe even greater depths musically, as well as allowing for extended periods of touring throughout the year.

Tak til Augustinus Fonden, Solistforeningen af 1921, Sorgenfri Kirke, Hvidovre Musikskole, Juhl-Sørensen

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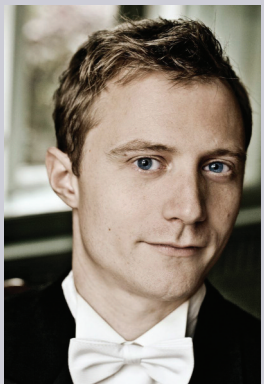
## Ensemble Nordlys



DACOCD 756

Christine Pryn

Viktor Wennesz



Øystein Sonstad

Kristoffer Hyldig

Photos:  
Lisbeth Holten



DACOCD 756

DIGITAL DDD

Total playing time  
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February 2010 at  
Sorgenfri Kirke

[ 1 ] - [ 2 ]

July 2013 in

Hvidovre Musikskole

[ 3 ] - [10]

Denmark

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Karsten Wolstad  
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Jesper Lützhoft©DANACORD 2015  
www.danacord.dk**Olivier Messiaen (1908 – 1992)**

- [ 1 ] **Fantaisie (1933)**  
for violin and piano 7:47
- [ 2 ] **Thème et variations (1932)**  
for violin and piano 10:23
- Quatuor pour la fin du temps (1941) 48:00**
- [ 3 ] 1. Liturgie de cristal 2:43
- [ 4 ] 2. Vocalise, pour l'Ange qui annonce la fin  
du Temps 5:14
- [ 5 ] 3. Abîme des oiseaux 7:50
- [ 6 ] 4. Intermède 1:36
- [ 7 ] 5. Louange à l'Éternité de Jésus 9:22
- [ 8 ] 6. Danse de la fureur, pour les sept  
trompettes 6:29
- [ 9 ] 7. Fouillis d'arcs-en-ciel, pour l'Ange qui  
annonce la fin du Temps 7:28
- [10] 8. Louange à l'Immortalité de Jésus 7:13

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