

## **Preface by Olivier Messiaen to the Quatuor pour la fin du temps (1941)**

And I saw another mighty angel come down  
From heaven, clothed with 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:  
and he had in his hand a little book open:  
and he set his right foot upon the sea,  
and his left foot on the earth,  
and cried with a loud voice, as when a lion  
roareth: and when he had cried, seven thunders  
uttered their voices.  
And when the seven thunders had uttered their voices,  
I was about to write: and I heard a voice from heaven  
Saying unto me, "Seal up those things which the seven thunders  
uttered and write them not".  
And the angel lifted up his right hand to heaven and  
Swore: "that there should be time no longer".

The Apocalypse by Saint John. Chapter X

Conceived and composed during my imprisonment, *Quatuor pour la fin du temps* was first performed at the Stalag VIII/A on January 15, 1941, by the violinist Jean Le Boulaire, the clarinetist Henri Akoka, the cellist Etienne Pasquier and with myself at the piano. It was directly inspired by this quote from the Apocalypse. Its musical language is mainly ethereal, spiritual and catholic. Achieving a sort of tonal ubiquity in melody and harmony, it draws the listener closer to eternity in space or in infinity. Special rhythms, beyond any measure, contribute significantly to distancing the concept of time (however these remain an attempt and almost a stutter if one thinks of the overwhelming greatness of the subject). It is formed by eight movements. Why? Seven is the perfect number. The six days of creation sanctified by the divine Sabbath; the seventh day of rest extends to eternity and becomes the eighth of the unfailing light, of the unchanging peace.

## 1 **Crystal liturgy**

Between three and four in the morning, the birds awaken: a soloist blackbird or a nightingale improvises, surrounded by granules of sound and by a halo of trills lost high up among the trees. Shifting this to a religious level, the result is the harmonious silence of Heaven.

## 2 **Vocalise, for the Angel announcing the end of time**

The first and last part (very short) evoke the strength of this powerful angel, surrounded by a rainbow and clothed in clouds, with one foot on the sea and the other on the earth. In the central part are the impalpable harmonies of Heaven. On the piano, sweet cascades of blue-orange chords surround the smooth melody (performed by the violin and cello) with their distant chimes.

## 3 **The Abyss of the Birds**

Solo clarinet. The abyss represents time with its sorrows and fatigue. The birds are the opposite of time, they depict our desire for light, stars, rainbows and joyous voices.

## 4 **Interlude**

A *scherzo* of more extroverted character than the other movements, but still linked to them by a few "melodic reminders".

## 5 **Praise to the Eternity of Jesus**

Jesus is considered here as the Word Incarnate. A long, infinitely slow phrase of the cello, magnified by love and reverence: a powerful and sweet Word Incarnate, whose years will never end. The melody majestically unfolds at a kind of tender and sovereign remove. "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 this is the most characteristic piece of the series. The four instruments play in unison imitating movements of the gong and the trumpets (the first six trumpets of the Apocalypse followed by the various catastrophes, the trumpet of the seventh angel who announces the end of time). Use of increased values, rhythmic augmentations or diminutions, non retrograding rhythms. Music like stone, formidable resounding granite. Irresistible movements of steel, enormous blocks of deep red fury, of frozen drunkenness. Near the end of the piece, the terrible *fortissimo* of the theme is heard above all - thanks to the augmentation and change of register of its different notes.

## 7 **Rainbow Vortex, for the Angel Announcing the End of Time**

Some passages of the second movement reappear here. The Angel full of power appears and, above all, the rainbow that covers him (the rainbow: symbol of peace, of wisdom and all luminous and sonorous vibrations). In my dreams I hear and see different chords and melodies, known colors and shapes. Then, after this transitional stage, I move into the unreal and ecstatically suffer a whirlwind like movement, a rotating swarm of superhuman sounds and colors. These swords of fire, the blue-orange lava flows and the sudden stars; here is the whirlwind, here is the rainbow.

## 8 **Glory to the Immortality of Jesus**

A long violin solo which contrasts with the cello's solo of the fifth movement. Why this second glory? It addresses more specifically the second aspect of Jesus, Jesus become man, the Word Incarnate reborn immortal to communicate His life to us. It is all love. Its slow rise towards the highest note is the ascension of man towards his God, the son of God toward his Father, the divine creature towards Paradise.

**Roberto Noferini** was born in 1973. He obtained his degree "cum laude" at the "Conservatorio di Milano" with G. Baffero and specialized with A. Grumiaux, S. Accardo, D. Schwartzberg and P. Vernikov. He has won numerous national and international competitions in violin and in chamber music. He has been mentioned by several critics as one of the major talents of his generation. He has participated in important Festivals and Concert Seasons in Italy and abroad. He has also performed in chamber music formations in many Italian theaters with famous musicians and performed as a soloist with orchestra in important concerts. He pays special attention to the contemporary repertoire having worked with L. Berio, G. Manzoni, N. Castiglioni, G. Petrassi, A. Caprioli and B. Bettinelli.

**Anton Dressler** was born in Moscow in 1974. At age 7 he began attending the Central Music School where he studied under the direction of Lev Mikhaïlov and Vladimir Sokolov. In 1995 he graduated from the Bologna Conservatory "G.B. Martini" where he studied with Italo Cappicchio and in 1996 he graduated from the Higher Conservatory "P. I. Chaïkovskiy" where he studied with Sokolov. In 1991 he won the "Soviet Union Competition" and the "International Competition in Stresa". He has also won other competitions in Italy and abroad. He has performed in concerts in the most important cities in Russia, Great Britain, France, Italy, Sweden and Taiwan, both as a soloist and as an orchestral musician. He has performed with Mischa Maisky, Boris Petrushansky, Vladimir Spivakov, Giovane Quartetto Italiano, "I Virtuosi del Conservatorio di Mosca" conducted by Yuri Bashmet, "The World Orchestra by Jeunesses Musicales" and toured the most important capitals of Northern Europe.

**Andrea Noferini**. Comes from a family of musicians. His mother is a pianist and his father a composer, conductor and former Director of the Conservatorio "G. B. Martini" in Bologna. He mastered his instrumental skills in Brussels, Belgium, at the school of the great violinist Arthur Grumiaux to whom he owes his virtuoso approach to the cello, one which is clearly influenced by the violin. In 1987, at the age of 18, he graduated with top marks and "cum laude" from the "G. Verdi" Conservatory in Milano where he studied with Rocco Filippini. He specialized with Antonio Janigro and attended master courses with Paul Tortelier, Yo-Yo Ma and André Navarra. He has won many national and international competitions and has performed as a soloist with various prestigious orchestras in Italy and abroad. He records for Dynamic, Warner Bros and Bongiovanni. He also teaches the cello at the Arts Academy in Roma. He has been first solo cellist at the Teatro dell'Opera di Roma since 1991. In 1997 he was awarded the "Nettuno d'Oro" prize by the city of Bologna as best artist of the year.

**Denis Zardi** was born in Lugo in 1974. He studied the piano with Mauro Minguzzi and graduated with top marks, "cum laude" and special mention from the "Conservatorio A. Boito" in Parma. He attended master courses held by Alfredo Speranza and Piero Rattalino with whom he completed the three year course at the music academy "S.Cecilia" in Portogruaro, obtaining a Diploma in Concert Studies. He also attended courses held by Aquilles Delle Vigne, Loise De Moura Castro, Roberto Szidon, Tatiana Zelikman, Philippe Cassare, and Lev Naumov. In 1994 he was selected to participate in the Irving S. Gilmoro International Keyboard Festival in the United States where he performed in numerous concerts and specialized with Gary Graffman and Russel Shermann. He has won many national and international competitions and has carried out successfully, for both critics and audience, an intense series of concerts. He has also been part of various orchestras and is obtaining considerable success with chamber music. In duo with violinist Roberto Noferini he won the "Concorso Nazionale della Gioventu' Musicale d'Italia" competition. In January 2000, he toured the United States in a piano duo with concerts in Minneapolis, St. Paul Des Moines, Milwaukee and Philadelphia. He is presently studying composition at the Conservatorio "G. B. Martini" in Bologna directed by Cesare Augusto Grandi.

Translation from the italian: Antonella Casagrande