



Con Brio Chamber Series and Orpheus Project
Present

Tangle of Rainbows

Chamber Music of Olivier Messiaen

Friday, April 18, 7:30 PM
UAS Egan Library

Saturday, April 19, 2:00 PM
Alaska State Library, Archives and Museum

PROGRAM

Le Merle noir (1951)

(the blackbird)

Sally Schlichting, flute

Kyle Farley-Robinson, piano

Mémoire de Claire (2020)

Composed and performed by Elena Levi, violin

Quatuor pour la fin du temps (1940-41)

(Quartet for the End of Time)

- I. Liturgie de cristal (Crystal liturgy)
- II. Vocalise, pour l'Ange qui annonce la fin du temps
(Vocalise, for the Angel who announces the end of time)
- III. Abîme des oiseaux (Abyss of the birds) ~ clarinet solo
- IV. Intermède (Interlude) ~ violin, cello, and piano
- V. Louange à l'Éternité de Jésus (Praise to the eternity of Jesus)
~ cello and piano
- VI. Danse de la fureur, pour les sept trompettes
(Dance of fury, for the seven trumpets)
- VII. Fouillis d'arcs-en-ciel, pour l'Ange qui annonce la fin du temps
(Tangle of rainbows, for the Angel who announces the end of time)
- VIII. Louange à l'Immortalité de Jésus (Praise to the immortality of Jesus)
~ violin and piano

William Todd Hunt, clarinet

Elena Levi, violin

Ben Holtz, cello

Jamila Hla Shwe, piano

Tangle of Rainbows came about through Todd Hunt's ambitious goal of performing Olivier Messiaen's mighty *Quatour pour la fin du temps*. Over cocktails with me, he fretted finding the musicians and the time to do it, and we deliberated how he might present it, given its length, which is long but not quite an entire program. I loved the idea of seeing a performance of this work in Juneau and was determined to help make it happen. Upon discovering that I had a copy of *Le Merle noir*, I slyly proposed that it could open a program for the Quartet. Then Lena revealed that she had written a piece in honor of Messiaen and his beloved Claire, and suddenly, here we are with a one-hour concert about this remarkable composer and human being.

Olivier Eugène Prosper Charles Messiaen (1908-1992) was a French composer, organist, and ornithologist. He entered the Paris Conservatoire at the age of 11, and numbered Paul Dukas, Maurice Emmanuel, Charles-Marie Widor and Marcel Dupré among his teachers. He was appointed organist at the church of La Trinité in Paris in 1931, a post he held until his death. Messiaen was appointed professor of harmony soon after his release as a prisoner of war in 1941, and professor of composition in 1966, at the Paris Conservatoire, positions he held until his retirement in 1978. His many distinguished pupils included Pierre Boulez, Yvonne Loriod (who later became Messiaen's second wife), Karlheinz Stockhausen, Iannis Xenakis and George Benjamin.

Messiaen's music is rhythmically complex (he was interested in rhythms from ancient Greek and from Hindu sources) and is harmonically and

melodically based on modes of limited transposition, which were Messiaen's own innovation. Many of his compositions depict what he termed "the marvellous aspects of the faith", drawing on his unshakeable Roman Catholicism. He travelled widely, and he wrote works inspired by such diverse influences as Japanese music, the landscape of Bryce Canyon in Utah, and the life of St. Francis of Assisi. Messiaen experienced a mild form of synaesthesia manifested as a perception of colors when he heard certain harmonies, particularly harmonies built from his modes, and he used combinations of these colors in his compositions. For a short period Messiaen experimented with the parametrization associated with "total serialism", a field in which he is often cited as an innovator. His style absorbed many exotic musical influences such as Indonesian gamelan (tuned percussion often features prominently in his orchestral works), and he also championed the ondes Martenot, an early electronic musical instrument.

Messiaen found birdsong fascinating; he believed birds to be the greatest musicians and considered himself as much an ornithologist as a composer. He notated birdsongs worldwide, and he incorporated birdsong transcriptions into a majority of his music. His innovative use of color, his personal conception of the relationship between time and music, his use of birdsong, and his intent to express profound religious ideas, all combine to make it almost impossible to mistake a composition by Messiaen for the work of any other western composer. – *Universal Edition*

About the Music

Le Merle noir (the blackbird) was composed in 1951 as a competition piece for the Paris Conservatoire, *le merle noir* is one of Messiaen's first pieces to make reference to birdsong, in this case, the European blackbird, which would continue to inspire him throughout his career: "I have always thought that birds were the great masters and that they had found everything: modes, neumes, rhythmic acuity, tone-colour melodies and even collective improvisation". Messiaen used several rigorous compositional techniques, though the final effect to the ear seems to be of improvised spontaneity. Its large-scale structure is AA'B form (or Bar form), with the A section consisting of six distinctive segments. The piano first provides an atmospheric introduction; it's followed by a flute cadenza, for which Messiaen established melodic motifs and employed Greek poetic metres to convey the blackbird's song. Here, the flutist is also required to "flutter-tongue", a then-novel technique, to mimic the bird's alarm rattle. Afterward, flute and piano perform a combined song, in canon; there's a series of stacked octaves, then "colour" chords alternating with brief silences, and lastly, a rapid flurry of notes, including trills. The segments are repeated, with the musical material undergoing further intensification. Finally, the tension is released in the B section, in which Messiaen employs strict 12-note technique in the piano part, while the flute's bird figuration is pushed to the limits of the instrument's range. - Dr. Hannah Chan-Hartley, National Arts Centre, Canada

Mémoire de Claire is a reference to Messiaen's first wife, Claire Delbos. Elena Levi was commissioned to write

this piece for a tribute concert of Messiaen's music. The solo violin quotes the final idea from the first movement of *Poèmes pour Mi*: a song cycle he wrote for his bride as a wedding present. Claire was later lobotomized and suffered from memory loss for the rest of her life, but Messiaen (having already met and allegedly fallen in love with Yvonne Loriod, whom he married after Claire's death) was unable to divorce Claire because of his commitment to his faith. Levi's piece exemplifies that remembrance of their love as it first was, but also explores themes of Claire Delbos' memory loss and Messiaen's lost love.

Quatour pour la fin du temps

Imagine being at the premiere of the Quartet for the End of Time. You are in a Nazi prisoner of war camp in January of 1941 in Görlitz, Germany (now modern Poland). Your world is cold and grey. Olivier Messiaen, a famous and fascinating composer from France, is in the camp with you, along with three other professional musicians. The instruments that they played dictated the instrumentation of the piece - clarinet, violin, cello, and piano. The audience around you is made up of people from all backgrounds, many of whom have not attended a chamber music concert outside of this performance.

Yet, because of their shared experience, Messiaen described this audience as the one that seemed to understand his music and what he was trying to convey better than any other. He wrote the entire piece in that POW camp, during the rise of fascism in Europe, when all hope for a free and egalitarian society seemed a distant dream. The work is heavily inspired by the Book of

Revelation. Messiaen's deep Catholic faith permeates the music, with movements dedicated to angels, eternity, and immortality. Messiaen was also inspired by numerology, unique rhythmic and harmonic ideas, and ornithology. Listen for bird songs throughout the piece. Contemplate timelessness and transcendence while immersed in our performance of this work. It is a long journey to eternity.

About the Musicians

WILLIAM TODD HUNT is a familiar contributor to Juneau's rich musical scene, serving as artistic director of The Orpheus Project, conductor of the Amalga Chamber Orchestra, composer, and performer on clarinet with the Hot Club of Juneau, the Juneau Symphony, Con Brio Chamber Series, and is a founding member of the Icefield Quartet.

Hunt's journey with the clarinet has been a relatively short one. He took a year of lessons during undergraduate work with the late Dallas Tidwell while studying for a saxophone performance degree. But it was not until coming to Juneau nearly 10 years later that Hunt took up the clarinet again, and in the following 25 years, has taught clarinet, played in all three clarinet chairs of the Juneau Symphony, toured with CrossSound, and played an occasional chamber music piece. Most recently, Hunt has enjoyed playing gypsy jazz with Hot Club of Juneau and finding new challenges as the clarinetist in the Icefield Quartet.

ELENA LEVI began studying violin at the age of 5 and went on to receive two bachelor's degrees from Boston University College of Fine Arts in violin performance and music theory/composition. She later studied

under Missy Mazzoli and Nancy Wu (assistant concertmaster of the Metropolitan Opera House) in New York City. After spending a year in academia and teaching private and group violin, viola and piano lessons in NY schools, Elena came to Juneau to continue her teaching career and to share her compositional works in a more intimate and tight-knit community. Elena is currently building a reputable private studio, performs with numerous local musical organizations, and is a board member of both Thrush Hill Music Academy and Orpheus Project. She is a regular performer in local ensembles and is a founding member of the Icefield Quartet.

BEN HOLTZ is Project Engineering Superintendent for Coeur Alaska's Kensington Mine and plays the cello locally in Juneau. Always an engineer by day and musician by night, Ben graduated from Michigan Technological University with a B.S. in mechanical and electrical engineering, as well as a minor in music composition. Since moving to Juneau in 2019, Ben has played in various local ensembles as well as premiered music compositions with Con Brio. He is a founding member of the Icefield Quartet.

JAMILA HLA SHWE grew up in Czechoslovakia, where she graduated from the Prague Conservatory of Music with a degree in Piano Performance. After graduating she worked at the National Theatre Opera and the State Opera in Prague as a rehearsal pianist and vocal coach. In 1994 she moved to Fairbanks, where she received a Pearl Boyd Fellowship to study at UAF and get her Master's degree. After graduating she continued

at UAF as an adjunct faculty, while also maintaining a private studio.

Mrs. Hla Shwe has performed as a soloist and a collaborative pianist in Europe (Czechoslovakia, Hungary, former Yugoslavia, Greece, Italy, Bulgaria, Austria, France, Spain, Germany, Belgium), Zimbabwe, South Africa, Malaysia and the US and she has made solo recordings for the Czech Radio and Sri Lanka Radio. Mrs. Hla Shwe has also worked at the Ravinia Festival as rehearsal pianist and as an assistant to the conductors with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra.

Besides teaching, she has worked with opera companies as a vocal coach, rehearsal pianist and chorus master, including Anchorage Opera, Opera Fairbanks, Juneau Lyric Opera, Opera to Go, Orpheus Project, Pacific Northwest Opera, Teatro Lirico d'Europa and Varna International Music Academy and Festival.

KYLE FARLEY-ROBINSON was born and raised in Juneau where he started playing piano at age six with piano lessons from both Mary DeSmet and Mary Watson. A graduate of the University of Alaska Fairbanks where he studied piano with Dr. Eduard Zilberkant, Kyle was the winner of the Fairbanks Symphony 2023 Concerto Competition and also the Juneau

Symphony 2017 Youth Solo Competition. He attended the Adamant piano camp in Vermont for two summers. Kyle is also an active accompanist, having performed with many community groups in Juneau. Apart from music, Kyle enjoys hiking, birdwatching, and fishing along with tinkering around with and building computers and other electronic equipment.

SALLY SCHLICHTING grew up in Juneau and studied flute locally, at Interlochen, the University of Southern California and at the University of Washington where she earned her bachelor's in music. She has performed with the Juneau Symphony, Juneau Lyric Opera, Opera to Go, Orpheus Project, Amalga Chamber Orchestra, CrossSound Contemporary Music Festival, with the chamber ensembles Nimbus and Dal Segno, and in recitals with her aunt, pianist Mary Watson, as well as countless chamber music performances. Her love of chamber music ultimately led her to form the Con Brio Chamber Series to highlight the incredible talent of local musicians as well as bring new and underperformed chamber works to Juneau's audiences in a pay-as-you-can format. She is also a founding member of the Icefield Quartet.

Con Brio Chamber Series

The Con Brio Chamber Series was formed in 2016 by Juneau flutist, Sally Schlichting, to broaden the reach of chamber music in Juneau. Con Brio aims to provide musicians with a forum to collaborate, create, perform, and share both their love and the breadth of chamber music to enrich our community and capital city. Since 2016, Con Brio has been proud to present 22 unique programs featuring local and guest artists and a wide range of chamber repertoire.

Orpheus Project

Orpheus Project is a non-profit organization that focuses on bringing new and rarely heard works of music to Juneau. It was previously called "Opera to Go", formed in 1996 by Joyce Parry Moore. Since then, the organization has presented nearly 60 operatic, orchestral, dance, choral, and chamber music performances. The current Artistic Director is William Todd Hunt.

Acknowledgements

We are honored to present this performance on the unceded Indigenous territory of the Áak'w Kwáan, who have lived and thrived in cultural richness reaching back thousands of years on Lingít Aaní. We respect and are grateful for the stewardship and musical traditions of the Lingít people who have danced, sung, and drummed on the ground beneath us. May your music be everlasting. Gunalchéesh.

Many thanks to Linda Kruger and Jeff Gnass for event support, Marjorie Hamburger and Peter Otsea for housing Mrs. Hla Shwe, Thrush Hill Music for rehearsal space, Perseverance Theatre for their loan of professional video cameras, Kerry Neely and the University of Alaska Southeast, and Clint Farr and the rest of the APK staff as well as the Friends of the Alaska State Library, Archives and Museum.

Orpheus Project Donors

\$1000+

Juneau Arts and Humanities
Dave Hunsaker and Annie Caulkins
Harry and Charlotte Hunt
Emily Kane
Eric Olsen and Vicki Bassett
Mary Willson

Jeanette McBride
in memory of Jean Hoegler
J Allan and Margaret MacKinnon
Julie North
Tom Melville
Bill and Karen Paulick
Linda and Paul Rosenthal
Kathleen Strasbaugh

\$500-\$999

Marla Berg and John Greely
Jacque Farnsworth
David and Kristen Miller
Judy and Rodney Mitchell
Sue and Carl Schrader
Judy and Verne Skagerberg
Colleen and Steve Torrence

\$100-\$249

Kristine Benson
Mary Borthwick
Terry Cramer
Sheli Delaney
Kathy Engen
Alisha Falberg and Adam Moser
Dan Fruits
Sharon Gaipman
Jane Ginter and Bob Coghill
Maria Gladziszewski and Eric Kueffner
David and Sarah Grove

\$250-\$499

Sharon Denton
Pat Harris
Ben Holtz and Elena Levi
Bob and Glenda Hutton

Janice Hurley
Kathryn Kurtz
Todd Hunt and Kristin Mabry
Lucy Merrell
Keith and Jan Levy
Janice McPhetres
Lucy Merrell
Roman Motyka
Susan Oshida
Heather Parker
Jay Query and Julie DeLong
Sally Schlichting and Bob King
Sharon Seim
Doug and Angela Smith
Sally Smith
John Staub and Stephanie Hoag
Jetta Whittaker and Rob Steedle

Up to \$99
Odin Brudie and Frankie Pillifant
John and Nancy DeCherney
Mary Ann Dlugosch and Wade
Loofbourrow
Jane and Michelle Hale
Dan Hopson
Sarah Isto
Ceann Murphy
Natalee Rothaus and Michael Stanley
John Roxburgh
Saralyn Tabachnick
Therese Thibodeau
Michael and Sheryl Wittig
Laura Wallrath
Ardyne Womack

Upcoming Music Events

Friday May 2: Taku Winds presents Spring Winds, chamber music concert, 7pm at Holy Trinity Church.

Saturday May 10: JAMM Faculty Recital, 7pm at the Shrine.

Wednesday May 14: Juneau Jazz and Classics presents the JACK Quartet with two programs at 5:30 and 7:30pm at the Shrine.

Saturday and Sunday, May 31 & June 1: The Juneau Symphony performs Homelands 7:30pm and 3:00pm at JDHS.

Friday June 13: Juneau Piano Series presents Jon Hays, 7pm at the JACC.

Friday, June 20: Juneau Piano Series presents Alexander Tutunov, 7pm at the JACC.

Con Brio Chamber Series

Next Season

The Icefield Quartet



Sara Radke Brown, soprano and Candace LiVolsi, harp in recital



Karen Pallenberg, clarinet and Sally Schlichting, flute in recital