



DDD DIGITAL RECORDING

OLIVIER MESSIAEN

Quartet for the End of Time (Quatuor pour la fin du Temps) (45:07)

- 1 Liturgie de cristal (2:45)
- 2 Vocalise, pour l'Ange qui annonce la fin du Temps (4:31)
- 3 Abîme des oiseaux (9:01)
- 4 Intermède (1:47)
- 5 Louange à l'Éternité de Jésus (6:49)
- 6 Danse de la fureur, pour les sept trompettes (5:57)
- 7 Fouillis d'arcs-en-ciel, pour l'Ange qui annonce la fin du Temps (7:19)
- 8 Louange à l'Immortalité de Jésus (6:35)

DE 3043



BÉLA BARTÓK

Contrasts (17:34)

- 9 Verbunkos (5:39)
- 10 Pihenő (4:37)
- 11 Sebes (7:02)

CHAMBER MUSIC NORTHWEST:

David Shifrin, clarinet

Ik-Hwan Bae, violin

Warren Lash, cello

William Doppmann, piano

TOTAL PLAYING TIME: 62:54

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NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

Olivier Messiaen (1908–1992) and Béla Bartók (1881–1945) are in some ways extremely different from one another. As major European composers of the 20th century, the two present a striking contrast in their aesthetic purpose. Messiaen is a French Catholic mystic who takes pleasure in manipulating complex harmonic structures and rhythmic patterns based on Greek and Hindu rhythms. Bartók championed and assimilated folk music from his native Hungary and from neighboring Eastern European countries. Unlike Messiaen, he avoided (or at least concealed) any consistent approach to compositional technique. Despite such aesthetic differences, however, there exist deeper-lying affinities between the two composers.

Certain important stylistic features establish the common ground. Both Messiaen and Bartók brought to fruition a personal keyboard idiom of extraordinary harmonic richness. Each derived his wide, varied chord vocabulary from the impulse of traditional — as well as invented — modes and scales, articulated through consistently inventive piano figuration. Each explored extended string techniques and colors: glissandos — sometimes slow and siren-like in Messiaen, quick and vocally expressive in Bartók; tapping the strings with the wood of the bow; playing near the bridge; Messiaen's prolonged whole-tone trills and expansion of the cello range into the upper reaches of the treble; Bartók's snapped, rebounding pizzicatos on the violin.

Most importantly, each — in the two works paired here — raised the expressive dramatic potential of the clarinet to transcendent heights. In the *Quartet for the End of Time* and in *Contrasts*, Bartók and Messiaen have challenged the clarinet to sound the darkest and yet most ecstatic intimation of man's peculiar combination of beast and angel. The result is a furthering of that instrument's solo development from the clarinet concertos and chamber works of Mozart and Weber and from the clarinet trio, quintet, and sonatas of Brahms.

Messiaen's *Quartet for the End of Time* and Bartók's *Contrasts* also reflect a similar tendency to unify multi-movement works by complementing movements of sadness with movements of apocalyptic rage and triumph. Listening to the subtly-colored and widely spaced voices of Messiaen's wind, string, and piano choir, we begin to sense that, for our time at least, there might be a strange connection between the drooping sadness of birds locked inexorably in the confines of earthly Time (the third movement of the Quartet) and the Gabriel-like trumpeting of apocalyptic fury in the second and sixth movements. We sense a parallel connection between the desolate "blues" feel to the middle movement of *Contrasts* and the wild, joyous "up-tempo" nature of that work's "Fast Dance" finale. Between the two works, moreover, we note the resemblance of the beguiling clarinet configurations in the Crystal Liturgy (the Quartet's opening movement) to the seductive Pied Piper-like

tootling that evokes the Hungarian ‘tarogato’ in Bartók’s opening “Recruiting Dance.”

Messiaen composed the *Quartet for the End of Time* in 1940, and Bartók completed *Contrasts* in 1938. The circumstances of composition in each case reflect the profound impact of Nazism and the Second World War on the artistic lives of the two composers. In 1939, the young Messiaen interrupted his activities with the recently formed group, *La Jeune France*, to serve in the French army. He was captured in 1940 and sent to a prison camp at Görlitz where his misery, coupled with an unrestrained creative energy, inspired the composition of the Quartet. The work was performed by Messiaen and three fellow inmates for an audience of 5000 prisoners in 1941. During the same period, Bartók was an outspoken opponent of fascism. In 1937 he gave up his membership in the Austrian Performing Arts Society because of its Nazi leanings. He also banned broadcasts of his music in Germany and Italy and left Universal Edition in favor of the British firm of Boosey & Hawkes. Such an anti-fascist stance spurred attacks in the Hungarian and Romanian press, and the composer found himself in-

creasingly isolated in his own country. The decision to expatriate to the United States soon proved inevitable. *Contrasts*, written just before his self-imposed exile, was commissioned by the late jazz and swing master Benny Goodman and Bartók’s fellow countryman and consummate violin virtuoso, Joseph Szigeti, to provide money for the frail and aging composer. They recorded the work in New York in 1940, and Bartók left Hungary permanently in October of the same year.

Thus we can perhaps say, finally, of both the *Quartet for the End of Time* and *Contrasts*, that in our time musicians can “warn” as well as the War poets did. We can also say that, when faced with the immensity and seeming limitlessness of musical communication, we can sense, if only for the time it takes to hear and rehear this compact disc, the possibility of the Angel in our divided nature becoming truly human and prevailing over the Beast — a dream all arts and culture have visited upon us since the beginning of time.

William Doppmann