

INTERSTELLAIRE

10:00AM

SATURDAY 12 OCTOBER 2024

REARDON THEATRE



Olivier MESSIAEN (1908 – 1992)
Appel interstellaire

Carla Blackwood *French Horn*

Natalie WILLIAMS (b. 1977)
Talking Points

1. *Explanations*
2. *Recollections*
3. *Declamations*
4. *Reflections*

Christopher Moore *Viola*
Stefan Cassomenos *Piano*

Gabriel FAURÉ (1845 – 1924)
Piano Quartet No. 1 in C minor, Op. 15

1. *Allegro molto moderato*
2. *Scherzo. Allegro vivo*
3. *Adagio*
4. *Allegro molto*

Helena Rathbone *Violin*
Christopher Moore *Viola*
Timo-Veikko Valve *Cello*
Stefan Cassomenos *Piano*

Olivier MESSIAEN (1908 – 1992)
Appel interstellaire

Known for his deeply spiritual works, with their remarkable use of birdsong and innovative explorations of rhythm and harmony, Messiaen is a giant in 20th century music. *Appel interstellaire* (*Interstellar Call*) was originally written in March 1971 as an in memoriam or elegy on the sudden passing of an old student. Messiaen then revised and expanded it for inclusion in his 12-movement orchestral paeon, *Des canyons aux étoiles... (From the Canyons to the Stars...)*. Its virtuosic technical demands and searching, metaphysical character have made it a favourite of horn players ever since.

In essence, *Appel interstellaire* is a sort of cry into the wilderness, or, given the astronomical ambit, into the void. In this regard, its existential preoccupations somewhat echo Ives' *Unanswered Question*. Over eight short sections, the soloist intones various cryptic melodic fragments, hunting calls and birdsongs, at turns plaintive, vehement, even mocking. Each of these passages is separated by a long pause, which one could perhaps imagine as reflecting brute, universal indifference – but for Messiaen, a devout believer, “In silence, there is perhaps a response that is adoration.”

On the movement's title page, he included two biblical references, one from Psalm 147: “It is He who heals the broken-hearted, and tends to their wounds; it is He who knows the number of the stars, calling each one by name.” And the other from the Book of Job: “O Earth, do not cover my blood, and let my cry not be hidden!”

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Natalie WILLIAMS (b. 1977)

Talking Points

1. Explanations
2. Recollections
3. Declamations
4. Reflections

Natalie Williams is a composer, academic and artistic manager. Her music has been commissioned and performed in Australia, the United States and Europe, including multiple works for orchestra, opera, chamber ensembles, vocal ensembles, soloists, and multimedia. A performing arts leader, she was Dean of the School of Music, Art and Theatre at North Park University (Chicago), and has held faculty positions in music theory and composition at the University of Georgia and the Australian National University. Her research interests include music theory pedagogy and post-tonal composition. Natalie holds a Graduate Certificate in Management from the Australian National University and a Doctoral degree from Indiana University's Jacobs School of Music.

Of *Talking Points*, the composer writes:

Talking Points is a suite for viola and piano, commissioned by ACO violist Stefanie Farrands for a recording project with ABC Classics in 2016. The suite is a short set of pieces depicting simple types of conversation and interaction between the two instruments, who function as characters within the piece.

The first movement, *Explanations*, introduces the two players as they each reveal their character traits to the other player, sometimes in unison, other times apart. The second movement, *Recollections*, explores the gentle faintness of memory, as both players seek to explore a shared, nostalgic past. The third movement, *Declamations*, reveals an argumentative side to the performing duo, as each player jostles with the other for musical and topical supremacy. The final movement, *Reflections*, unites the two voices in a shared love and longing for the past. A soft wash of sound in the accompanying piano line highlights the plaintive viola melody, which gradually disappears into eternity. © Natalie Williams, 2024

Gabriel FAURÉ (1845 – 1924)

Piano Quartet No. 1 in C minor, Op. 15

1. *Allegro molto moderato*
2. *Scherzo. Allegro vivo*
3. *Adagio*
4. *Allegro molto*

Something of a subtle revolutionary, bridging the soave romanticism of Franck and Saint-Saëns with the modernism of Debussy and Ravel, Fauré was still a fairly unknown composer at the time of writing his First Piano Quartet. However, the foundation of the *Société nationale de musique* by Saint-Saëns and Romain Bussine in 1871 opened up a forum for young French composers to have their works heard. Later in life, Fauré remarked that he never would have dreamt of writing chamber music were it not for the opportunities provided by La Nationale.

The piano quartet was first conceived in the summer of 1876, but various personal and professional interruptions delayed its completion for three years. The first performance was given at La Nationale on 11 February 1880, and although it was warmly received, some of Fauré's friends expressed reservations about the last movement – sharing their concerns, he ultimately decided to completely rewrite the finale in 1883.

Despite the work's C minor key, the music is full of light and elegance. The first movement almost seems to begin *in medias res*, with a stormily ardent main theme played by all the strings together. The viola introduces the sinuously flowing second subject, quickly shared among the other instruments. Frivolity reigns in the following movement, a quirky scherzo which cleverly mixes 6/8 and 2/4 time, giving the feeling of both a dance and a march.

Holding the emotional core of the quartet, the majestic adagio alternates between tragic grandeur and warm nostalgia. Fauré revisits the agitation of the first movement in the finale, which emerges furtively with manic dotted rhythms in the strings, building to a fierce march-like riff. After an impassioned climax in the development, Fauré brilliantly combines all the movement's themes in a final, electrifying coda. © Douglas Rutherford, 2024