

Taught by David Hamilton and Thea King, Michael Collins first became a household name when he won the first BBC TV 'Young Musician of the Year' Woodwind Section while still at school. He is a prodigious prizewinner, his awards including the prestigious Tagore Gold Medal from the Royal College of Music, the two top prizes from the National Youth Orchestra and First Prize in the Leeds National Competition. There followed prizes in international competitions and in 1984 Michael Collins made his BBC Promenade Concert début with the Thea Musgrave Concerto. In the 1985 Proms season he played the Copland Concerto with the BBC Symphony Orchestra and was also featured as the solo clarinet in Leonard Bernstein's *Prelude, Fugue and Riffs* with the London Sinfonietta under Simon Rattle. Michael Collins has also performed the Bernstein at the Royal Festival Hall, coupled with Stravinsky's *Ebony Concerto*, and recorded both these works for EMI in December 1986.

Michael Collins since 1985, has been a member of the prestigious Nash Ensemble, with which he has recorded the Mozart Clarinet Quintet and the Brahms Quintet for CRD. He is also Principal Clarinet of the London Sinfonietta, with which he has performed many contemporary concertos, such as Henze's *Le Miracle de la Rose*.

Programme

Ludwig van Beethoven Trio in B flat (Op 11) for piano, clarinet and 'cello

Maurice Ravel Piano Trio in A minor

Olivier Messiaen Quartet for the End of Time

During his first years in Vienna in the early 1790's, **Beethoven** enjoyed both notoriety and popularity for his extrovert career as composer and pianist; indeed his compositions were frankly lucrative. As the years went by Beethoven proved himself to be a shrewd man of business – and a bachelor! The nobility frequently commissioned works, or was happy to pay for dedications, and the years 1795 to 1800 produced a rich harvest of chamber music.

The **Clarinet Trio in B flat**, written in 1797 and published the following year, was dedicated to Countess Maria Wilhelmine von Thun; it exploits the newly-discovered range and melodic potential of the clarinet – enjoyed so very recently in Vienna through Anton Stadler's interpretations of Mozart's Quintet and Concerto.

Ravel's Piano Trio in A minor was written in 1914 during the early days of the war, although it gives no suggestion of the turmoil of the period, because its general origin precedes the outbreak of hostilities.

The first movement – *Moderé* – is in free sonata form and in fact ends in C major rather than A minor. The first subject is almost entirely concerned with a short rhythmic pattern, played initially by the right hand of the piano in chords. The second subject comes as a strong contrast from the violin, but retains the original metrical pattern.

The second movement is entitled *Pantoum* – a Malayan word describing a strict song pattern. Ravel's *Pantoum* is a scherzo with the musical sentences repeated and balanced against each other according to this pattern. It also contains a central tro, consisting of a chorale-like theme in $\frac{4}{2}$ time, which contrasts with the original quaver motif in $\frac{3}{4}$.

The *Passacaille* of the third movement is employed in less than its strictest meaning. Rather than using the theme as a foundation against which to set other counterpoints, Ravel's treatment consists mainly of variation and harmonic development.

A rhapsodic finale gives all the themes of the preceding movements one last happy fling, stated by the piano against trilling strings of both violin and 'cello.

OLIVIER MESSIAEN: Quartet for the End of Time

'And I saw another mighty angel come down from heaven, clothed with cloud: and a rainbow was on his head, and his face was as it were the sun, and his feet as pillars of fire. And he set his right foot upon the sea, and his left foot on the earth. And the angel which I saw stand upon the sea and upon the earth lifted up his hand to heaven.'

And sware by him that liveth for ever and ever that there should be time no longer. But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, the mystery of God should be finished'
Revelations X

Conceived and written during my captivity, the Quartet for the End of Time was first performed in Stalag VIII (in Görlitz, Silesia) on 15 January 1941, by Jean le Boulaire (violinist), Henri Akoa (clarinetist), Etienne Pasquier ('cellist) and myself at the piano. It was directly inspired by this quotation from the Apocalypse. Its musical language is essentially unmaterial, spiritual and Catholic. Modes which achieve melodically and harmonically a kind of tonal ubiquity here draw the listener to eternity and space or the infinite. Special rhythms, beyond all measure, contribute powerfully in repelling the temporal. (All this remains a stuttering attempt if the crushing grandeur of the subject is considered!)

This Quartet comprises eight movements. Why? Seven is the perfect number, the creation of six days, sanctified by the Divine Sabbath; the seven of this rest is prolonged to eternity and becomes the eight of unfailing light, of unalterable peace.

1. **Liturgie de cristal** Between three and four in the morning, the awakening of the birds: solo blackbird or nightingale improvises, surrounded by notes of sound, by a halo of trills lost very high in the trees. Transpose this on to a religious plane and you have the harmonious silence of heaven.
2. **Vocalise, pour l'Ange qui annonce la fin du Temps** The first and third sections (very short) evoke the power of this mighty angel, crowned with a rainbow and clothed with a cloud, who sets one foot upon the sea and one foot upon the earth. The middle section – these are the impalpable harmonies of heaven. On the piano, gentle cascades of blue-orange chords, garlanding with their distant carillon the *quasi* plain-chant melody for violin and 'cello.
3. **Abîme des Oiseaux** Clarinet alone. The abyss is Time with its sorrows and its weariness. The birds are the opposite of Time; they are our desire for light, stars, rainbows, joyful songs!
4. **Intermède** A scherzo of more external character than the other movements, but linked to them nevertheless by some melodic reminiscences.
5. **Louange à l'Eternité de Jesus** Jesus is considered here as the Word. A long and infinitely slow phrase for the 'cello magnifies with love and reverence the eternity of this gentle and powerful Word, 'which the years will never efface'. Majestically the melody unfolds in a kind of tender and lofty distance. 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was in God, and the Word was God'.
6. **Danse de la fureur, pour les sept trompettes** Rhythmically the most characteristic piece of the series. The four instruments in unison are made to sound like gongs and trumpets. Music of stone, formidable, sonorous granite; the irresistible movement of steel, enormous blocks of purple fury, of iced frenzy! Listen above all to the terrible fortissimo of the theme in augmentation and the change of pitch of its different notes towards the end of the piece.
7. **Fouillis d'arcs en ciel, pour l'Ange qui annonce la fin du Temps** Certain passages from the second movement return. The Mighty Angel appears, and above all, the rainbow crowns him. In my dreams I hear and see clouds and melodies classed in known forms and colours; then, after this transitory stage a medley of superhuman sounds and colours. These swords of fire, these flows of blue-orange lava, these sudden stars; these are the medleys, the rainbows!
8. **Louange à l'Immortalité de Jesus** A long violin solo making a pendant to the 'cello solo of the fifth movement. Why this second paean? It is addressed more specifically to the second aspect of Jesus – the man Jesus – to the Word made flesh, resurrected immortally to give us life. All here is love. Its slow ascent towards the extreme high register is the ascent of man towards his God, of the Child of God towards his Father, of the deified Being towards paradise.