



London Philharmonic Orchestra

**MESSIAEN**  
**DES CANYONS AUX ÉTOILES**

**CHRISTOPH ESCHENBACH** *conductor*

**TZIMON BARTO** *piano*

**JOHN RYAN** *horn*

**ANDREW BARCLAY** *xylorimba*

**ERIKA ÖHMAN** *glockenspiel*

**LONDON PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA**

# OLIVIER MESSIAEN

## DES CANYONS AUX ÉTOILES (FROM THE CANYONS TO THE STARS)

### Part One

- |    |       |   |
|----|-------|---|
| 01 | 04:29 | Le désert (The Desert)  |
| 02 | 06:10 | Les Orioles (The Orioles)   |
| 03 | 07:21 | Ce qui est écrit sur les étoiles... (What is Written in the Stars...) |
| 04 | 04:26 | Le Cossyphe d'Heuglin (The White-browed Robin)                        |
| 05 | 08:24 | Cedar Breaks et le Don de Crainte (Cedar Breaks and the Gift of Awe)  |

### Part Two

- |    |       |  |
|----|-------|--|
| 06 | 04:59 | Appel interstellaire (Interstellar Call)   |
| 07 | 15:00 | Bryce Canyon et les rochers rouge-orange (Bryce Canyon and the Red Orange Rocks) |

### Part Three –

- |    |       |   |
|----|-------|---|
| 08 | 11:57 | Les ressuscités et le chant de l'étoile Aldébaran (The Resurrected and the Song of the Star of Aldebaran) |
| 09 | 11:18 | Le moqueur polyglotte (The Mockingbird)   |
| 10 | 04:33 | La grive des bois (The Wood Thrush)   |
| 11 | 09:52 | Omao, Leiothrix, Elepaio, Shama   |
| 12 | 11:37 | Zion Park et la Cité Céleste (Zion Park and the Celestial City)   |

The *Turangalila-Symphonie* in 1949 marked the start of Messiaen's long and happy relationship with American musicians and audiences. In the autumn of 1970, Messiaen and his wife Yvonne Loriod embarked on a six-week concert tour of the USA and Canada. It was during this visit that a commission from Mrs Alice Tully was confirmed: a work for her Musica Aeterna Orchestra to be performed in the concert hall at New York's Lincoln Center that carries Mrs Tully's name, to celebrate the bicentenary of the United States Declaration of Independence. For Messiaen, the commission was an opportunity to explore some of the continent's wildest and most elemental landscapes. These turned out to be a marvellous inspiration.

The specific locations mentioned in *Des canyons aux étoiles* include the astonishing Bryce Canyon with its orange rock formations. Messiaen and Yvonne Loriod visited this natural wonder in 1972, and the composer was photographed by his wife walking, awe-struck, among the rocks, and notating the birdsongs he heard there. The musical results (in the seventh movement) have a sheer majesty, notably the brass refrain, that seems an ideal musical transformation of a breathtaking natural phenomenon. As will be clear, this is no musical tourism. Though Zion Park was partly the inspiration for the work's radiant final chorale, Messiaen was also looking beyond:

the work's title takes us upwards, from the depths of the canyons, to the songs of birds, to outer space, and ultimately to the Celestial City. The composer described his broad conception of the work as follows:

'From the Canyons to the Stars ... that is to say, ascending from the canyons to the stars – and higher, to the resurrected in Paradise – in order to glorify God in all His creation. The beauties of the earth (its rocks and birdsong), and the beauties of the physical sky and the spiritual sky. Consequently, it is above all a religious work, a work of praise and contemplation. It is also a geological and astronomical work. The sound-colours include all the hues of the rainbow and revolve around the blue of Steller's Jay and the red of Bryce Canyon. The majority of the birds are from Utah and the Hawaiian islands. Heaven is symbolised by Zion Park and the star Aldebaran.'

In terms of instrumentation, *Des canyons* is unusual – the highly inventive scoring is more like chamber music on a grand scale than conventional orchestral writing. As well as solo piano and horn, Messiaen includes 13 string instruments, each with its own individual part (with no doubling), as well as quadruple woodwind, triple brass, tuned and untuned percussion, including *éoliphone* –

wind machine – and *géophone* – sand machine. Messiaen included these last two instruments in order to evoke the sounds of nature: of wind and of the earth. (The *géophone* was specially made to his instructions, and carefully guarded by the composer himself between performances – after the premiere Messiaen returned it to his hotel room for safe-keeping before going on to a celebratory meal).

The movement for solo horn, the *Interstellar Call*, was the first to be written and was originally intended to stand alone: a short memorial piece for Jean-Pierre Guézec, one of Messiaen's pupils, who died in 1971 at the age of 36. The rest of the work was composed between 1971 and 1974, mostly after a visit to Utah and Arizona in May 1972.

*Des canyons* expresses Messiaen's sense of sheer wonder at the natural world – at the marvels of Creation itself – more completely than any of his previous works. Several of the American birds in the work, notably the Wood Thrush, the Mockingbird and the Baltimore Oriole, had been explored two decades earlier in *Oiseaux exotiques* (1955–6), but here they reappear in a much larger and more far-reaching work.

*Des Canyons* is divided into three parts:

### **Part One**

According to the composer, *The Desert* represents the emptiness that is needed if the soul is to be receptive to the message of the Holy Spirit, while *The Orioles* represents some of Messiaen's favourite American birds (the Baltimore oriole had already taken a starring role in *Oiseaux exotiques*). *What is Written in the Stars...* is headed by a quotation from the Book of Daniel (also used in Walton's *Belshazzar's Feast*): 'And this is the writing that was written: Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin. Mene: numbered; Tekel: weighed; Upharsin: divided'. Messiaen commented that he 'applied the idea of number, weight and division to the patterning of the stars. Musically, these fateful words are conveyed by an alphabet of sonorities and durations of fixed harmonies.' After *The White-browed Robin*, a piano solo that evokes 'a prodigious songster' (from south-east Africa – a characteristic example of Messiaen's geographical versatility), comes *Cedar Breaks and the Gift of Awe*. Messiaen described Cedar Breaks in Utah as having a 'wild and colourful beauty ... a vast natural amphitheatre plunging into a deep gorge'. So struck was the composer by this place, that he was forcibly reminded of one of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit – the Gift of Awe. Again he uses the alphabet of sounds

employed in the third movement, but this time as part of a musical canvas populated by the birds that are native to Cedar Breaks (Clark's Nutcracker, robins and hawks).

## Part Two

The *Interstellar Call* for solo horn exploits the possibilities of the instrument to the full, including stopped trills and flutter-tongue, in music that seems to call across vast spaces and makes immensely telling use of silences. Messiaen's superscription for this movement is a quotation from Psalm 147: 'He healeth the broken in heart and bindeth up their wounds. He telleth the number of the stars; he calleth them all by their names.' This is followed by *Bryce Canyon and the Red-Orange Rocks*, an astonishing evocation of natural wonder – the longest movement in *Des canyons* and a pivotal one. Here the majestic red-orange of the rocks meets the blue of Steller's Jay, a spectacular bird that flies over the canyon, and several other birds. The result is a movement of dazzling brilliance, alternating piano solos, elaborate percussion writing and chorale-like ideas, ending in a glorious *fortissimo*.

## Part Three

In *The Resurrected and the Song of the Star Aldebaran*, Messiaen makes the stars sing. Scored mainly for strings,

this rapturous slow movement is punctuated by fragments of birdsong and 'droplets of water and silken rustlings'. Written for piano solo, *The Mockingbird* is a portrait of one of Messiaen's favourite birds, described by him as 'America's most celebrated songster'. This is followed by another of the American birds Messiaen had known for at least two decades: the Wood Thrush – the sun-drenched poet of *Oiseaux exotiques*. It is now heard at its most cheerful and joyous, celebrating lines from the theologian Blessed John of Ruysbroeck: 'When we enter the state of grace, we receive from the Holy Spirit a new name, which shall be eternal.' In *Omao, Leiothrix, Elepaio, Shama* Messiaen again evokes the sound-world of *Oiseaux exotiques* with the triumphant Shama (heard on brass instruments here). The final movement, *Zion Park and the Celestial City*, is a vision of glory, of Paradise, and of hope. A luminous chorale is punctuated by ecstatic birdsong choruses until, finally, a radiant A major chord is heard on the strings, and, as Messiaen himself put it, 'the bells ring out heralding the ultimate joy.'

The first performance of *Des canyons aux étoiles* took place in Alice Tully Hall in New York on 20 November 1974, with Yvonne Loriod as the solo pianist, Sharon Moe as the horn soloist, and the Musica Aeterna Orchestra conducted by Frederic Waldman. It was almost a year later before the

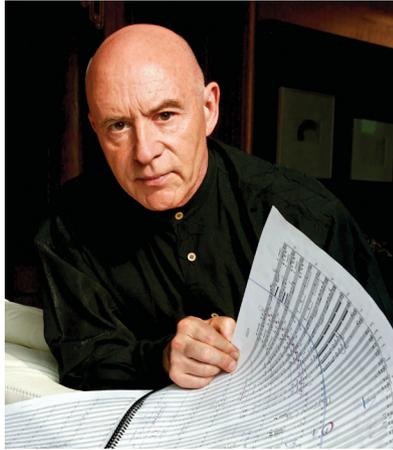
work was heard for the first time in Europe: in Paris on 29 October 1975, conducted by Marius Constant. A fortnight later, the British premiere was given at the Royal Festival Hall on 12 November: Pierre Boulez conducted the BBC Symphony Orchestra, with Yvonne Loriod and Alan Civil as soloists. On stage after the performance, Pierre Boulez presented Messiaen – his former teacher – with the Gold Medal of the Royal Philharmonic Society.

*Programme notes © Nigel Simeone*



Rock Bowl Canyon, USA © Thinkstockphoto

## CHRISTOPH ESCHENBACH *conductor*



© Eric Brissaud

Christoph Eschenbach is in demand as a distinguished guest conductor with the finest orchestras and opera houses throughout the world including Vienna, Berlin, London, New York, Los Angeles, Boston, Chicago, Paris, and Shanghai among others. He began his tenure as Music Director of the National Symphony Orchestra

in September 2010, as well as Music Director of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington D.C. He was formerly Music Director of the Orchestre de Paris (2000–10), The Philadelphia Orchestra (2003–08), the NDR Sinfonieorchester (1998–2004) and the Houston Symphony (1988–99).

He is regularly invited by prestigious music festivals including Salzburg, Prague, Tanglewood, Ravinia, Schleswig-Holstein, Rheingau, St Petersburg, Granada and others.

As a pianist, he continues his fruitful collaboration with baritone Matthias Goerne performing worldwide and recording duo recitals of the romantic Lieder repertoire of

Schubert, Brahms and Schumann.

A prolific recording artist over five decades, Christoph Eschenbach has an impressive discography as both a conductor and a pianist on a number of prominent labels. His recordings include works ranging from those by J.S. Bach to contemporary music and reflect his commitment not just to canonical works but the music of the late 20th and early 21st century as well. In 2014 he received a Grammy Award for his recording of Hindemith works with Midori and the NDR Sinfonieorchester.

Mentored by George Szell and Herbert von Karajan, it is very important for Christoph Eschenbach to pass on his own musical knowledge and experience. As such, he dedicates much time each season running masterclasses and young orchestra academies (including Schleswig-Holstein Academy Orchestra, Kronberg Academy and the Manhattan School of Music).

His many honours include the Légion d'Honneur, Commandeur dans l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres, the Commander's Cross of German Order of Merit and the Leonard Bernstein Award from the Pacific Music Festival.

## TZIMON BARTO

*piano*



© Malcolm Yawn

Tzimon Barto is recognised as one of the foremost American pianists of his generation.

His international breakthrough came in the mid-1980s, when he appeared at the Vienna Musikverein and the Salzburg Festival at the invitation of Herbert von Karajan. Since then he has performed with all the

major international orchestras worldwide and is a frequent guest at renowned festivals including Ravinia in the USA. For 25 years he has enjoyed a close musical collaboration with conductor Christoph Eschenbach.

His extensive discography ranges from works by Rameau, Haydn, Schumann and Schubert to Tchaikovsky, Prokofiev and Gershwin.

Tzimon Barto has always been actively involved in contemporary music and created an international composition competition for piano solo in 2006 – the Barto Prize. In addition to his career as a pianist, he is also a writer and speaks five languages fluently.

## JOHN RYAN

*horn*



© Benjamin Ealovega

John Ryan graduated from London's Guildhall School of Music & Drama in 2001, where he studied with Jeff Bryant and Richard Bissill. He was appointed Co-Principal Horn with the London Symphony Orchestra in the same year. John has played as Guest Principal with the Philharmonia, Royal Philharmonic and City of

Birmingham Symphony orchestras and the BBC National Orchestra of Wales, and was appointed Principal Horn of the London Philharmonic Orchestra in 2009.

As a soloist John Ryan has performed both of Strauss's horn concertos, the Mozart concertos, and Britten's *Serenade for tenor, horn and strings*. He has recorded Mozart's Second Horn Concerto on the Lyric label with the RTÉ Concert Orchestra. As a chamber musician John has appeared as a featured artist at festivals around Europe and the USA. He has appeared on many soundtracks as a session musician playing the music of John Williams, James Horner, Howard Shore, Harry Gregson-Williams and Alexandre Desplat amongst others.

## ANDREW BARCLAY

*xylorimba*

© Benjamin Ealovega



Andrew Barclay is the London Philharmonic Orchestra's Principal Percussionist and has been a member of the Orchestra since 1995. After studying at the Royal College of Music, he embarked on a wide-ranging freelance career with London and regional orchestras, chamber ensembles and contemporary music groups. In 1990 he joined

the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra and spent five years there before returning to London.

Andrew Barclay has performed in West End shows including *The Lion King* and *Les Misérables* and on film soundtracks including *The Hobbit*, *The Lord of the Rings* and *Harry Potter*. He has also appeared as Guest Principal with the Philharmonia, London Symphony and Royal Opera House orchestras, among others.

He is a professor of percussion at the Royal Academy of Music and is regularly invited to give classes both in the UK and abroad.

## ERIKA ÖHMAN

*glockenspiel*

© Ian Cape



Erika Öhman studied at the Royal Academy of Music, London, as well as in her native Sweden at the Royal College of Music, Stockholm.

Within a year of graduating, Erika Öhman joined the Hallé Orchestra in 2008 as Assistant Timpanist and Percussionist. She also freelances with

various orchestras in the UK and Sweden, including as Guest Principal with the City of Birmingham Symphony, Philharmonia and London Philharmonic orchestras.

Together with her sister Karolina, Erika Öhman plays throughout Europe in the award-winning cello/percussion duo UmeDuo. They received first prize in the prestigious Swedish competition 'Ung & Lovande', resulting in two tours of Sweden in 2014/15. Prior to that, UmeDuo were selected to perform as part of the Park Lane Group series at Queen Elizabeth Hall and St Martin-in-the-Fields.

In 2013, Erika Öhman was honoured to be made an Associate of the Royal Academy of Music.

# LONDON PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA

The London Philharmonic Orchestra is known as one of the world's great orchestras with a reputation secured by its performances in the concert hall and opera house, its many award-winning recordings, its trail-blazing international tours and its pioneering education work. Distinguished conductors who have held positions with the Orchestra since its foundation in 1932 by Sir Thomas Beecham include Sir Adrian Boult, Sir John Pritchard, Bernard Haitink, Sir Georg Solti, Klaus Tennstedt, Franz Welser-Möst and Kurt Masur. Vladimir Jurowski was appointed the Orchestra's Principal Guest Conductor in March 2003 and became Principal Conductor in September 2007. The London Philharmonic Orchestra has been Resident Symphony Orchestra at Southbank Centre's Royal Festival Hall since 1992 and there it presents its main series of concerts between September and May each year. In summer, the

Orchestra moves to Sussex where it has been Resident at Glyndebourne Festival Opera for 50 years. The Orchestra also performs at venues around the UK and has made numerous tours to America, Europe and Japan, and visited India, Hong Kong, China, South Korea, Australia, South Africa and Abu Dhabi.

The London Philharmonic Orchestra made its first recordings on 10 October 1932, just three days after its first public performance. It has recorded and broadcast regularly ever since, and in 2005 established its own record label. These recordings are taken mainly from live concerts given by conductors including LPO Principal Conductors from Beecham and Boult, through Haitink, Solti and Tennstedt, to Masur and Jurowski.

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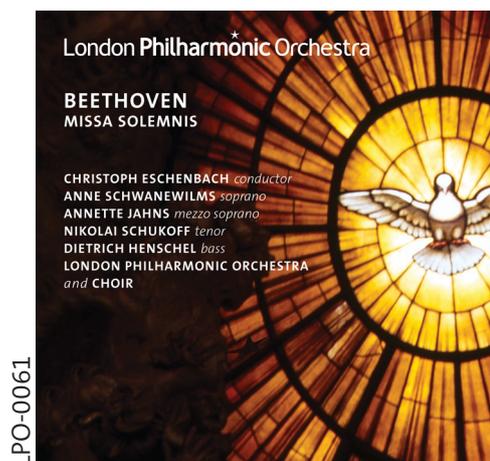
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## **OLIVER MESSIAEN (1908–92)**

### **100.06 Des canyons aux étoiles (from the Canyons to the Stars)**

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**Pieter Schoeman** leader

Recorded live at southbank centre's **ROYAL FESTIVAL HALL**, London

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