

# WIGMORE HALL

Sunday 8 October 2023  
7.30pm

Magdalena Kožená mezzo-soprano  
Mitsuko Uchida piano

Claude Debussy (1862-1918)

Chansons de Bilitis (1897-8)

*La flûte de Pan • La chevelure • Le tombeau des naïades*

5 poèmes de Baudelaire (1887-9)

*Le balcon • Harmonie du soir • Le jet d'eau •  
Recueillement • La mort des amants*

Interval

Claude Debussy

Ariettes oubliées (1885-7 rev. 1903)

*C'est l'extase • Il pleure dans mon cœur •  
L'ombre des arbres • Chevaux de bois • Green • Spleen*

Olivier Messiaen (1908-1992)

From *Poèmes pour Mi* (1936)

*L'épouse • Ta voix • Les deux guerriers •  
Le collier • Prière exaucée*



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Debussy composed his *3 chansons de Bilitis* in 1897-8, on the erotic poems which his friend Pierre Louÿs had claimed were translations of ancient Sapphic texts, but which were in fact Louÿs's own inventions. Edward Lockspeiser wrote that Debussy's settings were 'the most moving revelations of [his] hedonistic, pagan art', developing the evocative style of the *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* into something yet more strange and remote. The secret world and shifting moods of 'La flûte de Pan' give way to 'La chevelure', with its echoes of *Pelléas et Mélisande*, and the icy vision of desolation presented in 'Le tombeau des naïades'.

It is uncertain when Debussy and Louÿs first met, but it may well have been at the Librairie de l'Art indépendant, the bookshop and publishing house established by Edmond Bailly. It was Bailly who first issued the *5 poèmes de Baudelaire* in February 1890, in an edition of just 150 copies. These songs, Debussy's only settings of Baudelaire, were composed between 1887 and 1889 and show the influence of Wagner. This is unsurprising given that Debussy visited the Bayreuth Festival in 1888 (for *Parsifal* and *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*) and 1889 (for *Tristan und Isolde*) – though all the while he did his best to resist the impact of Wagner's music on his own. But in spite of Debussy's ambivalent view of Wagner, his shadow is certainly in evidence here. 'Le balcon' is conceived on an unusually large scale; it is by far the longest of Debussy's songs, an immensely subtle setting which seems alive to every nuance of Baudelaire's poem. As Roger Nichols wrote, it 'shows how sensitive Debussy was ... to the double need of recapitulation/confirmation and of forward movement.' In 'Harmonie du soir', Baudelaire used the Malay pantoum as his form and Debussy mirrors this in a sonorous and richly crafted musical setting. In 'Le jet d'eau' Debussy seems to put thoughts of Wagnerism to one side to explore a musical language that prefigures Mélisande's music in *Pelléas et Mélisande*. This light-filled song is followed by the more pensive 'Recueillement', its piano introduction certainly Debussy-like, but with clear nods in the direction of *Tristan* (Roger Nichols has speculated that it may have been written after Debussy saw *Tristan* in 1889). The last song in the set, 'La mort des amants', was the first to be composed, in December 1887. Like 'Recueillement', Baudelaire's poem is a sonnet, and here the text concerns the ecstasy of two lovers, followed by their 'death' (whether real or metaphorical) which brings some kind of happiness. Debussy's music falls mostly into regular phrases, giving it a more formal quality than some of the other songs in the set.

The *Ariettes oubliées*, six settings of poems by Paul Verlaine, were composed between 1885 and 1887, then revised by the composer in 1903, at which point

he added a dedication to the Scottish soprano Mary Garden, the 'unforgettable Mélisande' to whom 'this music (already a little old) is dedicated in affection and admiration.' In May 1904 Garden and the composer made a recording of three of the *Ariettes oubliées* which demonstrates why Debussy thought so highly of her; but when he first wrote the songs, the singer he had in mind was Marie-Blanche Vasnier, an earlier muse (with whom Debussy was infatuated for a time) at whose house he first encountered Verlaine's poetry. It is certainly possible to see the whole set as having its origins in a kind of declaration of love, at its most languorous in 'C'est l'extase' and 'Il pleure dans mon cœur', at its most despairing in 'L'ombre des arbres' and at its most vulnerable in 'Green' and 'Spleen'.

There's no such uncertainty about Messiaen's *Poèmes pour Mi*. In 1936, Messiaen and his first wife, Claire Delbos, were able to spend the summer at the small lakeside house they had built at Petichet in the Isère, a spectacular setting, overlooked by mountains, where Messiaen was to do most of his composing over the next five decades. 'Mi' was his pet name for Claire, and the songs he wrote that summer are a rapturous series of love songs, on poems by the composer himself. During the same summer, Delbos – a composer herself – wrote her settings of *L'âme en bourgeois*, the poems written by Messiaen's mother while he had been in the womb. These two intimate explorations of family life were both given their complete premières at a concert in Paris on 28 April 1937, sung by the Wagnerian soprano Marcelle Bunlet with Messiaen at the piano. The same year, Messiaen made a version of the songs for voice and orchestra. Beautiful as the orchestration is, the original voice and piano version emphasises the private nature of these songs. They were published in March 1937 by Durand in two volumes, the second of which comprises five songs: 'L'épouse', 'Ta voix', 'Les deux guerriers', 'Le collier' and 'Prière exaucée'. In 'L'épouse', the bond linking man and woman in marriage is compared with that of Christ and the church: to Messiaen, love and faith were indivisible, and the one was a joyous mirror of the other. In 'Ta voix', the beloved is a window to eternity who will come to number among the angels, while 'Les deux guerriers' are two soldiers of Christ, marching towards the gates of paradise. 'Le collier' describes an exotic necklace and likens it to the beloved's arms around the poet's neck, while 'Prière exaucée' begins with a paraphrase of words from the Mass ('only say the word and my soul shall be healed') and ends in bliss – as passionate, carnal love mingles with the joy of the Resurrection in the kind of glorious mélange only Messiaen could have imagined.

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## Claude Debussy (1862-1918)

### Chansons de Bilitis

(1897-8)

*Pierre Louÿs*

### Songs of Bilitis

#### La flûte de Pan

Pour le jour des Hyacinthies,  
il m'a donné une syrinx  
faite de roseaux bien  
taillés, unis avec la blanche  
cire qui est douce à mes  
lèvres comme le miel.

Il m'apprend à jouer, assise sur  
ses genoux; mais je suis un  
peu tremblante. Il en joue  
après moi, si doucement que  
je l'entends à peine.

Nous n'avons rien à nous dire,  
tant nous sommes près l'un  
de l'autre; mais nos chansons  
veulent se répondre, et tour à  
tour nos bouches s'unissent  
sur la flûte.

Il est tard; voici le chant des  
grenouilles vertes qui  
commence avec la nuit. Ma  
mère ne croira jamais que  
je suis restée si longtemps  
à chercher ma ceinture  
perdue.

#### La chevelure

Il m'a dit: 'Cette nuit, j'ai rêvé.  
J'avais ta chevelure autour  
de mon cou. J'avais tes  
cheveux comme un collier  
noir autour de ma nuque et  
sur ma poitrine.

'Je les caressais, et c'étaient les  
miens; et nous étions liés pour  
toujours ainsi, par la même  
chevelure la bouche sur la  
bouche, ainsi que deux  
lauriers n'ont souvent qu'une  
racine.

'Et peu à peu, il m'a semblé,  
tant nos membres étaient  
confondus, que je devenais  
toi-même ou que tu entrais  
en moi comme mon  
songe.'

#### The flute of Pan

For Hyacinthus day he  
gave me a syrinx made  
of carefully cut reeds,  
bonded with white wax  
which tastes sweet to  
my lips like honey.

He teaches me to play, as  
I sit on his lap; but I am  
a little fearful. He plays  
it after me, so gently  
that I scarcely hear him.

We have nothing to say,  
so close are we one to  
another, but our songs  
try to answer each  
other, and our mouths  
join in turn on the flute.

It is late; here is the song  
of the green frogs that  
begins with the night.  
My mother will never  
believe I stayed out so  
long to look for my lost  
sash.

#### The tresses of hair

He said to me: 'Last night I  
dreamed. I had your  
tresses around my neck. I  
had your hair like a black  
necklace all round my  
nape and over my breast.

I caressed it and it was  
mine; and we were  
united thus forever by  
the same tresses,  
mouth on mouth, just  
as two laurels often  
share one root.

And gradually it seemed  
to me, so intertwined  
were our limbs, that I  
was becoming you, or  
you were entering into  
me like a dream.'

Quand il eut achevé, il mit  
doucement ses mains sur  
mes épaules, et il me  
regarda d'un regard si  
tendre, que je baissai les  
yeux avec un frisson.

When he had finished, he  
gently set his hands on  
my shoulders and  
gazed at me so  
tenderly that I lowered  
my eyes with a shiver.

#### Le tombeau des naïades

Le long du bois couvert de  
givre, je marchais; mes  
cheveux devant ma bouche  
se fleurissaient de petits  
glaçons, et mes sandales  
étaient lourdes de neige  
fangueuse et tassée.

Il me dit: 'Que cherches-tu?'  
– 'Je suis la trace du satyre.  
Ses petits pas fourchus  
alternent des trous dans  
un manteau blanc.' Il me  
dit: 'Les satyres sont morts.

'Les satyres et les nymphes  
aussi. Depuis trente ans il  
n'a pas fait un hiver aussi  
terrible. La trace que tu  
vois est celle d'un bouc.  
Mais restons ici, où est leur  
tombeau.'

Et avec le fer de sa houe  
il cassa la glace de la  
source où jadis riaient  
les naïades. Il prenait  
de grands morceaux  
froids, et les soulevant vers  
le ciel pâle, il  
regardait au travers.

#### The tomb of the Naiads

Along the frost-bound  
wood I walked; my hair,  
across my mouth,  
blossomed with tiny  
icicles, and my sandals  
were heavy with  
muddy, packed snow.

He said to me: 'What do you  
seek?' 'I follow the satyr's  
track. His little cloven hoof  
marks alternate like holes  
in a white cloak.' He said  
to me: 'The satyrs are  
dead.

The satyrs and the nymphs  
too. For thirty years there  
has not been so harsh a  
winter. The tracks you see  
are those of a goat. But let  
us stay here, where their  
tomb is.'

And with the iron head of his  
hoe he broke the ice of  
the spring where the  
naiads used to laugh. He  
picked up some huge  
cold fragments, and,  
raising them to the pale  
sky, gazed through them.

## 5 poèmes de Baudelaire (1887-9)

Charles Baudelaire

### Le balcon

Mère des souvenirs,  
maîtresse des maîtresses,  
Ô toi, tous mes plaisirs! ô toi,  
tous mes devoirs!  
Tu te rappelleras la beauté  
des caresses,  
La douceur du foyer et le  
charme des soirs,  
Mère des souvenirs,  
maîtresse des maîtresses.

Les soirs illuminés par  
l'ardeur du charbon,  
Et les soirs au balcon,  
voilés de vapeur  
rose.  
Que ton sein m'était doux!  
que ton cœur m'était bon!  
Nous avons dit souvent  
d'impérissables choses  
Les soirs illuminés par  
l'ardeur du charbon.

Que les soleils sont beaux  
par les chaudes soirées!  
Que l'espace est profond!  
que le cœur est puissant!  
En me penchant vers toi,  
reine des adorées,  
Je croyais respirer le parfum  
de ton sang.  
Que les soleils sont beaux  
par les chaudes soirées!

La nuit s'épaississait ainsi  
qu'une cloison,  
Et mes yeux dans le noir  
devinaient tes prunelles,  
Et je buvais ton souffle, ô  
douceur! ô poison!  
Et tes pieds s'endormaient  
dans mes mains  
fraternelles.  
La nuit s'épaississait ainsi  
qu'une cloison.

Je sais l'art d'évoquer les  
minutes heureuses,  
Et revis mon passé blotti  
dans tes genoux.  
Car à quoi bon chercher tes  
beautés langoureuses  
Ailleurs qu'en ton cher corps  
et qu'en ton cœur si doux?  
Je sais l'art d'évoquer les  
minutes heureuses!

### The balcony

Mother of memories,  
mistress of mistresses,  
O you, all my pleasures, O  
you, all my duties!  
You will recall the beauty  
of caresses,  
the hearth's sweetness and  
the evenings' charm,  
mother of memories,  
mistress of mistresses!

Evenings lit with the glow  
of coals,  
and evenings on the  
balcony, veiled in pink  
vapours.  
How soft your breast was,  
how warm your heart!  
We have often said  
imperishable things,  
on evenings lit with the  
glow of coals.

How beautiful the suns on  
warm evenings!  
How space is deep, how  
strong the heart!  
Leaning toward you,  
queen of my loves,  
I seemed to breathe the  
scent of your blood.  
How beautiful the suns on  
warm evenings!

Night thickened like a  
wall,  
and my eyes in the dark  
divined your own,  
and I drank in your breath, O  
sweetness, O poison!  
And your feet were  
cradled in my fraternal  
hands.  
Night thickened like a  
wall.

I am skilled in the art of  
recalling rapture,  
and relive my past, my  
head in your lap.  
For where else should I seek  
your languid beauty  
but in your dear body and  
most loving heart?  
I am skilled in the art of  
recalling rapture!

Ces serments, ces parfums,  
ces baisers infinis,  
Renaîtront-ils d'un gouffre  
interdit à nos sondes  
Comme montent au ciel les  
soleils rajeunis  
Après s'être lavés au fond  
des mers profondes  
- O serments! ô parfums! ô  
baisers infinis!

### Harmonie du soir

Voici venir le temps où  
vibrant sur sa tige  
Chaque fleur s'évapore ainsi  
qu'un encensoir;  
Les sons et les parfums  
tournent dans l'air du soir;  
Valse mélancolique et  
langoureux vertige!

Chaque fleur s'évapore ainsi  
qu'un encensoir;  
Le violon frémit comme un  
cœur qu'on afflige;  
Valse mélancolique et  
langoureux vertige!  
Le ciel est triste et beau  
comme un grand reposoir.

Le violon frémit comme un  
cœur qu'on afflige,  
Un cœur tendre, qui hait le  
néant vaste et noir!  
Le ciel est triste et beau  
comme un grand reposoir;  
Le soleil s'est noyé dans son  
sang qui se fige.

Un cœur tendre, qui hait le  
néant vaste et noir,  
Du passé lumineux recueille  
tout vestige!  
Le soleil s'est noyé dans son  
sang qui se fige ...  
Ton souvenir en moi luit  
comme un ostensor!

These vows, these scents,  
these infinite kisses,  
will they rise from a pit we  
are forbidden to fathom,  
as the reborn suns  
ascend the sky,  
having washed themselves  
in the depths of the sea?  
O vows! O scents! O  
infinite kisses!

### Evening harmony

Now comes the time when,  
quivering on its stem,  
each flower sheds  
perfume like a censer;  
sounds and scents turn in  
the evening air;  
melancholy waltz and  
reeling languor!

Each flower sheds  
perfume like a censer;  
the violin throbs like a  
wounded heart;  
melancholy waltz and  
reeling languor!  
The sky is sad and beautiful  
like a great altar.

The violin throbs like a  
wounded heart,  
a fond heart that loathes  
the vast black void!  
The sky is sad and beautiful  
like a great altar;  
the sun has drowned in  
its congealing blood.

A fond heart that loathes  
the vast black void  
and garners in all the  
luminous past!  
The sun has drowned in  
its congealing blood ...  
Your memory within me  
shines like a monstrance!

## Le jet d'eau

Tes beaux yeux sont las,  
pauvre amante!  
Reste longtemps, sans les  
rouvrir,  
Dans cette pose nonchalante  
Où t'a surprise le  
plaisir.  
Dans la cour le jet d'eau qui  
jase  
Et ne se tait ni nuit ni jour,  
Entretient doucement  
l'extase  
Où ce soir m'a plongé  
l'amour.

La gerbe d'eau qui berce  
Ses mille  
fleurs,  
Que la lune  
traverse  
De ses pâleurs,  
Tombe comme une averse  
De larges pleurs.

Ainsi ton âme qu'incendie  
L'éclair brûlant des  
voluptés  
S'élançait, rapide et hardie,  
Vers les vastes cieux  
enchantés.  
Puis, elle s'épanche,  
mourante,  
En un flot de triste langueur,  
Qui par une invisible pente  
Descend jusqu'au fond de  
mon cœur.

La gerbe d'eau qui berce  
Ses mille  
fleurs,  
Que la lune  
traverse  
De ses pâleurs,  
Tombe comme une averse  
De larges pleurs.

O toi, que la nuit rend si  
belle,  
Qu'il m'est doux, penché vers  
tes seins,  
D'écouter la plainte  
éternelle  
Qui sanglote dans les  
bassins!  
Lune, eau sonore, nuit  
bénie,  
Arbres qui frissonnent autour,  
Votre pure mélancolie  
Est le miroir de mon amour.

## The fountain

Your beautiful eyes are  
fatigued, poor lover!  
Rest awhile, without  
opening them anew,  
in this careless pose,  
where pleasure surprised  
you.  
The babbling fountain in  
the courtyard,  
never silent night or day,  
sweetly prolongs the  
ecstasy  
where love this evening  
plunged me.

The sheaf of water  
swaying its thousand  
flowers,  
through which the moon  
gleams  
with its pallid light,  
falls like a shower  
of great tears.

And so your soul, lit  
by the searing flash of  
ecstasy,  
leaps swift and bold  
to vast enchanted  
skies.  
And then, dying, spills  
over  
in a wave of sad listlessness,  
down some invisible incline  
into the depths of my  
heart.

The sheaf of water  
swaying its thousand  
flowers,  
through which the moon  
gleams  
with its pallid light,  
falls like a shower  
of great tears.

O you, whom night  
renders so beautiful,  
how sweet, as I lean  
toward your breasts,  
to listen to the eternal  
lament  
sobbing in the fountain's  
basin!  
O moon, lapping water,  
blessed night,  
trees that quiver all around,  
your sheer melancholy  
is the mirror of my love.

La gerbe d'eau qui berce  
Ses mille  
fleurs,  
Que la lune  
traverse  
De ses pâleurs,  
Tombe comme une averse  
De larges pleurs.

The sheaf of water  
swaying its thousand  
flowers,  
through which the moon  
gleams  
with its pallid light,  
falls like a shower  
of great tears.

## Recueillement

Sois sage, ô ma Douleur,  
et tiens-toi plus tranquille.  
Tu réclamais le Soir ;  
il descend ; le voici :  
Une atmosphère obscure  
enveloppe la ville,  
Aux uns portant la paix,  
aux autres le souci.

Pendant que des mortels  
la multitude vile,  
Sous le fouet du Plaisir,  
ce bourreau sans merci,  
Va cueillir des remords  
dans la fête servile,  
Ma Douleur, donne-moi la  
main ;  
viens par ici,

Loin d'eux. Vois se pencher  
les défuntes  
Années,  
Sur les balcons du ciel,  
en robes  
surannées ;  
Surgir du fond des eaux  
le Regret  
souriant ;

Le Soleil moribond  
s'endormir sous une arche,  
Et, comme un long linceul  
traînant à l'Orient,  
Entends, ma chère, entends  
la douce Nuit qui marche.

## Meditation

Be good, O my Sorrow,  
and keep more calm.  
You longed for Evening ;  
it is falling ; now :  
A dusky atmosphere  
enfolds the town,  
Bringing peace to some,  
to others care.

While the vile  
multitude of mortals,  
Lashed by Pleasure,  
that pitiless tormentor,  
Goes gathering remorse  
in abject revels,  
Give me your hand, my  
Sorrow ;  
come this way.

Far from them. See  
the departed Years  
leaning,  
In outmoded dress,  
from the heavens'  
balustrades ;  
See smiling Regret  
well up from the water's  
depths ;

The dying sun fall asleep  
beneath an arch,  
And like a long shroud  
trailing in the East,  
Listen, my love, listen  
to the tread of gentle Night.

## La mort des amants

## The death of lovers

Nous aurons des lits pleins  
d'odeurs légères,  
Des divans profonds comme  
des tombeaux,  
Et d'étranges fleurs sur des  
étagères,  
Écloses pour nous sous des  
cieux plus beaux.

We shall have beds  
drenched in light scents,  
divans as deep as  
tombs,  
and displays of exotic  
flowers  
that bloomed for us  
beneath fairer skies.

Usant à l'envi leurs chaleurs  
dernières,  
Nos deux cœurs seront deux  
vastes flambeaux,  
Qui réfléchiront leurs  
doubles lumières  
Dans nos deux esprits, ces  
miroirs jumeaux.

Outdoing even their most  
recent passions  
our two hearts will be two  
mighty torches,  
reflecting their twin  
lights  
in our two twin-mirrored  
souls.

Un soir fait de rose et de bleu  
mystique,  
Nous échangerons un éclair  
unique,  
Comme un long sanglot tout  
chargé d'adieux ;

On an evening of pink  
and mystic blue,  
we shall exchange a  
single radiant glance,  
like a long sob laden with  
farewells;

Et plus tard un Ange,  
entr'ouvrant les portes,  
Viendra ranimer, fidèle et  
joyeux,  
Les miroirs ternis et les  
flammes mortes.

And later an Angel, pushing  
the portals ajar,  
will come, faithful and  
joyous, to revive  
the tarnished mirrors and  
lifeless flames.

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## Interval

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## Claude Debussy

### Ariettes oubliées (1885-7 rev. 1903)

*Paul Verlaine*

#### C'est l'extase

#### It is languorous rapture

C'est l'extase langoureuse,  
C'est la fatigue amoureuse,  
C'est tous les frissons des  
bois  
Parmi l'étreinte des brises,  
C'est, vers les ramures  
grises,  
Le chœur des petites voix.

It is languorous rapture,  
it is amorous fatigue,  
it is all the tremors of the  
forest  
in the breezes' embrace,  
it is, around the grey  
branches,  
the choir of tiny voices.

Ô le frêle et frais  
murmure!  
Cela gazouille et  
susurre,  
Cela ressemble au cri doux  
Que l'herbe agitée expire ...

O the delicate, fresh  
murmuring!  
The warbling and  
whispering,  
it is like the soft cry  
the ruffled grass gives out ...

Tu dirais, sous l'eau qui  
vire,  
Le roulis sourd des  
cailloux.

You might take it for the  
muffled sound  
of pebbles in the swirling  
stream.

Cette âme qui se lamente  
En cette plainte dormante  
C'est la nôtre, n'est-ce pas?  
La mienne, dis, et la tienne,  
Dont s'exhale l'humble  
antienne  
Par ce tiède soir, tout  
bas?

This soul which grieves  
in this subdued lament,  
it is ours, is it not?  
Mine, and yours too,  
breathing out our humble  
hymn  
on this warm evening,  
soft and low?

#### Il pleure dans mon cœur

#### Tears fall in my heart

Il pleure dans mon cœur  
Comme il pleut sur la ville;  
Quelle est cette langueur  
Qui pénètre mon cœur?

Tears fall in my heart  
as rain falls on the town;  
what is this torpor  
pervading my heart?

Ô bruit doux de la pluie  
Par terre et sur les toits!  
Pour un cœur qui s'ennuie,  
Ô le bruit de la pluie!

Ah, the soft sound of rain  
on the ground and roofs!  
For a listless heart,  
ah, the sound of the rain!

Il pleure sans raison  
Dans se cœur qui s'écœure.  
Quoi! Nulle  
trahison? ...  
Ce deuil est sans raison.

Tears fall without reason  
in this disheartened heart.  
What! Was there no  
treason? ...  
This grief is without reason.

C'est bien la pire peine  
De ne savoir pourquoi  
Sans amour et sans  
haine,  
Mon cœur a tant de peine.

And the worst pain of all  
must be not to know why,  
without love and without  
hate  
my heart feels such pain.

#### L'ombre des arbres

#### The shadow of trees

L'ombre des arbres dans la  
rivière embrumée  
Meurt comme de la fumée  
Tandis qu'en l'air, parmi les  
ramures réelles,  
Se plaignent les tourterelles.

The shadow of trees in  
the misty stream  
dies like smoke,  
while up above, in the real  
branches,  
the turtle-doves lament.

Combien, ô voyageur, ce  
paysage blême  
Te mira blême toi-même,  
Et que tristes pleuraient dans  
les hautes feuillées  
Tes espérances  
noyées!

How this faded  
landscape, O traveller,  
watched you yourself fade,  
and how sadly in the lofty  
leaves  
your drowned hopes  
were weeping!

## Chevaux de bois

Tournez, tournez, bons  
chevaux de bois,  
Tournez cent tours, tournez  
mille tours,  
Tournez souvent et tournez  
toujours,  
Tournez, tournez au son des  
hautbois.

L'enfant tout rouge et la  
mère blanche,  
Le gars en noir et la fille en  
rose,  
L'une à la chose et l'autre à la  
pose,  
Chacun se paie un sou de  
dimanche.

Tournez, tournez, chevaux  
de leur cœur,  
Tandis qu'autour de  
tous vos  
tournois  
Clignote l'œil du filou  
sournois,  
Tournez au son du piston  
vainqueur!

C'est étonnant comme ça  
vous soûle  
D'aller ainsi dans ce cirque  
bête:  
Rien dans le ventre et mal  
dans la tête,  
Du mal en masse et du bien  
en foule.

Tournez, dadas, sans qu'il  
soit besoin  
D'user jamais de nuls éperons  
Pour commander à vos  
galops ronds:  
Tournez, tournez, sans  
espoir de foin.

## Merry-go-round

Turn, turn, you fine  
wooden horses,  
turn a hundred, turn a  
thousand times,  
turn often and turn for  
evermore,  
turn and turn to the  
oboes' sound.

The red-faced child and  
the pale mother,  
the lad in black and the  
girl in pink,  
one down-to-earth, the  
other showing off,  
each buying a treat with  
their Sunday sou.

Turn, turn, horses of their  
hearts,  
while the furtive  
pickpocket's eye is  
flashing  
as you whirl about and  
whirl around,  
turn to the sound of the  
conquering cornet!

Astonishing how drunk it  
makes you,  
riding like this in this  
foolish fair:  
with an empty stomach  
and an aching head,  
discomfort in plenty, and  
masses of fun!

Gee-gees, turn, you'll  
never need  
the help of any spur  
to make your horses  
gallop round:  
turn, turn, without hope of  
hay.

Et dépêchez, chevaux de  
leur âme,  
Déjà voici que sonne à la  
soupe  
La nuit qui tombe et chasse  
la troupe  
De gais buveurs que leur soif  
affame.

Tournez, tournez! Le ciel en  
velours  
D'astres en or se vêt  
lentement.  
L'église tinte un glas  
tristement.  
Tournez au son joyeux des  
tambours!

## Green

Voici des fruits, des fleurs,  
des feuilles et des  
branches  
Et puis voici mon cœur qui  
ne bat que pour vous.  
Ne le déchirez pas avec vos  
deux mains blanches  
Et qu'à vos yeux si beaux  
l'humble présent soit doux.

J'arrive tout couvert encore  
de rosée  
Que le vent du matin vient  
glacer à mon front.  
Souffrez que ma fatigue à  
vos pieds reposée  
Rêve des chers instants qui  
la délasseront.

Sur votre jeune sein laissez  
rouler ma tête  
Toute sonore encore de vos  
derniers baisers;  
Laissez-la s'apaiser de la  
bonne tempête,  
Et que je dorme un peu  
puisque vous reposez.

And hurry on, horses of  
their souls:  
nightfall already calls  
them to supper  
and disperses the crowd  
of happy revellers,  
ravenous with  
thirst.  
Turn, turn! The velvet  
sky  
is slowly decked with  
golden stars.  
The church bell tolls a  
mournful knell –  
turn to the joyful sound of  
drums!

## Green

Here are flowers,  
branches, fruit, and  
fronds,  
and here too is my heart  
that beats just for you.  
Do not tear it with your  
two white hands  
and may the humble gift  
please your lovely eyes.

I come all covered still  
with the dew  
frozen to my brow by the  
morning breeze.  
Let my fatigue, finding  
rest at your feet,  
dream of dear moments  
that will soothe it.

On your young breast let  
me cradle my head  
still ringing with your  
recent kisses;  
after love's sweet tumult  
grant it peace,  
and let me sleep a while,  
since you rest.

## Spleen

Les roses étaient toutes rouges  
Et les lierres étaient tout noirs.

Chère, pour peu que tu te  
bougés,  
Renaissent tous mes  
désespoirs.

Le ciel était trop bleu, trop  
tendre,  
La mer trop verte et l'air trop  
doux.

Je crains toujours, – ce  
qu'est d'attendre! –  
Quelque fuite atroce de  
vous!

Du houx à la feuille  
vernée  
Et du luisant buis je suis  
las,

Et de la campagne  
infinie  
Et de tout, fors de vous,  
hélas!

## Spleen

All the roses were red  
and the ivy was all black.

Dear, at your slightest  
move,  
all my despair  
revives.

The sky was too blue, too  
tender,  
the sea too green, the air  
too mild.

I always fear – oh to wait  
and wonder! –  
one of your agonizing  
departures.

I am weary of the glossy  
holly,  
of the gleaming box-tree  
too,

And the boundless  
countryside  
and everything, alas, but  
you!

## Olivier Messiaen (1908-1992)

### From *Poèmes pour Mi* (1936)

*Olivier Messiaen*

## L'épouse

Va où l'Esprit te  
mène,  
Nul ne peut séparer ce que  
Dieu a uni,  
Va où l'Esprit te  
mène,  
L'épouse est le  
prolongement de l'époux,  
Va où l'Esprit te  
mène,  
Comme l'Église est le  
prolongement du Christ.

## The bride

Go whither the Spirit lead  
you,  
no one can put asunder  
what God has united,  
go whither the Spirit lead  
you,  
the bride is the extension  
of the bridegroom,  
go whither the Spirit lead  
you,  
as the Church is the  
extension of Christ.

## Ta voix

Fenêtre pleine  
d'après-midi,  
Qui s'ouvre sur l'après-midi,  
Et sur ta voix fraîche  
(Oiseau de printemps qui  
s'éveille).  
Si elle s'ouvrait sur l'éternité  
Je te verrais plus belle encore.  
Tu es la servante du  
Fils,  
Et le Père t'aimerait pour  
cela.  
Sa lumière sans fin tomberait  
sur tes épaules,  
Sa marque sur ton front.  
Tu complèterais le  
nombre des anges  
incorporels.  
A la gloire de la Trinité  
sainte  
Un toujours de bonheur  
élèverait ta voix fraîche  
(Oiseau de printemps qui  
s'éveille):  
Tu chanterais.

## Your voice

Window brimming with  
afternoon,  
opening onto the afternoon,  
and onto your fresh voice  
(awakening bird of  
spring).  
Were it to open on eternity,  
I'd see you fairer yet.  
You are the maidservant  
of the Son,  
and for that the Father  
would love you.  
His unending light would  
fall on your shoulders,  
his sign on your brow.  
You would complete the  
number of incorporeal  
angels.  
To the glory of the Holy  
Trinity,  
a joyous ever-after would  
raise up your fresh voice  
(awakening bird of  
spring):  
you would sing.

## Les deux guerriers

De deux nous voici un. En  
avant!  
Comme des guerriers bardés  
de fer!  
Ton œil et mon œil parmi les  
statues qui marchent,  
Parmi les hurlements noirs,  
Les écroulements de  
sulfureuses  
géométries.  
Nous gémissons: ah! écoute-  
moi,  
Je suis tes deux enfants, mon  
Dieu!  
En avant, guerriers  
sacramentels!  
Tendez joyeusement vos  
boucliers.  
Lancez vers le ciel les  
flèches du dévouement  
d'aurore:  
Vous parviendrez aux portes  
de la Ville.

## The two warriors

The two of us now are  
one. Onwards!  
Like iron-clad  
warriors!  
Your eye and mine  
among walking statues,  
among black shrieking,  
among sulphurous  
geometries tumbling  
down.  
We moan: ah! listen to  
me,  
I am your two children,  
my God!  
Onwards, sacramental  
warriors!  
Joyfully hold up your  
shields!  
Cast to the heavens the  
arrows of dawn  
devotion:  
you shall reach the City  
gates.



## Le collier

Printemps enchaîné, arc-en-ciel léger du matin,  
Ah! mon collier! Ah! mon collier!  
Petit soutien vivant de mes oreilles lasses,  
Collier de renouveau, de sourire et de grâce,  
Collier d'Orient, collier choisi multicolore  
Aux perles dures et cocasses!  
Paysage courbe, épousant l'air frais du matin,  
Ah! mon collier! Ah! mon collier!  
Tes deux bras autour de mon cou, ce matin.

## The necklace

Spring enchained, light rainbow of morning,  
ah! my necklace! Ah! my necklace!  
Small living support of my weary ears,  
necklace of renewal, of smiles, of grace,  
Oriental necklace, chosen, multicoloured  
with hard, whimsical pearls!  
Curving landscape, espousing the fresh morning air,  
ah! my necklace! Ah! my necklace!  
Your two arms round my neck, this morning.

## Prière exaucée

Ebranlez la solitaire, la vieille montagne de douleur,  
Que le soleil travaille les eaux amères de mon cœur!  
O Jésus, Pain vivant et qui donnez la vie,  
Ne dites qu'une seule parole, et mon âme sera guérie.

## A prayer granted

Shake up the solitary, ancient mountain of pain,  
may the sun work over the bitter waters of my heart!  
O Jesus, living Bread, giver of life,  
say but one word and my soul shall be healed.

Ebranlez la solitaire, la vieille montagne de douleur,  
Que le soleil travaille les eaux amères de mon cœur!  
Donnez-moi votre grâce,  
Donnez-moi votre grâce!

Shake up the solitary, ancient mountain of pain,  
may the sun work over the bitter waters of my heart!  
Give me your grace,  
give me your grace!

Carillonne, mon cœur!  
Que ta résonnance soit dure, et longue et profonde!  
Frappe, tape, choque pour ton roi!  
Frappe, tape, choque pour ton Dieu!  
Voici ton jour de gloire et de résurrection!  
La joie est revenue.

Ring out, my heart!  
May your ringing resound hard, long, and deep!  
Strike, knock, smite for your king!  
Strike, knock, smite for your God!  
Behold the day of your glory and resurrection!  
Bliss has returned.