

WIGMORE HALL

Monday 9 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!

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!

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!

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'élançe, 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 frissonnez 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 réclamaï 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 cueïllir des remords
dans la fête servile,
Ma Douleur, donne-moi la
main ;
viens par ici,

Loin d'eux. Vois se pencher
les défuntés
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.

Interval

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.