



VANCOUVER
RECITAL
SOCIETY

Three vertical bars of varying heights and colors (orange, magenta, and pink) are positioned in the top right corner.

2024^{YEARS}
2025
SEASON



FALL CONCERTS

Barbara Hannigan soprano
Bertrand Chamayou piano

Saturday November 30 2024

From the Artistic Director

Dear Friends:

We're delighted to welcome the renowned Canadian soprano, Barbara Hannigan, and French pianist, Bertrand Chamayou, to our stage, both in their Vancouver debuts. And furthermore, it has just been announced that Barbara has been named Musical America's Artist of the Year for 2025. This is a very big deal! Congratulations, Barbara!

Together they'll perform works by Messiaen and John Zorn, the American composer, conductor, saxophonist, arranger and producer.

Bertrand Chamayou will be heard solo in two works by Scriabin.

This is a most unusual and remarkable program to say the least, but that is what one would expect when one engages Barbara Hannigan. She is an artist who has shown a profound commitment to the music of our time.

We would like to thank our Season Sponsor, the Peak Group of Companies, and the sponsors of this concert, George Pick and Santi Pelaez. In addition, we are grateful for the support received from the Chan Centre for the Performing Arts and the Province of British Columbia through the Festivals, Fairs and Events Fund.

This will be a one-of-a kind performance. Enjoy it!

Sincerely,



Leila



CELLPHONES

The use of cellphones and recording devices is prohibited in the concert hall. Please take this opportunity to turn off all electronic devices.

音乐厅内禁止使用手机，禁止拍照，录音，录像。请观众关闭所有电子器材，感谢您的合作。

Program

THIS PROGRAM WILL BE PERFORMED WITHOUT AN INTERMISSION

Barbara Hannigan, soprano
Bertrand Chamayou, piano

Saturday, November 30, at 7:30 pm
Chan Centre for the Performing Arts

Season Sponsor



Supporting the VRS since 2008

Concert sponsor:

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Additional Support



Supported by the Province of British Columbia

Barbara Hannigan
& Bertrand Chamayou

OLIVIER MESSIAEN (1908-1992)

Chants de Terre et de Ciel

Bail avec Mi (pour ma femme)
Antienne du silence (pour le jour des Anges gardiens)
Danse du bébé-Pilule (pour mon petit Pascal)
Arc-en-ciel d'innocence (pour mon petit Pascal)
Minuit pile et face (pour la Mort)
Résurrection (pour le jour de Pâques)
(approx. 28 minutes)

Bertrand Chamayou

ALEXANDER SCRIABIN (1872-1915)

Poème-nocturne Op. 61

(approx. 8 minutes)

Bertrand Chamayou

ALEXANDER SCRIABIN (1872-1915)

Vers la Flamme Op. 72

(approx. 6 minutes)

Barbara Hannigan
& Bertrand Chamayou

JOHN ZORN (b. 1953)

Jumalattaret

Proem - opening invocation
1. Päivätär (sun goddess)
2. Vedenemo (mother of waters)
3. Akka (queen of the ancient magic)
4. Louhi (hostess of the underworld)
5. Mielikki (the huntress)
6. Kuu (moon goddess)
7. Tellervo (forest spirit)
8. Ilmatar (air spirit)
9. Vellamo (goddess of the sea)
Postlude

(approx. 25 minutes)

Barbara Hannigan, soprano

Embodying music with an unparalleled dramatic sensibility, Nova Scotian-born soprano and conductor Barbara Hannigan is an artist at the forefront of creation. More than 30 years since her professional debut, Hannigan has created magical working relationships with world class musicians, directors and choreographers, for audiences worldwide. Her artistic colleagues include John Zorn, Krzysztof Warlikowski, Simon Rattle, Sasha Waltz, Kent Nagano, Vladimir Jurowski, Andreas Kriegenburg, Andris Nelsons, Esa-Pekka Salonen, Christoph Marthaler, Antonio Pappano, Katie Mitchell and Kirill Petrenko. The late conductor and pianist Reinbert de Leeuw has been an extraordinary influence and inspiration on her development.



Photo credit: Marco Borggreve

The Grammy and Juno Award winning Canadian musician has shown a profound commitment to the music of our time and has given the world première performances of nearly 100 new creations, with extensive collaborations with composers including Boulez, Zorn, Dutilleux, Ligeti, Di Castri, Stockhausen, Khayam, Barry, Dusapin, Dean, Benjamin and Abrahamsen.

A passionate musician of unique and courageous choices, Hannigan is renowned for creating innovative concert programs, combining new and older repertoire in a highly dramatic and authentic manner. She began her career as a soprano after her studies at the University of Toronto with Mary Morrison, tackling some of the most difficult and virtuoso roles in the repertoire. She then turned her hand to conducting, with her debut in 2011 at the Chatelet in Paris, and now balances her engagements as singer or conductor on a free and original path. She has held the position of Principal Guest Conductor of the Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra since 2019, and in 2026 she will begin her tenure as Chief Conductor and Artistic Director of the Iceland Symphony Orchestra. She became a member of the Order of Canada in 2016.

In recent years she has been conducting world class orchestras including the Concertgebouw and Cleveland Orchestras, the London Symphony Orchestra and Rome's Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia, has ongoing relationships with festivals including Aix-en-Provence and Spoleto and has had starring soprano roles on opera stages including London's Covent Garden, Teatro San Carlo in Naples, Paris Opera's Palais Garnier and the opera houses of Berlin, Hamburg and Munich.

Barbara Hannigan is represented by Tez Arts.

Bertrand Chamayou, piano

Bertrand Chamayou is one of today's most strikingly brilliant pianists, recognized for his revelatory performances at once powerfully virtuosic, imaginative and breathtakingly beautiful. A leading interpreter of French music, his vast repertoire includes major bodies of work such as the complete piano works of Ravel, Liszt's *Études* and *Années de pèlerinage* and Messiaen's *Vingt regards sur l'enfant-Jésus*. At the same time, the French pianist possesses a deep passion for new music, having worked with composers including Pierre Boulez, Henri Dutilleux, György Kurtág, Thomas Adès, Bryce Dessner and Michael Jarrell.

This season sees him appear with the London Symphony Orchestra in Gstaad and La-Côte-Saint-André, play a chamber music evening at Wigmore Hall, perform with the Seattle Symphony Orchestra, the Orchestre de la Suisse Romande, the Basel Chamber Orchestra, the Chamber Orchestra of Europe, the BBC Philharmonic Orchestra, the Basel Symphony Orchestra, Les Siècles Orchestra, the Gürzenich Orchestra, the Belgian National Orchestra and the Detroit Symphony Orchestra. A tour with Barbara Hannigan will take the two musicians to Montreal, Toronto, Vancouver, Victoria, La Jolla, Rochester, Philadelphia, New York, Ottawa, Washington and Paris with duo recitals. Duo recitals with Sol Gabetta will take place at the Vienna Konzerthaus, the Gewandhaus Leipzig, the De Doelen Rotterdam, Trieste and Bologna. This season, Bertrand Chamayou will give solo recitals in Clermont-Ferrant, Metz, Bordeaux, Poitiers, Perth, Paris, Dijon, Lyon, Aix-en-Provence, Toulouse, Lille and Oeiras.

Bertrand Chamayou performs with the most prestigious orchestras: the Vienna Philharmonic, New York Philharmonic, the orchestras of Cleveland, San Francisco, Pittsburgh, Chicago, Atlanta, Montreal, Vienna and London, the Orchestre de Paris, the Tonhalle Orchestra Zurich, the Orchestre National de France and the Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France, the Gewandhaus Orchestra Leipzig, the Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen, the radio orchestras in Munich, Frankfurt, Cologne and Copenhagen as well as the NHK Symphony Orchestra, the Seoul Philharmonic Orchestra and the Orchestra dell'Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia. He has had the privilege of playing under the baton of Pierre Boulez and Sir Neville Marriner and works with conductors such as Esa-Pekka Salonen, Herbert Blomstedt, Semyon Bychkov, Charles Dutoit, Mikko Franck, Santtu-Matias Rouvali, Krzysztof Urbanski, Philippe Herreweghe and Gianandrea Noseda, Philippe Jordan, Andris Nelsons, François-Xavier Roth, Tugan Sokhiev, Sir Antonio Pappano and Elim Chan.

A highly regarded chamber musician, his partners include such renowned artists as Sol Gabetta, Barbara Hannigan, Vilde Frang, Renaud and Gautier Capuçon, Leif Ove Andsnes, the Quatuor Ebène and Antoine Tamestit. He is very committed to new repertoire and has also worked with Henri Dutilleux and György Kurtág and, more recently, with Thomas Adès, Bryce Dessner and Michael Jarrell, who dedicated his last piano concerto to him.

Bertrand Chamayou has published a large number of highly successful recordings, including a *Naïve* CD of music by César Franck, which was awarded several accolades. For his recording of Camille Saint-Saëns' Piano Concertos Nos. 2 and 5 he was awarded the Gramophone Recording of the Year Award 2019. The only artist to win France's prestigious Victoires de la Musique on five occasions, he has an exclusive recording contract with Warner/Erato and was awarded the 2016 ECHO Klassik for his recording of Ravel's complete works for solo piano. His new album *Letter(s) to Erik Satie* pairs the music of Satie and Cage.

Bertrand Chamayou was born in Toulouse; his musical talent was quickly noted by pianist Jean-François Heisser, who later became his professor at the Paris Conservatoire. He completed his training with Maria Curcio in London. Since 2021, Chamayou has been co-Artistic Director of Festival Ravel, the major new international festival celebrating Maurice Ravel, situated in France's Basque country.



Photo credit: Marco Borggreve

Bertrand Chamayou is represented by HarrisonParrot, Munich, Germany.

Program Notes

Olivier Messiaen

Chants de Terre et de Ciel

Messiaen's song cycle *Songs of Heaven and Earth* was written in 1938 to celebrate the birth of the composer's son Pascal the previous year, an event which he sets in the context of his deep love for his wife and his profound commitment to the Christian faith.

The deliriously poetic texts, by Messiaen himself, are dramatic and intensely personal. They are set to music of almost Wagnerian emotional intensity that seeks to express the link between earthly sexual love here on Earth (*Terre*) and celestial divine love emanating from on high (*Ciel*).

The music is written without a time signature. The voice floats freely in rhythm with the text while the piano's saturated chords, replete with tone clusters, provide a colourfully bright tonal backdrop to the singer's often ecstatic outpourings of emotion.

* * *

The first song in the cycle, *Bail avec Mi*, might be translated as "Lease with Mi", referring to the composer's marriage "contract" with his wife Claire Delbos (nicknamed "Mi") and the love that binds him to her. The implication is that she is only on "loan" to him from God.

Un peu lent *p*

Un peu lent Ton œil de terre, mon œil de terre,

pp (m.g.)

p

pp (m.g.)

Their "earthly" love is communicated in the opening line: "Your eye of earth, my eye of earth." The opening flourish in the piano part offers a glimpse of the heavenly implications of this love.

* * *

Antienne du silence (Antiphon of silence) has the subtitle “For the feast day of the Guardian Angels”, a reference to the Catholic belief in celestial beings that guard over the faithful on Earth.

Messiaen’s wife is transformed into one of these angels, silently standing watch to protect the new life in her arms. She is the *Ange silencieux* (silent angel) of the opening line.

The image shows a musical score for 'Antienne du silence'. It consists of four staves. The top staff is a vocal line with the lyrics 'An - ge si - len - ci.eux,'. Above the staff are the markings 'Très modéré' and 'p expressif'. The second staff is a piano accompaniment with the marking 'pp (m.d.)' and 'très lié'. The third staff is another piano accompaniment with the marking 'p (m.d.)' and 'expressif'. The bottom staff is a piano accompaniment with the marking 'pp (m.g.)' and 'léger, un peu détaché'.

The religious associations of this “antiphon” are extended in the extremely melismatic vocal writing, especially for the word *Alleluia* in the text, while the piano’s continuously wandering line in 16ths seems to be breathing this *Alleluia* in shorter note values for the entire length of the song.

* * *

Danse du bébé-Pilule (pour mon petit Pascal) evokes the infantile world of the “little pill” of a child that is Messiaen’s son Pascal. It might even be that *Pilule* is the closest that the young baby could get to pronouncing his own name, *Pascal*.

The image shows a musical score for 'Danse du bébé-Pilule'. It consists of two systems. The first system has a vocal line with the lyrics 'Pi - lu - le, viens, dan - sons. — Ma - lon.lan.lai - ne, ma. Fi - cel.les du so -' and a piano accompaniment. Both are marked 'Vif et joyeux' and 'mf'. The second system shows a piano accompaniment with the marking 'mf'.

And this is a song filled with more baby-talk, such as the nonsense word *Malonlanlaine*, and descriptions of the birds, fish and pebbles that make up the miraculous world that the child sees. The mood varies between playful and outright laughter.

* * *

Arc-en-ciel d'innocence (Rainbow of innocence), also subtitled “for my little Pascal”, is the second of two songs devoted to Messiaen’s son. As the song begins, we see the baby, “Pilule”, stretching out its limbs “like the big capital letter in an old Mass book.”

Tu t’étires comme une majuscule de vieux missel

The image shows a musical score for the song "Arc-en-ciel d'innocence". It features a vocal line at the top and piano accompaniment below. The tempo is marked "Modéré" and the dynamics are "mf". The lyrics are "Pi.lu.le, tu t'é-ti - res". The piano accompaniment includes a treble clef with a melodic line and a bass clef with a bass line. There are triplets and slurs in the piano part.

The rainbow, vividly painted by washes of colour from the piano, is both a symbol of God’s wondrous presence in the world and a representation of the baby’s kaleidoscopic view of that world. In this song we hear of the father smiling at his progeny and experience the “Whee!” as he lifts him high in the air to catch rainbows with his tiny fists.

* * *

Minuit pile et face (The two sides of midnight), subtitled “for Death” strikes a more sombre tone as the composer imagines the world of sin and temptation that his son has been born into.

The image shows a musical score for the song "Minuit pile et face". It features a vocal line at the top and piano accompaniment below. The tempo is marked "Bien modéré" and the dynamics are "mf". The lyrics are "Vil - le, œil puant,". The piano accompaniment includes a treble clef with a melodic line and a bass clef with a bass line. There are slurs and accents in the piano part.

Messiaen spares us none of the dread he feels in evoking the perils of this world, imagined as a city with a “stinking eye” (*oeil puant*). To complete the picture, he gives the eternal threat of sin a gleeful dance-like rhythm in the middle section of this song.

After plaintive calls to God and Christ for salvation, the song ends with the image of a young child falling asleep in its father’s arms.

* * *

Résurrection (pour le jour de Pâques), the last song in the cycle, rebounds from all this dread with a great whoop of Easter-inspired exultation.



The “paschal” celebration of Easter, from which the name of Messiaen’s son “Pascal” is derived, is related with numerous references to the New Testament narrative of the saving event at the centre of the Christian story: the angel at the empty tomb, the perfumed scent of the Eternal City with its pearly gates, etc.

The vocal writing is showy in the extreme, patterned after the wailing style of Gregorian chant but raised to an ecstatic level of expressive force and vigour. The work ends with a last line that pleads you to “wash yourself in the Truth” (*lavez-vous dans la Vérité*).

Texts & Translations for Messiaen

Chants de Terre et de Ciel

Bail avec Mi

(pour ma femme)

Ton œil de terre,
 Mon œil de terre,
 Nos mains de terre,
 Pour tisser l’atmosphère,
 La montagne de l’atmosphère.
 Étoile de silence, à mon cœur de terre,
 A mes lèvres de terre,
 Petite boule de soleil, complémentaire à ma terre,
 Le bail, doux compagnon de mon épaule amère.

Pledge with Mi

(for my wife)

Your eye of earth,
 my eye of earth,
 our hands of earth,
 to weave the atmosphere,
 the mountain of atmosphere.
 Silent star to my heart of earth,
 my lips of earth,
 small ball of sun, a foil for my earth.
 This pledge, sweet companion to my bitter shoulder.

Antienne du silence

(pour le jour des Anges gardiens)

Angé silencieux, écris du silence dans mes mains
 Alléluia.
 Que j’aspire le silence du ciel,
 Alléluia.

Antiphon of silence

(for the day of the guardian angels)

Silent angel, silent writings in my hands,
 alleluia.
 How I aspire to the silence of heaven,
 alleluia.

Danse du bébé-Pilule
(pour mon petit Pascal)

Pilule, viens, dansons.
Malonlanlaine, ma.
Ficelles du soleil.
Malonlanlaine, ma.
C'est l'alphabet du rire
aux doigts de ta maman.
Son oui perpétuel
était un lac tranquille.
Malonlanlaine, ma, ma.
Douceur des escaliers,
surprise au coin des portes.
Tous les oiseaux légers
s'envolaient de tes mains.
Oiseaux légers, cailloux,
refrains, crème, légère.
En poissons bleus,
en lunes bleues,
les auréoles de la terre et de l'eau,
un seul poumon dans un seul roseau.
Io, io, malonlaine, ma.
L'œil désarmé,
Un ange sur la tête,
ton petit nez levé
vers le bleu qui s'avale,
ourlant de cris dorés
les horizons de verre,
tu tendais ton cœur si pur.
Chanter, chanter, chanter, ah !
chanter glaneuses d'étoiles,
tresses de la vie,
pouviez-vous chanter
plus délicieusement ?
Le vent sur tes oreilles,
malonlanlaine, ma,
joue à saute-mouton,
malonlanlaine, ma,
et la présence verte
et l'œil de ta maman.
En effeuillant une heure
Autour de mon sourire.
Malonlanlaine, ma.
Io, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, io, io !

Dance of Bébé-Pilule
(for my little Pascal)

Pilule, come let's dance.
Malonlanlaine, ma.
Strands of sunshine.
Malonlanlaine, ma.
It's the alphabet of laughter
at your mother's fingertips.
Her perpetual yes
was a tranquil lake.
Malonlanlaine, ma, ma.
Gentleness of staircases,
surprise at the turnings of doors.
All the light birds
take flight from your hands.
Light birds, pebbles,
refrains, light cream.
Into blue fish,
into blue moons,
halos of earth and water,
a single lung in a single reed.
Io, malonlaine, ma.
The disarmed eye,
an angel on the head,
your little nose raised
towards the blue which swallows itself,
hemming the glass horizons
with gilded cries,
you offered your heart so pure.
To sing, to sing, ah! to sing,
gleaner of stars,
braids of life,
could you sing
more delightfully?
The wind on your ears,
Malonlanlaine, ma.
Plays leap-frog,
Malonlanlaine, ma
and your mother's
watchful eye and presence
Shedding one hour
around my smile.
Malonlanlaine, ma.
Io! ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, io, io!

Arc-en-ciel d'innocence

(pour mon petit Pascal)

Pilule, tu t'étires comme une majuscule de vieux missel.
Tu es fatigué ; regarde ta main.
Jouet incassable, les ressorts fonctionnent toujours ;
Mais on ne peut pas le lancer par-dessus bord
Comme la jolie poupée en coton.
Rêve aux plis de l'heure ; tresse, tresse
des vocalises autour du silence :
Le soleil t'écrira sur l'épaule
 du matin
Pour lancer des oiseaux dans la bouche sans dents.
Sourire, sourire, ce que tu chantes,
chanter, chanter, t'a appris à sourire.
Ce que tu ne vois pas, sauras-tu en rêver ?
Viens, que je te catapulte dans le jour
comme la libellule aviateur !
Te voilà plus haut que moi ;
quel plaisir de dominer tous ses géants !
Attache à tes poignets fins
les arcs-en-ciel d'innocence
Qui sont tombés de tes yeux,
fais-les frémir dans les encoignures du temps
Très loin, très près ;
recommençons cent fois le jeu !
Où est-il? si haut qu'on ne le voit plus ?
Saute, mon bilboquet Pilule !
Tu t'agites comme un battant de
cloche pascale.
Bonjour, mon petit garçon.

Rainbow of innocence

(for my little Pascal)

Pilule, you stretch like an old missal's first letter.
You're tired; look at your hand.
Unbreakable toy, the springs still work;
but you can't toss it overboard
like the pretty cotton doll.
Dream at the folds of time;
braid melismas around silence:
the sun will write to you on the shoulder
 of the morning
to fling birds into your toothless mouth.
Smile, smile, that which you sing,
Singing, singing, has taught you to smile.
Will you be able to dream what you do not see?
Come, let me launch you into the day
like an aviator dragonfly!
Now you are higher than me;
what fun to reign over all these giants!
To your delicate wrists
fasten rainbows of innocence:
which have fallen from your eyes,
make them tremble in the corners of time.
Now far, now near;
let's start the game over a hundred times!
Where is he? so high, that he can't be seen?
Jump, my bilboquet Pilule!
You jiggle like the clapper of
an Easter bell.
Good morning, little boy.

Minuit pile et face

(pour la Mort)

Ville, œil puant, minuits obliques,
clous rouillés enfoncés aux angles de l'oubli.
Agneau, Seigneur !
Ils dansent, mes péchés dansent !
Carnaval décevant des pavés de la mort !
Grands corps tout pourri des rues, sous la dure
lanterne.
Carrefour de la peur !
Couverture de démence et d'orgueil !
Rire, aiguise-toi, rire, avale-toi
ces flambeaux sont des montagnes de nuit.
Nœuds bien serrés de l'angoisse.
Bête inouïe qui mange.
Qui bave dans ma poitrine.
Tête, tête quelle sueur !
Et je resterais seul
à la mort qui m'enroule ?
Père des lumières, Christ,
Vigne d'amour
Esprit Consolateur,
Consolateur aux sept dons !
Cloches, mes os vibrent,
chiffre soudain,
décombres de l'erreur
et des cercles à gauche,
Neuf, dix, onze, douze.
Oh! m'endormir petit!
sous l'air trop large, dans un lit bleu,
la main sous l'oreille,
avec une toute petite chemise.

Midnight heads and tails

(for death)

City, stinking eye, slanted midnights,
rusted nails sunk at the angles of the forgotten.
Lamb, Lord!
They dance, my sins dance!
deceiving carnival on the cobbles of death.
Large, rotted body of the streets, under a stark
lantern.
Crossroad of fear!
Blanket of dementia and pride!
Laugh, hone yourself, laugh, swallow yourself:
these torches are mountains of night.
Knots of anguish well tightened,
Inconceivable beast that eats,
Drooling within my breast.
On my brow, on my brow, what sweat!
And I would be left alone
while death circles me round?
Father of light, Christ,
vine of love,
Spirit, Comforter,
Comforter of the seven gifts!
Bell, my bones shake,
a sudden numbering,
ruins of error
and of sinister circles,
Nine, ten, eleven, twelve.
Oh! To fall asleep so small!
Under too wide a sky, in a blue bed,
hand under ear,
in a tiny little shirt.

Résurrection

(pour le jour de Pâques)

Alléluia, alléluia,
Il est le premier, le Seigneur Jésus.
Des morts, il est le premier né.
Sept étoiles d'amour au transpercé,
revêtez votre habit de clarté.
«Je suis ressuscité, je suis ressuscité.
Je chante : pour toi, mon Père, pour toi,
mon Dieu, Alléluia
De mort à vie je passe. »
Un ange. Sur la pierre il s'est posé.
Parfum, porte, perle,
azymes de la Vérité.

Alléluia, alléluia,
Nous l'avons touché, nous l'avons vu.
De nos mains nous l'avons touché.
Un seul fleuve de vie dans son côté,
revêtez votre habit de clarté.
«Je suis ressuscité, je suis ressuscité.
Je monte : vers toi, mon Père, vers toi,
mon Dieu, Alléluia.
De terre à ciel je passe. ».
Du pain. Il le rompt et leurs yeux sont dessillés.
Parfum, porte, perle,
lavez-vous dans la Vérité.

POEMS BY
OLIVIER MESSIAEN

Resurrection

(for Easter Day)

Alleluia, alleluia.
He is the first, the Lord Jesus.
Of the dead He is the first born.
Seven stars of love for the pierced,
don your cloak of clarity.
"I am risen from the dead, I am risen from the dead.
I sing: for Thee, my Father, for Thee,
my God, alleluia.
I pass from death to life."
An Angel. On the stone he perched.
Fragrance, gate, pearl,
unleavened Truth.

Alleluia, alleluia.
We have touched Him, we have seen Him.
With our hands we have touched Him.
One sole river of life in
His side, don your cloak of clarity.
"I am risen from the dead, I am risen from the dead.
I climb: towards Thee, my Father, towards
Thee, my God, alleluia.
From earth to heaven I pass."
Bread. He breaks it and their eyes are opened.
Fragrance, gate, pearl,
wash yourselves in Truth.

ENGLISH TRANSLATION:
JOSEPH BAIN & DONALD WINKLER

Alexander Scriabin Poème-nocturne Op. 61

Alexander Scriabin was known as “the Russian Chopin”, since he wrote almost exclusively for the piano and began his career by composing mazurkas, waltzes, nocturnes, preludes and études, just like his Polish musical forebear.

But as his musical language evolved, he gradually moved away from the simple, soulful expressiveness of Chopin towards a less directly assertive and more psychologically suggestive kind of keyboard writing, one projected in the sort of “wispy” keyboard textures created by Debussy.

These tendencies are on full display in Scriabin’s *Poème-nocturne*, Op. 61 (1911), with its softly whispered short phrases enveloped in gently yearning harmonies that float in the air like the scent of a French perfume on a warm summer evening.

The image shows the beginning of the musical score for Scriabin's *Poème-nocturne*, Op. 61. It is written for piano in 8/8 time. The score consists of two staves, treble and bass clef. The music is characterized by wide intervals and a multi-layered texture. Performance instructions include "avec une grâce capricieuse", "molto rit.", "mp", "poco", "pp", "molto più vivo", and "léger, animé". The score includes first, second, and third endings for a triplet figure.

The nocturne-ish “feel” of this work resides in the veiled atmosphere produced by the overtones of its widely spaced chord structures and its hypnotic repetition of musical motives murmuring obsessively in a multi-layered texture – all of which evokes the feeling of being in a dreamscape where much is happening but little is certain.

This image shows a section of the musical score for Scriabin's *Poème-nocturne*, Op. 61. It features a multi-layered texture with wide intervals and triplet patterns. The score includes a "cresc." marking and a first ending for a triplet figure.

Guiding the performer in creating just the right “lava lamp” mood of wide-eyed wonder and focused reverie are performance indications in French such as *comme en un rêve* (like in a dream), *avec une soudaine langueur* (with sudden languor) and *comme une ombre mouvante* (like a moving shadow).

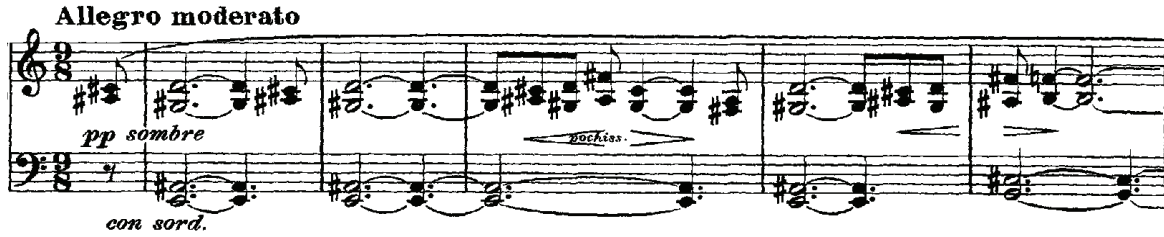
Alexander Scriabin Vers la Flamme Op. 72

The aesthetic aims of Scriabin at the end of his career were so expansive as to be hardly containable within the scope of the piano keyboard. As he advanced in years his mystical inclinations narrowed the gap between solo sonata and sonic séance, with his very last works showing him at his most grandiose.

Left unfinished at his death in 1915, for example, is a work called *Mysterium* for mixed chorus and orchestra, intended to be enacted over the course of a week in the foothills of the Himalayas with the aid of dancers, a light show and the release of appropriately apocalyptic scents into the air, after which the world was roundly expected to dissolve into a state of perpetual bliss.

Meanwhile, back home at the keyboard, pianists attempting to sustain the legacy of his piano music – without the aid of sherpas – have had their hands full dealing with the equally ambitious textures of his late works, with their flamboyant arpeggiations down to the nether regions, eddying swirls of finger fodder in the mid-range and luminous echoes up in the gods of the upper register.

His “piano poem” *Vers la flamme* (Toward the flame), composed in 1914, is precisely of this stamp. What constitutes “melody” in the piece is virtually limited to the obsessively repeated semitone motif announced at the opening and present throughout at the top of the texture.



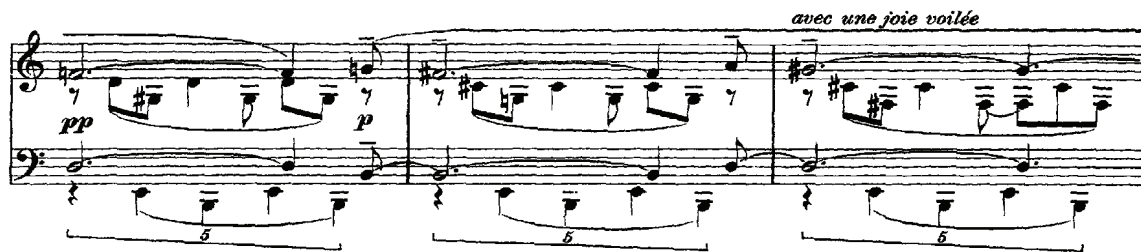
The composer’s unique harmonic vocabulary of altered dominant 9th, 11th and 13th chords, spaced in 4ths for maximum resonance, ensures such an abundance of tritones (there seems to be one in virtually every chord) that in the end they all begin to sound like consonances.

According to Vladimir Horowitz, one of the major twentieth-century proponents of Scriabin’s music, the title of the work relates to the composer’s conviction that the world was edging “towards the flame” and would gradually heat up until it erupted into a fiery cosmic conflagration.

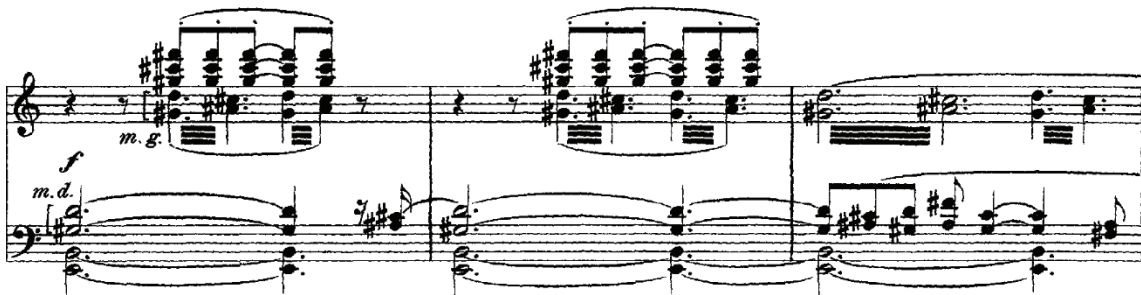
“He voss kray-see, you know”, the famous pianist added dryly.

Prescient intimations of global warming aside, Scriabin’s incendiary vision is communicated in this piece through a gradual increase in the complexity and animation of the keyboard texture.

At its opening, time seems suspended as long-held chords interspersed with rhythmically uncertain phrase fragments remove any sense of regular pulse. Soon the mid-range begins to oscillate with conspiratorial murmurings as an ominous five-against-nine rhythm rumbles in the bass.



A third and final stage is reached when tongues of flame, in the form of blurry double tremolos, begin to lick the sonic spaces in the octave above middle C,



leading to a final burst of bright light at the extreme upper end of the keyboard.

John Zorn Jumalattaret

John Zorn is a New-York-based saxophonist, arranger, producer and avant-garde composer who has written for an extraordinarily wide range of instrumental ensembles, including rock bands, jazz groups, string quartets, orchestras and chamber ensembles, as well as for solo instruments and for voice.

Long recognized as a giant of the new music scene centred in Manhattan's Lower East Side, he received a MacArthur Foundation "Genius Grant" in 2006, and his sixtieth birthday in 2013 was celebrated with performances at the Guggenheim Museum, Lincoln Center and the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

He has been described by the online journal *Classical Music Geek* as a composer who "treads the line between experimental classical and experimental jazz", a musician whose music is "the most organized chaos you've ever heard."

Zorn is a composer who likes to push boundaries. "Most of my work", he says, "involves pushing the envelope of technical mastery."

And the search for technical mastery is indeed pushed, poked and pummelled in his song cycle *Jumalattaret*, which was premiered by Barbara Hannigan and pianist Stephen Gosling at the 2018 "Jazz in August" festival in Lisbon with the composer sitting in the front row.

As senior staff editor for the *New York Times* Joshua Barone wrote in 2019:

*On paper, John Zorn's "Jumalattaret" ... looks impossible: breathless vocalise; abrupt transitions from head-spinning complexity to folk-song simplicity; and, within the span of a single measure, whispering, squeaking and throat-singing like a winter storm. It's the kind of piece that leaves you asking, repeatedly, over the course of its 25 minutes: Can a voice even do this?*¹

Based on the Finnish national epic *Kalevala* first published in 1835, the work is in nine sections, with an opening invocation and a postlude. In each principal section the singer channels a different Sami goddess, whispering the text or delivering it in a wordless vocalise.

The *New York Times'* chief classical music critic Anthony Tommasini describes what comes next:

*The lines are thick with rapid-fire leaps to high and low extremes; sustained tones delivered in wobbling vibrato; explosions of skittish notes that sound like crazed bird calls; cackling that morphs into manic laughter. Not to mention moments when the singer must also play percussion or clap.*²

And for added measure there are ensemble difficulties piled on to the pyrotechnics expected of the singer, especially in polyrhythmic passages in the first and second sections in which the voice and piano are in two different time signatures.

Having given nearly 100 premieres of new compositions in her career, Barbara Hannigan is known for her work ethic and her gritty resolve to fulfill each composer's wishes and expectations in performance. But this work, and the months-long process of preparing it for performance, was of an order of magnitude she was not prepared for.

"It has changed everything", she said in her interview with Joshua Barone. "It's one of those pieces that was life-changing."

* * *

John Zorn's *Jumalattaret* and Barbara Hannigan's rehearsal process with pianist Stephen Gosling are the subject of *Zorn III*, the third of director Mathieu Amalric's documentary films on the works of John Zorn.

Program notes by
Donald G. Gíslason, 2024

¹ Joshua Barone, "The unsingable music that stumped a diva", *New York Times* (October 10, 2019).

² Anthony Tommasini, "Review: A fearless soprano shows what's possible", *New York Times* (October 18, 2019).

Text for John Zorn's Jumalattaret

JOHN ZORN (b. 1953)

Jumalattaret

Proem - opening invocation

1. Päivätär (sun goddess)
2. Vedenemo (mother of waters)
3. Akka (queen of the ancient magic)
4. Louhi (hostess of the underworld)
5. Mielikki (the huntress)
6. Kuu (moon goddess)
7. Tellervo (forest spirit)
8. Ilmatar (air spirit)
9. Vellamo (goddess of the sea)

Postlude

Texts for Jumalattaret

(Finnish with English translation)

proem - opening invocation

Mieleni minun tekevi, aivoni ajattelevi lähteäni laulamahan, saa'ani sanelemahan, sukuvirttä suoltamahan, lajivirttä laulamahan. Sanat suussani sulavat, puhe'et putoelevat, kielelleni kerkiävät, hampahilleni hajoovat. ylistykseksi jumala

Mastered by impulsive desire, by a mighty inward urging, i am now ready for singing, ready to begin the chanting in praise of the goddesses!

3. akka

Viel' on muitaki sanoja, ongelmoita oppimia:

there are other words of magic, incantations I have learned

4. louhi

siitti siivet sulkinensa kuuhuen käsin tavoitti

made a pair of feathered wings, with her bare hands by her magic

7. tellervo

Keksi piirtämän kivessä, valeviivan kal

secret sign drawn on the rock

8. ilmatar

Parempi olisi ollut ilman impenä elää,

better had it been for me to have stayed the airy virgin

postlude

Ellös täältä ilman pääskö,nousko, kuu, kumottamahan, pääskö, päivä, paistamahan, kun en käyne päästämähän, itse tulle noutamahan yheksän orihin kanssa, yhen tamman kantamalla!"

Moon of gold and Sun of silver, Hide your faces in the caverns Of Pohyola's dismal mountain; Shine no more to gladden Northland, Till I come to give ye freedom, Drawn by coursers nine in number, Sable coursers of one mother!

Notes for John Zorn's *Jumalattaret*

by John Zorn and Barbara Hannigan

Using pieces of texts from the epic Finnish tale the Kalevala, *Jumalattaret* (2012) is a song cycle in praise of nine Finnish Goddesses out of Sami Shamanism: Päivätär, goddess of summer – Vedenemo, the mother of waters – Akka, goddess of the underworld – Louhi, a powerful witch and shapeshifter – Mielikki, the goddess of the hunt – Kuu, the moon goddess – Tellervo, goddess of forests – Ilmatar the virgin spirit of air – Vellamo, the goddess of water. The music uses a variety of musical techniques and genres and moves from lyrical folk-like simplicity to more complex atonal and textural pyrotechnics.

John Zorn:

Barbara Hannigan was in New York City performing George Benjamin's *Written on Skin* at Lincoln Center in the summer of 2015. We met for the very first time, introduced by mutual friends, for a memorable lunch at the Thai restaurant Som Tum Der on Avenue A. We stayed for hours talking candidly about music, life, collaboration, improvisation, the classical world, conductors and so much more. It was deeply inspiring – and we began to imagine a path forward. Remembering *Jumalattaret*, I sent her the score and proposed it as our first adventure together.

Barbara Hannigan:

Meeting John back in 2015 was a turning point in my life as a creative person. The connection between us as musicians was immediate and magnetic. I began working on *Jumalattaret* in 2016/17, but realized quite quickly that I'd met my "Waterloo" in its virtuosic demands. I was not sure I would manage it, even though I had tackled many "impossible" pieces before. Finally I mustered the courage to write to John with my concerns. I was hoping he might make a few corners of it a little more "possible" for me to manage.

We exchanged several emails, and John was incredibly deep in his response to the vulnerabilities I was sharing with him.

I'd never experienced anything like this kind of support with a composer. He was not offended. He was really with me in the struggle.

John wrote the following to me:

one cannot transcend anything by staying on safe ground

and it is in these intense moments that we can find deeper truths, bring mind and heart together
- and begin to understand the soul and its workings

in that courageous moment of letting go and going for it, the music will become alive in a special and heroic way - a way that is beyond just the notes on paper

John:

The long journey toward Barbara's mastery of the piece is beautifully told in Mathieu Amalric's insightful documentary *Zorn III*, which is focused on our back-and-forth communications, and the long process of Barbara learning, struggling, rehearsing and performing *Jumalattaret*.

Barbara:

Because of John's belief in me, I felt overcome with a new energy and summoned all my strength to throw myself into the music until I was completely immersed in it and it became a part of me. I have performed it many times now on festivals celebrating John Zorn's music, and wanted to put it into a new performance context, programming it together with Messiaen's song cycle *Chants de Terre et de Ciel*. Both works are deeply spiritual, mysterious, tender and ecstatic. While the Messiaen cycle has a more male-dominated focus (the God of the Catholic faith), the Zorn is inspired by female power, as are many of John's compositions.

John has gone on to write another five works for my voice, with various combinations of instruments, and not a season goes by that I am not singing his music, somewhere. He has become a very dear friend and inspiring mentor.

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