

RIVERSIDE THEATRES PRESENTS

# TIMELIGHT: JULIAN BLISS AND NZTRIO

SATURDAY 25 AUGUST AT 7:30PM



# REPERTOIRE

***ISLAND SONGS***  
**(CLARINET, CELLO, PIANO)**

JOHN PSATHAS (NZ)

***SUITE (VIOLIN, CLARINET, PIANO)***

DARIUS MILHAUD (FR)

***THERE MAY BE LIGHT (VIOLIN,  
CLARINET, CELLO, PIANO)***

ROSS HARRIS (NZ)

# INTERVAL

***QUARTET FOR THE END OF TIME***  
**(VIOLIN, CLARINET, CELLO, PIANO)**

OLIVIER MESSIAEN (FR)



## PROGRAM NOTES

### JOHN PSATHAS (NZ) – *ISLAND SONGS* (CLARINET, CELLO, PIANO)

The composer writes:

“These three pieces were each inspired by certain styles of Greek Dance music. They are not so much simulations of these styles as they are my own reaction to them. What I have responded to mostly is the unique energy of each of the dance types.

The first piece involves a number of styles and reflects what I perceive as the latent energy in much of this music (which, in this movement, only surfaces from time to time).

The second piece is a reaction to the great strength of the Zeibekiko dance, which is in a (sometimes extremely slow) 9/4 time. This second piece, while not cast in the same time frame as a true Zeibekiko, does reflect the uncertainty of the downbeat, alongside the intensely focused emotional content of this dance.

The third piece is much in the style of the Sirto dance which is always lively and unfailingly contagious with its energy.”

This work was originally commissioned by the Kandinsky Ensemble.

### DARIUS MILHAUD (FR) – *SUITE* (VIOLIN, CLARINET, PIANO)

The *Suite* was written in 1936 and reuses material from Milhaud’s own incidental music to a Jean Anouilh play about an amnesiac war veteran. The influence of Latin music, with its hip-swinging offbeat accents, is most obvious in the *Ouverture*. The *Divertissement* opens with mellow, intertwined melodies in clarinet and violin, but the piano gradually takes over the melodic impetus, supported by floating accompaniment in the other instruments. *Jeu* is a romp for clarinet and violin in the style of a folk dance. The stately *Introduction* is followed by a jaunty *Final* that incorporates the jazz influences that were popular in Paris at the time.

*(Notes sourced from Chamber Music NZ)*

### ROSS HARRIS (NZ) – *THERE MAY BE LIGHT* (VIOLIN, CLARINET, CELLO, PIANO)

The composer writes:

“*There May Be Light* was commissioned by Chamber Music New Zealand for Julian Bliss and NZTrio. As part of the commission it was suggested that it relate in some way to the Messiaen *Quartet for the End of Time* which uses the same unusual instrumentation. Whereas the Messiaen is a work permeated by his strong Catholic faith, *There May Be Light* follows a more tentative line

raising questions for which there may or may not be answers. One unusual aspect of the instrumentation of *There May Be Light* is the clarinet's use of multiphonics. The instability and fragility of this technique, (playing more than one note at a time), gives the work its elusive character."

*(Notes sourced from Chamber Music NZ)*

## **OLIVIER MESSIAEN (FR) – QUARTET FOR THE END OF TIME (VIOLIN, CLARINET, CELLO, PIANO)**

*Quartet for the End of Time* was inspired by Chapter 10 of the Book of *Revelation* in the *Bible*, in which the end of time is announced by the Angel of the Apocalypse. The circumstances of its composition are extraordinary.

Messiaen was a soldier in the French army in 1940 when he was captured by the Germans and interned in a prisoner-of-war camp in Silesia. His fellow prisoners included three other professional musicians: clarinettist Henri Akoka, violinist Jean le Boulaire, and cellist Étienne Pasquier. A sympathetic guard helped them obtain instruments as well as paper for the score, and the work was premiered at the camp in January 1941.

The work is based on apocalyptic imagery as well as a concept of time that diverts rhythm from its usual regular metrical patterns to an appreciation of each note for its

own duration, using palindromes, added beats, and augmentation and diminution of rhythmic motifs to disturb the expected rhythmic flow. The choice of eight movements was also significant: Messiaen described them as representing the six days of creation and the seventh day of rest, followed by an eighth day of "eternal light, unalterable peace".

*Liturgie de cristal*. Described by Messiaen as "the harmonious silence of heaven", this movement evokes the early morning songs of blackbirds and nightingales (sung by the clarinet and violin).

*Vocalise for the angel* who announces the end of time. The outer sections evoke the "mighty angel, his head crowned with a rainbow and dressed in a cloud." The angel's central song on the violin and cello is supported by piano chords that Messiaen described as "blue-orange".

*Abyss of the birds*. This solo clarinet movement was the first to be written. The abyss is "time itself with all its sadness and weariness", while the birds are the opposite of time: "they are our desire for light, for stars and rainbows and jubilant songs!"

*Interlude*. Messiaen composed this brief scherzo movement for his three fellow musicians next. In the central section, the clarinet recalls bird song elements from the previous movement.

*In praise of the eternity of Jesus.*

A song of praise for cello and piano, with the tempo marking “infinitely slow, ecstatic”.

*Furious dance for the seven trumpets.*

The four instruments play in unison, imitating the sounds of gongs and the six trumpets of the Apocalypse, each heralding a new catastrophe. Messiaen’s use of duration based rhythmic motifs is most obvious in this movement.

*Tangle of rainbows for the angel who announces the end of time.*

Messiaen quotes material from the second movement, before evoking a vision of superhuman sounds and colours, picturing the angel covered by a rainbow, which “symbolises peace, wisdom, and all vibrations of light and sound”.

*In praise of the immortality of Jesus.* An expansive violin melody floats upwards, portraying “the ascent of man to his god”. Like the fifth movement, this second song of praise is marked “extremely slow and tender, ecstatic”.

*(Notes sourced from Chamber Music NZ)*

## BIOGRAPHIES – MUSICIANS



### JULIAN BLISS – CLARINET

Julian Bliss is one of the world’s finest clarinetists excelling as a concerto soloist, chamber musician, jazz artist, masterclass leader and tireless musical explorer. He has inspired a generation of young players as guest lecturer and creator of his Conn-Selmer range of affordable clarinets, and introduced a substantial new audience to his instrument.

Born in the UK, Julian started playing the clarinet age 4, going on to study in the U.S. at the University of Indiana and in Germany under Sabine Meyer. The breadth and depth of his artistry are reflected in the diversity and distinction of his work.

In recital and chamber music he has played at most of the world’s leading festivals and venues including Gstaad, Mecklenburg Vorpommern, Verbier, Wigmore Hall (London) and Lincoln Center (New York). As soloist, he has appeared with a wide range of international orchestras, from the Sao Paulo Symphony, Chamber Orchestra of Paris, and Auckland Philharmonia, to the BBC Philharmonic Orchestra, London Philharmonic and Royal Philharmonic Orchestra.

In 2012 he established the Julian Bliss Septet, creating programmes inspired by King of Swing, Benny Goodman, and Latin music from Brazil and Cuba that have gone on to be performed to packed houses in festivals, Ronnie Scott's (London), the Concertgebouw (Amsterdam) and across the U.S. He has released several critically acclaimed albums including his recording of Mozart and Nielsen's Concertos with the Royal Northern Sinfonia.

## NZTRIO

Described as a “national treasure” and “New Zealand’s most indispensable ensemble” (William Dart, NZ Herald), NZTrio is renowned for its eclectic repertoire, outstanding talent and warm Kiwi stage presence. The trio smash outmoded preconceptions of classical music being stuffy or intimidating by presenting a fresh and approachable style that appeals to listeners from all walks of life.

Members of NZTrio have a strong commitment to new music, particularly by New Zealand, Australian and Asian composers, and the group regularly performs commissioned works alongside existing contemporary pieces and standard repertoire.



## WILMA SMITH – VIOLIN

Wilma Smith is Artistic Director and violinist of Wilma & Friends, a

chamber music series based in Melbourne and presenting concerts throughout Australia and New Zealand. She is also Artistic Director of the Melbourne International Chamber Music Competition and teaches violin and chamber music at the University of Melbourne, Monash University, Scotch College and Korowa Anglican Girls' School.

Wilma was born in Fiji and raised in New Zealand. She studied in Boston at the New England Conservatory with the legendary Dorothy DeLay and Louis Krasner then was founding First Violinist of the Lydian String Quartet, winners of the Naumburg Award for Chamber Music and multiple prizes at the Evian, Banff and Portsmouth International String Quartet Competitions. She was Concertmaster of the Harvard Chamber Orchestra and Handel and Haydn Society and performed regularly with the Boston Symphony Orchestra and Boston Pops Orchestra.

Invited to return home to form the New Zealand String Quartet, Wilma was First Violinist until she was appointed Concertmaster of the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra, a position she held for nine years before moving to Melbourne to be Concertmaster of the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra from 2003 to 2014. Wilma also appears as Guest Concertmaster with Sydney, Adelaide, West Australian, and Tasmanian Symphony Orchestras along with Orchestra Victoria and the

Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra. She will perform *Timelight* as guest violinist for NZTrio's Australian tour with UK clarinetist Julian Bliss August 21 – 29.



## ASHLEY BROWN – CELLO

Acclaimed as a musician of “unimpeachable artistry”, Ashley Brown is one of New Zealand's leading soloists, collaborators, chamber musicians and recording artists.

He is a founder of NZTrio and a passionate advocate for New Zealand music.

Ashley's teachers have included Alexander Ivashkin, Aldo Parisot and William Pleeth helping him to success in auditions, competitions and awards, both local and international. His musical curiosity has led him from an Artist Diploma at Yale to a Doctorate of Musical Arts exploring the collaborative relationship between composer and performer.

Ashley has shared the stage with composers and artists as diverse as Dame Gillian Whitehead, Moana Maniapoto, Michael Houstoun, Kristian Jaarvi and Neil Finn and he continues to enjoy a musical career that leaves no colour of the musical spectrum unexplored. Ashley plays the 1762 William Forster 'Liberte' cello.



## STEPHEN DE PLEDGE – PIANO

New Zealand pianist Stephen De Pledge has given concerto

performances with the Philharmonia, Bournemouth Symphony, BBC Scottish Symphony and New Zealand Symphony Orchestras, and performed internationally from London to New York, Tokyo and Shanghai.

Stephen's discography for Naxos, Champs Hill Records, Quartz, Black Box and others includes the first recordings of works by Bliss, Gorecki, and Arvo Pärt, for whom he made the world premiere recording of the *Piano Sonatinas*. In addition to his solo recordings Stephen's discography includes song cycles by Ned Rorem and Samuel Barber, chamber music of Messiaen, Shostakovich and Schnittke and the premiere recording of Cresswell's *Piano Concerto*.

Stephen has broadcast for Radio 3 and Classic FM in the UK, on radio in USA, Australia, New Zealand and Sweden, and for BBC Television. Since 2010 Stephen has taught piano at the School of Music, University of Auckland. Stephen will perform with NZTrio this year in a range of programmes: Messiaen's *Quartet for the End of Time* Australian tour *Timelight* in August, the NZTrio 2018 Loft Series 2 – *Braid* in September, and *Exotica* at various festivals throughout New Zealand in October.

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# BIOGRAPHIES – COMPOSERS

## JOHN PSATHAS, ONZM– *ISLAND SONGS*

John Psathas was born in Wellington New Zealand to Greek immigrant parents in 1966. The family worked in the restaurant trade and John developed a strong interest in music, leaving college early to study music at Victoria University of Wellington where he is now Professor of Composition.

Now considered one of New Zealand's most internationally acclaimed composers with performances in venues from Windsor Castle to Kalamazoo, Jakarta to Bermuda, Japan to Alaska, and Hong Kong to Tel Aviv, he has established and maintains an international reputation unprecedented in New Zealand history.

From genre-crossing projects with jazz legends Michael Brecker and Joshua Redman, to an innovative e-book scoring collaboration with Salman Rushdie, from an unforgettable recording session with the Grand Mufti in Paris's Grand Mosque, to a Billboard classical-chart-topping album with System of a Down front man Serj Tankian, John's musical journey weaves through a myriad of genres, and has moved concert audiences in more than 50 countries on all 7 continents (yes, even Antarctica).

Early career collaborations included working with such luminaries as Sir Mark Elder, Kristjan Jarvi, the Takacs Quartet, Lara St. John, the Netherlands Blazers Ensemble, Dame Evelyn Glennie, Edo de Waart, Joanna MacGregor, Pedro Carneiro, the Halle Orchestra, The New Zealand Symphony Orchestra, the Strasbourg Philharmonic Orchestra, Symphony Orchestra of Emilia Romagna "Arturo Toscanini", the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, and many more. Then followed a period of intense creative exploration in the worlds of electronica and jazz, and a series of mega-projects (such as scoring much of the opening ceremony of the Athens 2004 Olympic Games). All of which has led to an explosion of first-hand collaborations with artists from dozens of musical traditions spanning Asia, Europe, North and South America, Africa, and Australasia.

John is now developing projects that integrate the many strands of this creative journey with much of his recent work having social and historical commentary at its core. He has also received several awards and honours, including twice winning the SOUNZ Contemporary Award (2002 and 2004) for individual works and three 'Tuis' for Classical CD of the Year (2000, 2004, and 2007). In 2003 he was made a New Zealand Arts Foundation Laureate and in 2005 was appointed an Officer of the New Zealand Order of Merit (ONZM).

## DARIUS MILHAUD – SUITE

Darius Milhaud (1892 – 1974) was a French composer and teacher, influenced by jazz and polytonality and one of the most prolific composers of the twentieth century.

As a child he studied piano and violin but began composing in his early teens, after being inspired by playing Debussy's *String Quartet*. He studied at the Paris Conservatory. In 1917 he travelled to Rio as an attaché at the French Embassy, and while in Brazil he immersed himself in the local musical culture. On his return to Paris, Milhaud joined a group of French composers known as Les Six, who were heavily influenced by Satie and Cocteau and notorious for their rejection of both French impressionism and Wagnerian romanticism. Milhaud's music is characterised by its lyricism, even if that is sometimes obscured by the harmonic clashes caused by his use of multiple tonalities simultaneously.

As a prominent Jewish artist who was also disabled by severe rheumatoid arthritis, Europe became dangerous for him as WWII approached. Milhaud escaped to America where he accepted an offer to teach at Mills College in Oakland. For most of his life he would alternate teaching at Mills College and the Paris Conservatory.

Milhaud composed ballets, operas, film and theatre scores, songs and symphonies. He was highly influential

and mentored hundreds of successful composers including Iannis Xenakis, Karlheinz Stockhausen, Steve Reich, Dave Brubeck, and Burt Bacharach.

## ROSS HARRIS – THERE MAY BE LIGHT

New Zealander Ross Harris taught music at Victoria University for over 30 years, and is now a freelance composer. His repertoire spans piano pieces, songs, chamber music, operas, orchestral works, jazz, rock and klezmer music. The Arts Foundation recognised his contribution to New Zealand music by naming him as an Arts Laureate in 2014. Other awards include the QSM for Public Service in 1985 following the premiere of his opera *Waituhi*, and the SOUNZ Contemporary Award in 2000, 2005, 2006 and 2009.

During 2005-2006 he was composer-in-residence with the Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra, who gave the first performance of his *Symphony No. 2* in 2006 and subsequently recorded it for commercial release. In 2016 the Philharmonia premiered his *Symphony No. 6 Last Letter*, a setting of poems by his regular collaborator, Vincent O'Sullivan. The two also wrote the chamber opera *Brass Poppies* which was presented at both the 2016 International Arts Festival in Wellington and the 2016 Auckland Arts Festival. In 2015 his *Piano Quintet* was performed in Chamber

Music New Zealand's *Composer Connections* series by the New Zealand String Quartet and Stephen De Pledge.

## OLIVIER MESSIAEN – *QUARTET FOR THE END OF TIME*

Olivier Messiaen was born in Avignon France in 1908, the son of an English scholar and a poet. On his 10th birthday, Messiaen was given the score of Debussy's opera *Pelleas et Melisande*. "It was this score", he said later, "that decided my vocation." He was already a proficient pianist, a budding composer, and had studied operatic scores by Mozart, Berlioz and Wagner. From Debussy, though, he gained inspiration for his use of conventional chords in unconventional sequences.

He entered the Paris Conservatory at the age of 11 where his teachers included the organist Marcel Dupré and the composer Paul Dukas. In 1931 he was appointed organist at the Church of the Sainte-Trinité, Paris. From 1939 to 1942 he was a soldier and prisoner of war. It was in captivity that he composed *Quartet for the End of Time*. After the war he returned to his position as organist at Sainte-Trinité (a position he held until the early 1970s) and began teaching at the Paris Conservatory. The rest of his life would be spent composing, teaching and travelling.

Messiaen associated harmonies with strong mental images of colours (a capacity known as synaesthesia). He developed a set of modes, each of which produced harmonies of certain colours, and he combined this palette of chord-colours into sound pictures, treating them as colouring devices and ignoring the rules of traditional harmony. A deeply religious person, Messiaen intended much of his music to represent the relationship between God and the people, and he did so through an eclectic range of techniques influenced by plainchant, Greek rhythms, stained-glass windows, the music and theology of India, birdsong and Christian number symbolism. Each work seeks to illuminate a single truth, drawn from his own Catholic faith. This tends to give it a timeless, meditative quality, in which the listener is invited to enjoy each moment for its own sake.

Messiaen was one of the most respected and recognised composers of the twentieth century, inspiring and teaching countless younger composers. He was awarded The Grand Cross of the Legion of Honour, The Grand Cross of the National Order of Merit and was a Commander of Arts and Letters. He died in Clichy, France, 1992.

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