

Musicians' artistry a truly divine revelation

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People say that the experience of great art puts us in touch with the eternal. On Thursday evening, the Gryphon Trio and clarinetist James Campbell achieved that literally in the closing professional concert of this year's Toronto Summer Music Festival at the University of Toronto's MacMillan Theatre.

These accomplished Canadian musicians used their every technical skill and considerable artistry to evoke (to say interpret wouldn't do the effort justice) the Quartet for the End of Time, French composer Olivier Messiaen's 1941 confession of faith, created while imprisoned in a German prisoner-of-war camp.

As Campbell explained in his insightful introduction, this eight-movement piece is now considered to be one of the masterpieces of 20th century music. The proof was in the delicately ethereal performance that followed.

The secret to making this abstract piece work is to levitate the notes so that they hang suspended somewhere between stage and heaven, sometimes wafting, occasionally raining down on the audience. Time, both in terms of the listener's attention and the notes and beats being counted, should cease to matter as the Apocalypse, as seen by St. John-the-Divine in the Book of Revelation, comes to end life as we know it.

The sustained silence at the end of the piece proved that the musicians had achieved their goal and, in the process, confirmed that the experience of serious, emotionally stirring and intellectually challenging music has a place in the hot days and nights of a Toronto summer.

All four musicians — pianist Jamie Parker, violinist Annalee Patipatanakoon, cellist Roman Borys and Campbell on clarinet — delivered exceptional performances. This music was performed with a backdrop of large projections of landscape paintings by visual artist Stephen Hutchings. The images that accompany music were something for each beholder to appreciate for themselves. I preferred to keep my eyes shut, the better to enjoy the a personal transferrance of sound into shimmering, shifting rainbows of colour.

The Quartet was preceeded by the Op. 80 Piano Trio composed by Robert Schumann eight decades previously. Here, also, the Gryphons came through with an impeccably balanced, elegantly rendered interpretation of something from a much simpler time.

Concerts any time of year don't get finer than this.