

Coalesce

Quartet for the Start of Life

Perusal Score,

The Royal Philharmonic Society commissioned Arthur Keegan as one of its 2025 Composers to write this work for Hebrides Ensemble.

The RPS is especially grateful to donors to its Beethoven 200 Appeal, notably Judith Weir, Karis Lacroix, Kieran Cooper, Composers Edition, and several anonymous supporters.

Duration: c. 10'

Arthur Keegan

16.12.25

Perusal Score,
not for performance

Programme Note:

[This is the programme note used for first performances, the piece was written as a companion to Messiaen's Quartet for the End of Time which it was performed alongside]

Messiaen's Quartet for the End of Time is an iconic masterpiece of 20th-century music. Its extraordinary combination of radical musical language, blazing imagery and beguiling instrumental sonorities means it occupies a unique space in the chamber repertoire. Being asked to create a companion piece for it has been intense and deeply rewarding... and not a little intimidating!

The story of the Quartet's origin is essential context in the achievement of the piece. It was composed in 1940 amid deprivation and existential dread in a prisoner-of-war camp using manuscript provided by a prison guard. The Quartet was then premiered to an audience of both inmates and guards on a freezing January night. This is surely one of the most poignant examples of art transcending, and elevating, human experience against all odds.

That creation story is inseparable from the musical and spiritual world of the Quartet itself. Across eight movements, Messiaen draws on the Book of Revelation to create searingly beautiful and at times terrifyingly vivid musical images, culminating in the apocalyptic angelic announcement that "there should be time no longer". The work traces a journey in which earthly, human conceptions of time are gradually dissolved and transcended by a spiritual sense of eternity. This trajectory finds completion in the final movement, 'In Praise of the Immortality of Jesus', which Messiaen positions beyond time altogether: outside temporal experience. It's a bold and dramatic conception, made all the more powerful by the circumstances of its composition and first performance.

Messiaen's rhythmic and harmonic invention in the Quartet is profound and tangibly shapes the piece's imagery. He creates stasis in movement, continually plays with the listener's perception of time, and drenches the music in shimmering, entrancing chords. The soundworld is unmistakably Messiaen, deeply influenced by his synaesthesia and incorporating his trademark transcriptions of birdsong: nightingales and blackbirds appear in the very first moments of the piece. Any opportunity to hear the Quartet for the End of Time is truly precious.

My piece, Coalesce, is concerned not with the end but the beginning of time, both biblical and biological. The opening responds to the first lines of the Book of Genesis, depicting Earth "without form, and void," with "darkness upon the face of the deep". I also drew inspiration from Rachel Carson's book 'The Sea Around Us', with its poetic account of unrelenting, awe-inspiring processes unfolding over unimaginable spans of time that led to the emergence of life on earth. Key to both beginnings is an arc of order emerging from tempestuous chaos.

Musically, Coalesce begins where Messiaen's piece ends. It atomizes the soundworld of Messiaen's eighth movement across the quartet. Each instrument begins independently, contributing to a "soup" of musical material that gradually coagulates toward cohesive ensemble playing. The coming together of individual, independent lines to form an ensemble musically mirrors the magical threshold where biology is created from chemistry and life begins. From this point, musical gestures are extended and transformed in a process akin to a sped-up, kaleidoscopic evolution toward complex life and humanity. Ideas quickly morph and flit by. Ensemble interactions grow more complex: dance rhythms appear, solos and duets emerge and, occasionally, Messiaen's birdsong pops through the texture.

The short closing section is reflective. Whilst writing, I kept returning to a thought from Brian Cox, extending words by Carl Sagan about the miracle of life on Earth... 'If Earth is the only planet in our galaxy that hosts intelligent life, we are the only island of meaning in a sea of 400 billion stars'. The story of life on Earth is now intertwined with humanity's responsibility for our home, and a moment of reflection – even a prayer – seemed the only appropriate response.

The process of writing this piece has been particularly reflective and exploratory. The inspiring embrace of Messiaen's music has stretched me and encouraged a fresh approach for which I am grateful. The members of Hebrides Ensemble, led by Will, have been ideal collaborators in this – I'd like to thank them all, as well as the Royal Philharmonic Society which commissioned the work.

Arthur Keegan | www.arthurkeegan.co.uk | [@Arthur_Keegan_Music](https://www.instagram.com/Arthur_Keegan_Music)

*Perusal Score,
not for performance*

Performance Notes:

Trills are marked either s.t. (semi-tone above) or w.t. (whole tone above).

The opening section asks for violin and clarinet to be either off stage or at the back of the hall. The effect is for spatialisation (so back of the hall is normally preferred to off-stage) and the ideal scenario is that the first moments of the piece are acousmatic – the audience aren't aware of where the sound is coming from.

Pedal for piano is marked in some places. Assume *ad lib.* wherever it is not marked.

*Perusal Score,
not for performance*

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Coalesce: Quartet for the Start of Life

Arthur Keegan

♩ = c. 108

Cl. starts off-stage or at back of hall
Start walking to seat around b. 19

Clarinet in B♭

Piano

Violin

Violoncello

pppppp
wispily sound - delicate, fragile

Cl.

Pno.

Vln.

Vc.

una corda
(till end of section?)

pppppp *p*

mp

*molto sul pont**

sfz ppppp subito jittery fluctuations in dynamic *f p*

* vary contact point/pressure to bring out variety of partials
fluctuations in dynamic welcome - it should feel unstable

Cl. **mp** > **ppp** **mf** > **ppp** **mf** > **ppp**

Pno. **ppppp** *poco* **ppppp** **f**

Vln. **ppp** **mp** **ppp** **mf** **ppp** **mf**

Vc. **ppp** **mp** **pp** **f** **pp**

*sul pont.** *ord.* *s.p.* *ord.* *s.p.*

8vb *8vb*

Perusal Score, not for performance

|| [Start walking toward stage seat] Cl. & Vln.: senza misura, molto rubato
 change durations keep inconsistent, commas are rests of varied length.
 general trend: start sparse (long notes, bigger pauses) and become dense / fast

Cl. **ppppp**

Pno. **ppppp**

Vln. **ppp**

Vc. **p** **ppp** **f** **poco**

ord. *8vb*

Perusal Score, not for performance

[Start walking toward stage seat] Vln & Cl.: senza misura, molto rubato
 change durations, keep inconsistent, commas are rests of varied length.
 general trend: start sparse (long notes, bigger pauses) and become dense / fast

Vln. **ppp**

Vc. **p** **ppp** **f** **poco**

*s.p.** *with nail [or s.p.? - metallic sound]* *pizz* *with flesh [warm sound]* *molto vib arco*

30

Cl.

Pno. *pp* *p < mf*
8^{va}

*Perusal Score,
not for performance*

Vln.

Vc. *pp* *f > ppp*
ord. change strings as needed
can be separated, gestural glisses
gliss.



35

Cl.

Pno. *mp* *f*

*Perusal Score,
not for performance*

Vln.

Vc. *p* *p* *f* *p* *f*
subito pizz

39

Cl. |----->

Take seat around here
(definitely by b. 43!)

Pno. *p* *mf*

8vb-----|

Vln. |----->

Take seat around here
(definitely by b. 43)

Vc. *arco*

pp < > *f* > *mf* *f*

Perusal Score,
not for performance

Stop repeats abruptly at b. 43

43

Cl. |----->

flz. ord.

mf

Pno. *ff* *pp*

[change this chord?]

Vln. |----->

ped. ad lib.

Stop repeats abruptly at b. 43

sul pont.

Vc. *mf*

ff

Perusal Score,
not for performance

47

Cl. *p* < *f* *mp* < *f* flz. ord.

Pno. *mf* *mf*

Perusal Score,

not for performance

Vln. pizz *p* < *f* arco *p* < *mf*

Vc. *sfz* *ppp* < *f* ric... *sfz*

50

Cl. flz. ord. *f*

Pno. *p* *ppp*

Vln. *f* < *pp* < *f*

Vc. *p* < *ff* *f* Sub arco

Perusal Score,

not for performance

53

Cl. *flz.*
pp \leftarrow *mp* \rightarrow *pp*

Pno. *pp* \leftarrow *mp* \rightarrow *pp* *pp* \leftarrow *mp* *f*

Vln. *p* \leftarrow *mp* \rightarrow *pp*

Vc. *ppp* \leftarrow *p* \leftarrow *f*
espress.

*Perusal Score,
not for performance*

56

Cl. *ord.*
f \leftarrow *pp* *f* *f*

Pno. *p* *f* *p*

Vln. *arco*
f

Vc. *ppp* *f* \leftarrow *ff*

*Perusal Score,
not for performance*

flz. ord. pulsing within
general decresc

flz. ord.

Cl. *p* < *f* *p* *p*

Pno. *f* *p* *f*

Vln. *f* *p* *f* *pp*

Vc. *p* < *mf* *p* *f* *p*

arco III ric.

61 Cl. flz. ord. *mf* *p* *mf* *mp* *f*

Pno. *p* *mf* *p* *mf* *mp* *f*

Vln. *p* *mf* *mp* *f* *p* *mf*

Vc. *p* *mf* *p*

arco III

64 flz. ord. flz. ord. flz. ord. flz. ord. **66**

Cl. *p* *mf* *mp* *f* *mf*

Pno. *p* *mf* *mp* *f* *p* *mf*

Vln. *p* *mf* *mp* *f*

Vc. *f* *p* *mf* *mp* *f*

Perusal Score,
not for performance

67 flz. ord. flz. ord. flz. ord. flz. ord. **69**

Cl. *p* *mf* *mp* *f* *pp subito*

Pno. *mp* *f* *mp* *f* *ffz*

Vln. *p* *mf* *mp* *f*

Vc. *p* *mf* *mp* *f* *pp subito*

Perusal Score,
not for performance

70 72

Cl.

Pno. *pp*

Vln.

Vc. *pp* *f*

Perusal Score, not for performance



73 75

Cl.

Pno.

Vln. *pp* *f* *pp*

Vc. *pp*

Perusal Score, not for performance

76 78

Cl.

Pno.

Vln.

Vc.

f *pp* *pp* *f* *pp*

pp *molto espress.* *ff*

Perusal Score, not for performance

79 83

Cl.

Pno.

Vln.

Vc.

p *f* *p* *f* *p* *p*

ff *mp* *f* *ppppp*

p *f* *p* *f* *p* *p*

p *f* *p* *ff* *sul pont**

pp - mf (vary)

Perusal Score, not for performance

Cl. *f p f p mf*

Pno. *mf p*

Vln. *f p f p mf* pizz

Vc. *p mf p*

(8)

Perusal Score, not for performance

Cl. *92*

Pno. *8va ff*

Vln. arco

Vc.

Perusal Score, not for performance

Cl. *f* *p* *f* *p* *p* *f* *p*

Pno. *pp*

Vln. *f* *p* *f* *p* *p* *f* *p*

Vc. *f* *p* *f* *p* *p* *f* *p*

arco

Perusal Score, not for performance



Cl. *f* *ppp* *poco placed* *ppp*

Pno. *loco*

Vln. *f* *ppp* *poco placed* *ppp*

Vc. *f* *ppp* *ma dolce*

Perusal Score, not for performance

Cl. *mf ppp mf p*

Pno. *ppp*

Vln. *mf ppp mf*

Vc. *mf ppp*

Perusal Score, not for performance



119 $\text{♩} = \text{c. } 120$
a little faster rubato

Cl. *p* [vln leads the rubato]

Pno. *p*

Vln. *p f mp espress.* [vln leads the rubato]

Vc. *mf p*

Perusal Score, not for performance

124

Musical score for measures 121-124. The score includes parts for Clarinet (Cl.), Piano (Pno.), Violin (Vln.), and Violoncello (Vc.). The Clarinet part features a melodic line with a slur and a fermata over the final measure. The Violin part has a melodic line with a slur and a fermata over the final measure. The Piano and Violoncello parts are mostly rests. A large pink watermark "Perusal Score, not for performance" is overlaid on the score.



128

Musical score for measures 127-128. The score includes parts for Clarinet (Cl.), Piano (Pno.), Violin (Vln.), and Violoncello (Vc.). The Clarinet part features a melodic line with a slur and a fermata over the final measure, with dynamics markings *f p* and *mp*. The Violin part has a melodic line with a slur and a fermata over the final measure, with dynamics markings *f*, *p*, and *mp*. The Piano and Violoncello parts are mostly rests. A large pink watermark "Perusal Score, not for performance" is overlaid on the score.

133 135 poco accel.

Cl. *p* *mp*

Pno.

Vln. *mp*

Vc.

Perusal Score, not for performance

||

137 139 a tempo

Cl. *mf* *p*

Pno. *mf* *p*

Vln. *p*

Vc. *mf* *p* *mf*
pizz arco

Perusal Score, not for performance

accel.

rit.

143

♩ = c. 132

♩ = c. 120

Cl. *f* *p*

Pno. *mf*

Vln. *f stark* *f*

Vc. *pp*

Perusal Score, not for performance

147

148

Cl. *f* *p* *f* *p*

Pno. *f* *mf*

Vln. *p* *f* *p* *f* *p*

Vc. *f* *p* *f* *p*

Perusal Score, not for performance

Cl. *mf* *s.t. tr*

Pno. *p* *mf* *E₄ s.t. tr*

Vln. *p* *mf* *s.t. tr*

Vc. *mf*

Perusal Score, not for performance

Cl. *p < mf* *w.t. tr* *f* *p* *s.t. tr* *f*

Pno. *mf* *w.t. tr*

Vln. *p < mf* *s.t. tr* *f*

Vc. *f* *pizz*

Perusal Score, not for performance

158 *s.t.* *tr* **159**

Cl.

pp

w.t. *tr*

Pno.

pp *poco* *pp* *mf* *pp* *poco* *pp* *mf*

Vln.

pp *subito* *f* *p*

Vc.

p *mf* *pizz*

165

Cl.

p *f* *p*

Pno.

Vln.

mf *pizz* *arco* *p* *f* *p*

Vc.

Perusal Score,
not for performance

166 $3+2+2$ $2+2+3$

Cl. f p p f p

Pno. pp

Vln. f p p f p

Vc. arco f p f p f p f p

Perusal Score, not for performance

171 $3+2+2$ 174 $\text{♩} = c. 160$

Cl. f p

Pno. p

Vln. f p

Vc. 3 3 3 3 3 3 3

Perusal Score, not for performance

175

Cl.

Pno.

Vln.

Vc.

pp

p

pizz

p

mf

p

arco

pp

mf

p

arco

p

Perusal Score,
not for performance

181

Cl.

Pno.

Vln.

Vc.

p

mf

arco

arco

Perusal Score,
not for performance

186 187

Cl. *f*

Pno. *f* *p*

Vln. *mf* *f* *p* *arco* *pizz*

Vc. *f* *p*

Perusal Score, not for performance

191

Cl.

Pno.

Vln.

Vc.

Perusal Score, not for performance

195 197

Cl. *p* *f*

Pno. *p* *f* *pp* *mf* *pp* *mf*

Vln. *pizz* *mf*

Vc. *f*

Perusal Score, not for performance



199

Cl. 2+3 2+2+3

Pno. *pp* *mf* *sim*

Vln.

Vc.

Perusal Score, not for performance

204 2+2+3 2+2+3

Cl.

Pno.

Vln. arco *f*

Vc. pizz *mf*

Perusal Score,
not for performance

212

209 2+2+3

Cl. *ppp*

Pno. *f p f p f p f p pp ff* *p* espress. 5

Vln. *ppp*

Vc. arco *ppp*

molto rall. ♩ = c. 120

Perusal Score,
not for performance

226

Cl. *mf* *p*

Pno. *f* *p*

Vln. *mf* *p*

Vc. *mf* *p*

Perusal Score, not for performance



230

Cl.

Pno. *pp* *mp* *poco a poco cresc.*

Vln. *delicate, gentle*

Vc. *con sord.* *ppp* *poco a poco cresc.*

Perusal Score, not for performance

232 236

Cl.

Pno.

Vln.

Vc.

*Perusal Score,
not for performance*

238 241

Cl.

Pno.

Vln.

Vc.

*Perusal Score,
not for performance*

244

242

Cl.

Pno.

Vln.

Vc.

p *mf*

f *pp* *f*

p *mf*

p *ff*

Perusal Score, not for performance

245

Cl.

Pno.

Vln.

Vc.

p *mf* *p* *p* *mf* *p* *mf*

mp

p *mf* *p* *mf* *p* *mf*

p *f* *p* *f* *p* *f*

Perusal Score, not for performance

half tempo

251 ♩ = c. 60

Cl.

[sing - change octave if more comfortable in a different register]

Pno.

[sing - change octave if more comfortable in a different register]

Vln.

[sing - change octave if more comfortable in a different register]

Vc.

Perusal Score,
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Perusal Score,
not for performance

258

Cl. *mp* *ppp* *p* *pp*

Musical notation for Clarinet (Cl.) in treble clef. It begins at measure 256 with a triplet of eighth notes. The dynamics are marked as *mp*, *ppp*, *p*, and *pp*. The piece concludes with a fermata over a whole note.

p

Musical notation for Bassoon in bass clef. It features a long, sustained note with a fermata, marked with the dynamic *p*.

Pno. *pp* *mp* *p*

Musical notation for Piano (Pno.) in grand staff. The dynamics are marked as *pp*, *mp*, and *p*. The piece ends with a fermata over a whole note.

Perusal Score,
not for performance

p

Musical notation for Bassoon in bass clef. It features a long, sustained note with a fermata, marked with the dynamic *p*.

Vln. *p*

Musical notation for Violin (Vln.) in treble clef. It features a long, sustained note with a fermata, marked with the dynamic *p*.

p

Musical notation for Bassoon in bass clef. It features a long, sustained note with a fermata, marked with the dynamic *p*.

Vc. *p*

Musical notation for Violoncello (Vc.) in bass clef. It features a long, sustained note with a fermata, marked with the dynamic *p*.

Perusal Score,
not for performance

263

Cl.

Musical staff for Clarinet (Cl.) in 3/4 time. It begins at measure 261 with a treble clef. The notes are: G4 (quarter), F4 (quarter), E4 (quarter), D4 (quarter), C4 (half), B3 (quarter), A3 (quarter), G3 (quarter), F3 (quarter), E3 (half). A dynamic marking of *p* is placed below the staff.

Musical staff for Bassoon (Bsn.) in 3/4 time. It begins with a bass clef. The notes are: G2 (half), F2 (half), E2 (half), D2 (half), C2 (half), B1 (half), A1 (half), G1 (half), F1 (half), E1 (half). A dynamic marking of *p* is placed below the staff.

Pno.

Musical staff for Piano (Pno.) in 3/4 time. It begins with a treble clef. The notes are: G3 (quarter), F3 (quarter), E3 (quarter), D3 (quarter), C3 (half), B2 (quarter), A2 (quarter), G2 (quarter), F2 (quarter), E2 (half). A dynamic marking of *pp* is placed below the staff.

Musical staff for Bassoon (Bsn.) in 3/4 time. It begins with a bass clef. The notes are: G2 (half), F2 (half), E2 (half), D2 (half), C2 (half), B1 (half), A1 (half), G1 (half), F1 (half), E1 (half). A dynamic marking of *p* is placed below the staff.

Vln.

Musical staff for Violin (Vln.) in 3/4 time. It begins with a treble clef. The notes are: G4 (quarter), F4 (quarter), E4 (quarter), D4 (quarter), C4 (half), B3 (quarter), A3 (quarter), G3 (quarter), F3 (quarter), E3 (half). A dynamic marking of *p* is placed below the staff.

Musical staff for Bassoon (Bsn.) in 3/4 time. It begins with a bass clef. The notes are: G2 (half), F2 (half), E2 (half), D2 (half), C2 (half), B1 (half), A1 (half), G1 (half), F1 (half), E1 (half). A dynamic marking of *p* is placed below the staff.

Vc.

Musical staff for Violoncello (Vc.) in 3/4 time. It begins with a bass clef. The notes are: G2 (half), F2 (half), E2 (half), D2 (half), C2 (half), B1 (half), A1 (half), G1 (half), F1 (half), E1 (half). A dynamic marking of *p* is placed below the staff.

*Perusal Score,
not for performance*

*Perusal Score,
not for performance*

[sing - change octave if more comfortable in a different register]

266

264

Cl.

Pno.

Vln.

Vc.

*Perusal Score,
not for performance*

*Perusal Score,
not for performance*

The image shows a page of a musical score for rehearsal mark 266. The score is for four instruments: Clarinet (Cl.), Piano (Pno.), Violin (Vln.), and Viola (Vc.). The vocal line is written above the Clarinet staff. The music is in 3/4 time and consists of four measures. The vocal line has lyrics 'a - - - - - men' with a long note on 'a' and a dotted note on 'men'. The piano accompaniment features a melodic line in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. The violin and viola parts have a similar melodic line. The score includes dynamic markings such as 'p' (piano) and 'p' (piano) with hairpins. The rehearsal mark '266' is enclosed in a box. The page number '31' is in the top right corner. The rehearsal mark '264' is at the beginning of the first measure. The text 'Perusal Score, not for performance' is overlaid in pink on the piano and violin parts.