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MUSIC REVIEW

## Uchida, Neidich connect at Marlboro

By David Weininger | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT JULY 29, 2014



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**Playing Messiaen’s “Quartet for the End of Time”  
Saturday at Marlboro Music were violinist Itamar  
Zorman, pianist Mitsuko Uchida, cellist Lionel Cottet,  
and clarinetist Charles Neidich.**

MARLBORO, Vt. — Few pieces test an ensemble’s internal cohesion like Messiaen’s “Quartet for the End of Time.” Written in a German POW camp in the early 1940s, the piece reaches out of the historical catastrophe in which it was created, and opens a series of windows onto eternity. The music is ecstatic, strangely shaped, shot through with silence, and requires something akin to collective ESP to bring off convincingly.

On Saturday, the quartet was played in brilliant and gripping fashion by clarinetist Charles Neidich, violinist Itamar Zorman, cellist Lionel Cottet, and pianist Mitsuko Uchida, during the second weekend of concerts at Marlboro Music. Though they have no lengthy history of playing together and vary greatly in age and career status — Zorman and Cottet are in their 20s, while Neidich and Uchida are world-renowned instrumentalists; the latter is also Marlboro’s artistic director — they nevertheless achieved the requisite sense of unanimity. This is what Marlboro has been doing for 63 seasons — bringing together outstanding musicians, giving them all-but-unlimited rehearsal time, and setting them loose on a wide range of repertoire, only a few samples of which are heard at public concerts.

Like time itself, Messiaen’s quartet oscillates between stasis and frenzy. Some groups try to unlock its sense of timelessness by narrowing its extremes toward the middle. But Saturday’s performance showed that the piece succeeds only by embracing those extremes. Dynamic changes were vast, and the string players’ phrasing showed how much minute attention goes into making its melodies seem vast and oceanic. The care with which Uchida varied her touch so that each iteration of a repeated chord sounded different was staggering.

Most impressive, if one can single anyone out, was Neidich in his solo movement, “Abyss of the Birds.” Some phrases began imperceptibly and only gradually emerged from shadow into full presence. During long, loud notes he seemed to bend his pitch in a way Messiaen may not have intended, but which was spellbinding nonetheless. When a piquant bird call emerged at the end of one such moment, a wave of surprise rippled through the audience. This was the best performance I have heard of the quartet, and one of the very best things I’ve heard during two decades of Marlboro visits.

Festival concerts continue through Aug. 17.

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