

BRUSSELS PHILHARMONIC

EN

THE ELEMENTS

earth, air, fire, water: music inspired by the 4 elements



The power of the elements

FRI
28.10

BRUSSELS PHILHARMONIC PRESENTS A BUCKET LIST CONCERT
CONDUCTOR **KAREN KAMENSEK** HARP **ELINE GROSLLOT**
CONCERTMASTER **HENRY RAUDALES**
CAMILLE PÉPIN VAJRAYANA **PHILIP GLASS** THE LIGHT
GEOFFREY GORDON EOLIAN - A CONCERTO FOR HARP AND ORCHESTRA (WORLD PREMIERE)
CLAUDE DEBUSSY LA MER

FLAGEY
BRUSSELS

**“THE HARP AS A SOLO
INSTRUMENT IS A CHALLENGE
BUT IT’S SUCH A BRILLIANT
INSTRUMENT, CAPABLE
OF SO MANY THINGS. AND
HAVING THE CHANCE TO
WORK WITH A VIRTUOSO LIKE
ELINE GROSLLOT MEANS I AM
FREE TO WRITE ANYTHING
THAT COMES TO MIND.”**

GEOFFREY GORDON

PROGRAMME

Brussels Philharmonic
Karen Kamensek, conductor
Eline Groslot, harp

Camille Pépin

Vajrayana (2015)

1. Ratna
2. Vajra
3. Padma
4. Karma
5. Vairocana

Philip Glass

The Light (1987)

— intermission —

Geoffrey Gordon

**Eolian, Concerto for Harp and Orchestra
(2022, world premiere)**
soloist: Eline Groslot

Claude Debussy

La Mer (1905)

- I. De l'aube à midi sur la mer
- II. Jeux des vagues
- III. Dialogue du vent et de la mer

MUSICIANS BRUSSELS PHILHARMONIC

Conductor
Karen Kamensek

Concertmaster
Henry Raudales

Soloist
Eline Groslot, harp

Violin 1
Bart Lemmens ⁽¹⁾, Sylvie Bagara,
Olivia Bergeot, Annelies Broeckhoven,
Cristina Constantinescu,
Stefan Claeys, Justine Rigutto,
Kristina Rimkeviciute,
Elizaveta Rybentseva, Anton Skakun,
Alissa Vaitsner, Veerle Van Roosbroeck,
Gillis Veldeman

Violin 2
Mari Hagiwara ⁽¹⁾
Alexis Delporte, Francisco Dourthé Orrego,
Nicolás Fernández Mancebo,
Aline Janeczek, Mireille Kovac,
Eléonore Malaboeuf, Sayoko Mundy,
Naoko Ogura, Eline Pauwels,
Julien Poli, Joana Revez Mendonça

Viola
Mihai Cocea ⁽¹⁾, Griet François ⁽²⁾,
Philippe Allard, José-Miguel Freitas,
Phung Ha, Hélène Koerver,
Agnieszka Kosakowska,
Barbara Peynsaert, Stephan Uelpenich,
Patricia Van Reusel

Cello
Kristaps Bergs ⁽¹⁾
Kirsten Andersen, Barbara Gerarts,
Julius Himmler, Sophie Jomard,
Laia Ruiz Llopert, Suzanne van Duuren,
Elke Wynants

Double Bass
Jan Buysschaert ⁽¹⁾
Luzia Correia Rendeiro Vieira,
Thomas Fiorini, Daniele Giampaolo,
Benjamin Heymans, Simon Luce

Flute
Wouter Van den Eynde ⁽¹⁾
Elise Tossens
Maaïke Cottyn ⁽²⁾

Oboe
Joris Van den Hauwe ⁽¹⁾
Maarten Wijnen
Lode Cartrysse ⁽²⁾

Clarinet
Anne Boeykens ⁽¹⁾
Elena Herrero Vega
Midori Mori ⁽²⁾

Bassoon
Marceau Lefèvre ⁽¹⁾
Alexander Kuksa, Pieter Opsteyn
Jonas Coomans ⁽²⁾

Horn
Hans van der Zanden ⁽¹⁾
Luc van den Hove, Claudia Rigoni
Mieke Ailliet ⁽²⁾

Trumpet
Ward Hoornaert ⁽¹⁾
Rik Ghesquière, Diego Hernandez Torres
Luc Sirjacques
Steven Bossuyt ⁽²⁾

Trombone
David Rey ⁽¹⁾
Zaccharie Kropp
Tim Van Medegael ⁽²⁾

Tuba
Jean Xhonneux ⁽²⁾

Timpani
Titus Franken ⁽¹⁾

Percussion
Bjorn Denys, Gerrit Nulens,
Miguel Sánchez Cobo, Stijn Schoofs

Harp
Marieke Schoenmakers ⁽²⁾
Anouk Sturtewagen

Piano & Celesta
Anastasia Goldberg ⁽²⁾

⁽¹⁾ principal

⁽²⁾ soloist

WELCOME

The four elements inspire and intrigue us. Earth, air, fire and water – they are all around us, permanently present and tangible, but also full of mysteries and secrets.

Philip Glass writes *The Light* as a musical portrait of the speed of light, Geoffrey Gordon brings the wind – the breath of God – to life with his Eolian-concerto for harp, and Claude Debussy shows himself as a master of suggestion with *La Mer*: he does not paint an exact portrait of the sea, but evokes an atmosphere. Airy and smooth – with menacing clouds, splashing water and a wind that casts a silty haze over the surface of the water. In many religions, such as the Tibetan, there is a fifth element that brings everything together. Vajrayana or Ether is the all-embracing state of equilibrium and calm. Camille Pépin's *Vajrayana* is based on the five elements, with a separate musical motif for each element and a rhythm that symbolises the heartbeat of nature.

PROGRAMME NOTES

The natural elements have for centuries inspired and intrigued countless artists, philosophers and scientists. Many religions, including the Tibetan, honour not only the elements of 'fire', 'earth', 'water' and 'air, but also a fifth, all-encompassing element. That element, which brings everything together, was the inspiration for the orchestral work *Vajrayana* by the French composer Camille Pépin (°1990). Scientists, too, believed for a long time in the existence of a fifth element. Until the scientists Michelson and Morley in 1887 disproved the existence of "ether" in their ground-breaking experiment. In *The Light*, Philip Glass (°1937) sketches a portrait of that historic moment, using his characteristic repetitive style of composition.

Thoughts of water and wind inevitably call to mind the impressionistic music of Claude Debussy (1862-1918). His music first and foremost evokes an atmosphere: one that is fluid and slippery, consisting of clouds, water, wind and turbulence. In *La Mer – 3 esquisses symphoniques*, he brings the sea in all its forms to life. In the *Harp Concerto* by the American composer Geoffrey Gordon (1968), the wind once again has free play.

FOUR OR FIVE ELEMENTS?

The French composer Camille Pépin has, despite her young years, obtained a number of international prizes. For example, her orchestral work *Vajrayana* – a commission by the Orchestre national d'Île-de-France and Radio France – won the jury prize as well as the audience prize at the *Concours Île de créations* in 2015. *Vajrayana* means 'ether', an all-encompassing state of equilibrium that undergirds earthly and spiritual existence. Pépin drew inspiration for this work from the five elements of Tibetan Buddhism: "I conceived the piece as a progression through the different stages of the spiritual world. I have designated these stages by means of rhythmic musical motifs – more often than not – because rhythm is at the core of nature and energy. Each element corresponds to a [different] musical motif. Ratna (Earth) is a primary, powerful but repressed energy. Vajra (Water) expresses anguish in its defensive aspect – the storm – which fades into a peaceful body of water. Padma (Fire) represents a spiritual place that can be reached by violent, burning emotions lacking inner control; it is a place of chaos. Karma (Wind) corresponds to an impalpable element, weightless and fleeting. Finally, Vairocana (Space) combines all these elements. Existing outside time, it is the most powerful state in this quest for transcendence; the ineffable fulfilment of the elevation of the soul; healing."

In scientific circles as well, it was long thought that in addition to the four elements, there was also a fifth, 'ether'. Natural scientists believed that ether was the physical medium that transmitted light waves. Until the scientists Albert Michelson and Edward Morley conducted an experiment, in 1887, in which they sought to measure the relative movement of matter in comparison to ether. The idea behind it, in brief, was as follows: if the Earth moves through the ether, the speed of light should be different depending on whether it moves in the direction of or contrary to the ether. To their surprise, they found that the speed was the same for both. The presence of ether could not, in other words, be confirmed. The research represented a significant breakthrough in science: it paved the way for Albert Einstein's famous theory of relativity.

When the American composer Philip Glass was asked, in 1987, by Case Western Reserve University to write a work in honour of the hundredth anniversary of the ground-breaking experiment by Michelson and Morley, he was pleased to accept: "During the period in 1975 when I was writing Einstein on the Beach with Robert Wilson I had researched the years prior to Einstein's first published work on relativity in 1905 and had come to realise the critical importance of the Michelson-Morley work to scientists of the time. Quite simply, their discoveries were perhaps the

final blow to the system of Newtonian physics which had dominated scientific thought until that moment." Glass took the occasion as the starting point for the musical structure of his orchestral work *The Light*: "In a way, these experiments formed in my mind an almost 'before and after' sequence. The 'before' represented something like 19th century physics. The 'after' marks the onset of modern scientific research. Perhaps this may appear somewhat simplified from a scientific point of view, but for a musician it provided a dramatic contrast... The music begins with a slow, romantic introduction and leads abruptly to the main body of the work - a rapid, energetic movement which forms the balance of the music. The opening bars are heard again just before the final moments and the music ends quietly."

FROM WIND AND WATER

Of all the elements, it is air that probably appeals the most to the imagination: it is intangible, almost invisible, but essential for life. The American composer Geoffrey Gordon (1968) took as his starting point for 'Eolian', a Concerto for Harp the poem *The Eolian Harp* by the English poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834). It speaks of the eolian harp, a small airy instrument that produces sounds as the wind blows through its strings. Both the poem and the composition constitute a personal contemplation of human beings and their relationship

to nature and the divine. Allegorically, the harp symbolises the poet and the wind symbolises God's breath. Both the order and chaos found in nature abound here as the orchestra's palette evokes sensual pleasure, divine force and staggering creative power through Gordon's lyrical and luminous writing. The concerto opens with a riveting and intense first movement. On the first page of the score, the composer adds a quote from Coleridge's poem: "A light in sound, a sound-like power in light. Rhythm in all thought, and joyance everywhere-". This is followed by a second movement that puts contemplation and stillness in the foreground, and also here, Gordon alludes to the poem: "Where the breeze warbles, and the mute still air is. Music slumbering on her instrument... The sunbeams dance, like diamonds, on the main..." The work concludes with a final movement, evoking the apogee of nature's beauty represented as the purest form of allure and joy: "Bubbles that glitter as they rise and break. On vain Philosophy's aye-babbling spring..."

Debussy, too, tried to represent the sound of the wind in one of his works. The first movement of his *Nocturnes* evokes, among other things, "the solemn motion of the clouds, fading away in grey tones." In *La Mer*, in turn, he gives expression to the interplay of waves and wind by means of unusual sound combinations in the orchestra. Debussy wrote the work between 1903 and 1905,

chiefly in his workroom in Burgundy, based on the "countless memories" of the sea. The three movements that make up the work - in order *De l'aube à midi sur la mer* [From dawn to noon on the sea], *Jeux de vagues* [Play of the waves] and *Dialogue du vent et de la mer* [Dialogue of the wind and the sea] constitute a symphonic triptych. The music evokes the airy and fleeting perceptions that are reflected in a refined way. Like a never-ending play of colours and nuances, without either beginning or end.

Commentary by Aurélie Walschaert
(the part on Debussy's *La Mer* was freely reworked based on a text by Kristin Van den Buys)

THE EOLIAN HARP

Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834)

My pensive Sara! thy soft cheek reclined
Thus on mine arm, most soothing sweet it is
To sit beside our Cot, our Cot o'ergrown
With white-flowered Jasmin, and the broad-leaved Myrtle,
(Meet emblems they of Innocence and Love!)
And watch the clouds, that late were rich with light,
Slow saddening round, and mark the star of eve
Serenely brilliant (such would Wisdom be)
Shine opposite! How exquisite the scents
Snatched from yon bean-field! and the world so hushed!
The stilly murmur of the distant Sea
Tells us of silence.

And that simplest Lute,
Placed length-ways in the clasping casement, hark!
How by the desultory breeze caressed,
Like some coy maid half yielding to her lover,
It pours such sweet upbraiding, as must needs
Tempt to repeat the wrong! And now, its strings
Boldlier swept, the long sequacious notes
Over delicious surges sink and rise,
Such a soft floating witchery of sound
As twilight Elfin's make, when they at eve
Voyage on gentle gales from Fairy-Land,
Where Melodies round honey-dropping flowers,
Footless and wild, like birds of Paradise,
Nor pause, nor perch, hovering on untamed wing!
O! the one Life within us and abroad,
Which meets all motion and becomes its soul,
A light in sound, a sound-like power in light,
Rhythm in all thought, and joyance everywhere—
Methinks, it should have been impossible
Not to love all things in a world so filled;
Where the breeze warbles, and the mute still air
Is Music slumbering on her instrument.

And thus, my Love! as on the midway slope
Of yonder hill I stretch my limbs at noon,
Whilst through my half-closed eyelids I behold
The sunbeams dance, like diamonds, on the main,
And tranquil muse upon tranquility:
Full many a thought uncalled and undetained,
And many idle flitting phantasies,
Traverse my indolent and passive brain,
As wild and various as the random gales
That swell and flutter on this subject Lute!

And what if all of animated nature
Be but organic Harps diversely framed,
That tremble into thought, as o'er them sweeps
Plastic and vast, one intellectual breeze,
At once the Soul of each, and God of all?

But thy more serious eye a mild reproof
Darts, O beloved Woman! nor such thoughts
Dim and unhallowed dost thou not reject,
And biddest me walk humbly with my God.
Meek Daughter in the family of Christ!
Well hast thou said and holily dispraised
These shapings of the unregenerate mind;
Bubbles that glitter as they rise and break
On vain Philosophy's aye-babbling spring.
For never guiltless may I speak of him,
The Incomprehensible! save when with awe
I praise him, and with Faith that inly feels;
Who with his saving mercies healèd me,
A sinful and most miserable man,
Wildered and dark, and gave me to possess
Peace, and this Cot, and thee, heart-honored Maid!

**KAREN KAMENSEK,
CONDUCTOR**

www.karenkamensek.com

Karen Kamensek served as the Music Director of the Staatsoper Hannover from 2011-2016. She has also served as the 1st Kapellmeister at the Volksoper Wien (2000-2002), Music Director of the Theater Freiburg (2003-2006), Interim Music Director at the Slovenian National Theatre in Maribor (2007-2008), and Associate Music Director at the Staatsoper Hamburg (2008-2011).

Cherishing a deep commitment to championing composers of the 20th and 21st century, Kamensek recently made a triumphant return to the Metropolitan Opera to lead the production of Glass' Akhnaten for which she won a 2022 Grammy. Orchestral highlights of the recent years include collaborations with the Royal Stockholm Philharmonic, Oslo Philharmonic, Britten Sinfonia, Orchestre de Chambre de Paris, the Lyric Opera of Chicago, San Francisco Opera, Royal Swedish Opera en Opéra National du Rhin. With the latter, Kamensek made her debut in the world premiere of Glass' ballet Alice choreographed by Amir Hosseinpour and Jonathan Lunn.

Kamensek regularly collaborates with internationally renowned singers, directors, and instrumentalists. She has partnered with groundbreaking directors such as Guy Joosten,

Harry Kupfer, Uwe Eric Laufenberg and Phelim McDermott. She has led performances featuring critically-acclaimed instrumentalists like, among others, Michael Barenboim, Gautier Capuçon, Renaud Capuçon, David Aaron Carpenter, Lynn Harrell, Louis Lortie and Olli Mustonen.

ELINE GROSLLOT, HARP

www.elinegroslot.com

Eline Groslot has been solo harpist of the Brussels Philharmonic since 2001. She is an exceptionally experienced and valued orchestral musician, chamber musician and soloist, with a commitment to the development of young musicians and with a broad interest in all forms of art. Former music director of the Brussels Philharmonic Stéphane Denève described her artistry as follows: "I consider Eline Groslot as one of the top players of today. I have had the opportunity, week after week, to admire her superb music making, always imaginative sound, her impressive precision and concentration."

As a musician, Eline finds the creation, performance and promotion of new music a particularly important task. She has played the world premiere of Robert Groslot's Concerto for Harp and Orchestra at the World Harp Congress in Sydney, which has been on the Naxos label with Brussels Philharmonic.

In 2021, Eline founded the 'GPS for Harp Repertoire of the 20th and 21st century'. With his project she seeks to guide and inspire composers to write new repertoire for the harp. This led, amongst other things, to the creation of Geoffrey Gordon's Concerto for Harp.

Eline has performed at numerous festivals, such as the Festival Camac in Marseille, the international harp festival Seduced by Harps, the Festival van Vlaanderen, Festival de Wallonie, Festival Briggittines, and soloed with the Vlaams Radiokoor, Dvorak Collegium and Brussels Philharmonic, among others.

She is a member of several permanent chamber music ensembles. With other more various and fluid ones, she plays a repertoire of all style periods, sometimes combined with other art forms.

An important part of Eline's practice is reserved for the guidance of young musicians with a wide scope. Therefore, she created the programme BOS in which she stimulates them, among others, to get acquainted with other art forms besides music, and simultaneously paying attention to how to deal with stress and to contemplate the role of the musician in society.

GEOFFREY GORDON, COMPOSER

www.geoffreygordoncomposer.com

Geoffrey Gordon is an American composer. When asked to describe his music in only three words, he replies 'expressive, expressive, expressive'. In writing, his music has been referred to as 'complex, richly-satisfying' (BBC Music Magazine), 'luminous and ecstatic' (Gramophone), and 'taut and exhilarating' (Classical Ear). He wrote his first concerto for harp in close contact with harpist Eline Groslot, which will be premiered by the Brussels Philharmonic.

The composer has worked with world renowned orchestras such as BBC Philharmonic, Orchestre de la Suisse Romande, WDR Sinfonieorchester, Münchner Philharmoniker, Frankfurt Radio Symphony Orchestra, Malmö Symfonieorkester and Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France. Honoured by a number of residencies internationally, he has twice served as composer-in-residence at the Aaron Copland House and is winner of 2017 Mario Merz Prize for Music. Besides this, he has been in residence at La Napoule Arts Foundation in Cannes, and at the Cliff Dweller Club in Chicago. His work has been praised through, among others, a nomination for the Elise Stoeger Prize.

BRUSSELS PHILHARMONIC

www.brusselsphilharmonic.be

**"The world needs symphonic music.
And symphonic music needs the world."**

That is the firm belief of the Brussels Philharmonic. As a symphony orchestra founded in 1935 under the auspices of the Belgian public broadcaster, unveiling the symphonic world as best we can is deep in our DNA. By innovating while maintaining full respect for the value of the past, we keep the symphonic music of the past, present and future relevant and inspiring – for ourselves and all of society. We do this from the historic Studio 4 at Flagey in Brussels, together with our music director Kazushi Ono: he shares our open and adventurous spirit and our rock-solid belief in the need for cross-fertilization between art, life and society.

With our activities firmly based in our home city of Brussels, the Brussels Philharmonic focuses resolutely on 4 areas, each of which is intended to bring people together around symphonic music:

> Brussels Philharmonic Bucket List: our own distinctive selection of the great symphonic repertoire, with works that we think you must hear live in a concert hall at least once in your life.

> Brussels Philharmonic Atelier: back to the source of symphonic music, the art of playing music in a smaller formation.

We work carefully and in depth, with extra attention to delicate details.

> Brussels Philharmonic Lab: a place where contemporary music is given the leading role, researched and tested, and exposed to other arts or forms of performance. A radical decision to experiment and focus on the future, with guest conductor Ilan Volkov.

> film & festival: as a former broadcast orchestra, the Brussels Philharmonic has a deeply rooted love of film music. And we love to share our enthusiasm, knowledge and expertise with partners and festivals.

In, around and throughout the many concerts we offer, the golden thread is the theme of EXPLORE: a wide range of diverse, joined-up initiatives that invite audiences to discover, explore in greater depth, admire, share, and connect. By means of meetings, podcasts, chamber music, guided walks, educational materials and workshops, discussions after concerts, customized introductions, digital initiatives and much more, the Brussels Philharmonic comes to you. Thanks to the youth orchestra programme, young musicians also receive the opportunity to get down to work themselves: from an amateur level at BOENK! Brussels Young Philharmonic (BOENKI) to the pre-professional at the Youth Orchestra Flanders.

The vision of our music director, Kazushi Ono, an experienced conductor whose reputation crosses continents, cultures and genres, overlaps in so many ways with that of the orchestra: the authenticity with which the great repertoire is kept alive, the permanent quest for innovation and evolution, the commitment to giving the music of today and tomorrow a central role, and the passion for sharing the love of symphonic music widely and generously.

That sharing takes place first and foremost in our home port at Flagey, where the orchestra rehearses, performs and throws open the doors to its activities, as well as on the major stages and at festivals in Flanders. The orchestra's international reputation comes to the fore in its specialisation in recording soundtracks (including the Oscar-winning music for 'The Artist'), the many successful recordings for labels such as Deutsche Grammophon, and the ambitious projects on prestigious stages around the world (Carnegie Hall, New York, Philharmonie de Paris, Musikverein Wien, Grosses Festspielhaus Salzburg, Cadogan Hall, London).

Brussels Philharmonic is an institution of the Flemish Community.

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Vlaanderen
winnendegewort



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