

Une Lueur dans l'âge sombre (2005)

Commissioned by the Royal Scottish National Orchestra.

Premiered on september 28, 2005 at the Caird Hall, Dundee (Écosse), by the Royal Scottish National Orchestra, conducted by Stéphane Denève.

For four hundred thousand years after the Big Bang, the universe is nothing more than frozen darkness; one calls this period " the Age of Darkness". Within this cosmic void, the cold gases slowly gather in formless masses which, in collapsing upon themselves, proceed to illuminate the first stars. It is the start of a renaissance, and the universe will begin to shine with a thousand galactic fires.

I have tried to depict this birth of the light, these initial glimmerings within the dark, obscure immensity. The piece was conceived to precede another of my orchestral works, *Supernova* (1997), which portrayed the explosion and death of a star. For a long time, these cosmic scenarios have been sources of feeling and color for my musical imagination.

Une Lueur dans l'âge sombre unfolds as a vast, contemplative slow movement, framed by an introduction and coda. The introduction is based on a harmonic spectrum laid out upon a complete cycle of fifths in the bass line. A glistening, infinitely sweet music is progressively deployed, giving birth to the first theme enunciated in a very soft brass chorale. Little by little, the sound disappears in the cosmic silence. In this space the second theme arises in the violas, based upon an Indian raga (Todi, one of the great morning ragas). This long, sinuous melodic line develops slowly and the orchestra embraces it in a grand crescendo of light.

The central part of the work is a calm sea, a serene development of the two themes in which a duet for oboe and cello alternates with the full strings in their upper range. Following a horn solo, a new wave of light reappears with the raga theme and achieves the work's climax superimposing the two themes in a blinding light. Then, in the coda that follows, the wave of light extends itself and disappears little by little into space. One hears the theme that begins my *Supernova*, and it is on the initial fifth chord that the piece concludes. *Une Lueur dans l'âge sombre* is dedicated to Stéphane Denève.

Guillaume Connesson