

**Henri Dutilleux**  
*Ainsi la nuit* (1976)

Over the course of his long and distinguished career, French composer Henri Dutilleux has developed a personal and unique musical style strongly rooted in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century innovations of Debussy, Ravel, Bartók and Stravinsky, and having allegiance to no stylistic or artistic-philosophical dogma beyond the simple pursuit of the beautiful and evocative in music.

The seven short movements of Dutilleux's striking 1976 string quartet, *Ainsi la nuit*, are preceded by a brief introduction presenting the musical ideas that will be developed and explored through the rest of the work. In a sense, each of the quartet's seven movements is a kind of variation on this introduction, though the piece is in no sense a conventional theme with figural or character variations such as we might find in the music of Mozart or Beethoven, or in the second movement of Robert Schumann's A major string quartet which will be heard later on this program. Rather the movements of *Ainsi la nuit* might be termed "structural variations", in some way duplicating the wave-like expansion of the introduction up to the high point A, then falling away.

Of great importance in the work as a whole is the opening chord made up of superimposed 5ths, low, rich and resonant, a signature harmony and sonic fulcrum from which the music continually departs and inevitably returns. This chord is the source of the recurring major 3<sup>rd</sup> – major 2<sup>nd</sup> melodic motive used in a number of movements; and the chord's highest note D functions as a pitch center for the entire work.

Brief passages Dutilleux calls *Parenthèses* appear between several of the movements. These "parenthetical" interjections comment on what has just been heard, or sometimes prefigure what is about to come. Despite the large number of formal sections – introduction, seven movements, and the four parentheses – the entire work is essentially played without pause, and projects a continuous and spontaneous temporal flow full of freedom and fluidity.

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