



## Contemporary

**G Benjamin** Palimpsests **Ligeti** Lontano **Murail** Le désenchantement du monde<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Pierre-Laurent Aimard *of* Bavarian Radio

Symphony Orchestra /

Sir George Benjamin

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Producer **Wolfgang Schreiner**

Engineer **Peter Urban**

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Unlike David Allen, who reviewed this recording on its release, I find Tristan Murail's 30-minute 'concerto symphonique' *Le désenchantement du monde* to be the main event here – slightly to my surprise, I admit, because a number of his previous spectral pieces have always struck me as rather aimless. The title here means demystification rather than disenchantment, in the sense coined by sociologist/economist Max Weber with some ambivalence to denote the upsurge in rationalisation in modern society. Quite how that maps onto the music, however, the composer declines to explain. In fact there's a good deal of mystery, enchantment even, in the writing. It may not be as purely spectral as before in its technology, but it gently unfolds the sonic possibilities of the material into an engrossing and musical experience. Just occasionally there are reminders of Murail's tutelage under Messiaen, though the musical processes suggest, to me at least, analogies with natural phenomena such as weather systems or tides, rather than anything spiritual (or speculative-intellectual, for that matter). They do so not so much

through onomatopoeia as by virtue of their sense of organic progression. Variety of pacing and event is brilliantly sustained, so that the invention never goes stale in slow passages and never degenerates into mere fidgeting in faster ones (so tempting to name recent piano concertos that stumble into those pitfalls!). Pierre-Laurent Aimard caresses and shapes the solo piano writing as a kind of constantly self-renewing accompanied cadenza.

Murail's fellow Messiaen-alumnus George Benjamin directs the 2012 world premiere performance with a sure hand. I also agree with David Allen that his account of Ligeti's now-classic *Lontano* is 'surprisingly visceral', though I confess to a preference for softer edges. With Benjamin's own *Palimpsests* (1998-2002), the rawness is all gain. It's almost as if Benjamin – always a fastidious purveyor of textures – has here paid a tribute to Birtwistle, and the perspectives and collisions he fashions are, as with Murail's, utterly absorbing. Authority seeps from every pore of the performance, and from what was a strong shortlist for this year's Contemporary award, this was a deserved winner. **David Fanning**



George Benjamin receives his Gramophone Contemporary Award at the 2017 Awards ceremony