

## François Couturier Tarkovsky Quartet

**François Couturier:** piano; **Anja Lechner:** violoncello; **Jean-Marc Larché:** soprano saxophone; **Jean-Louis Matinier:** accordion

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*"It is to a true inner world that François Couturier and the Tarkovsky Quartet with Anja Lechner, Jean-Louis Matinier and Jean-Marc Larché give us a splendid access. Here are poetic ballads in which the voices of the piano, cello, accordion and saxophone rise up, answer one another, entwine, fade, and return... In which the pulse, like the beating of a heart, and the most imperceptible sounds sketch out a world in which the soul may soar with its entreaty and its dreams. Huge wings unfold, stretch out and close again. The image of dancers comes to mind. A whole protected interior space of long drawn out silences, in which, miraculously, improvisation remains sovereign. This is probably what brings us closest to the 'absolute freedom of the spiritual potential of man' which Andrei Tarkovsky regarded as the essential function of art."*

Charles H. de Brantes, Director of the Andrey Tarkovsky International Institute

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Following on from "Nostalghia – Song for Tarkovsky" (2005) and the solo piano album "Un jour si blanc" (2009), this new recording, made in the responsive acoustic of the Auditorium RSI in Lugano, completes a trilogy for François Couturier. It also opens a new door for his quartet, known henceforth as the Tarkovsky Quartet.

The work of filmmaker Andrei Tarkovsky (1932-1986) continues to provide inspiration for the pianist, and his compositions here are packed with allusions to Tarkovsky's life and art. In a liner note, Charles de Brantes illuminates some of these references, pointing out that the titles of the twelve pieces heard here themselves constitute a series of tributes.

"A celui qui a vu la'ange", for instance, is an epitaph inscribed on Tarkovsky's tombstone. "Tiapa" and "Maroussia" were Tarkovsky's affectionate nicknames for his youngest son and his mother. "Myshkin" is named for the Dostoyevskyan prince whom Tarkovsky often spoke of as an apt film subject. "San Galano" is the ruined abbey in "Nostalghia". "Mouchette" was Tarkovsky's favourite Bresson film, and "Doktor Faustus" the Thomas Mann novel that he longed make into a movie. Tarkovsky wrote the screenplay for the Tajik Western "Sardor", but never filmed it. "La passion selon Andrei" was the original title of Tarkovsky's historical masterpiece. "L'Apocalypse", last book of the Bible (Revelation), is a frequent reference in Tarkovsky's last three films, "La main et le oiseau" (The hand and the bird) "feature in the brief scene in 'The Mirror' which Tarkovsky later referred to as his self-portrait. This leads, finally to "De l'autre côté du miroir", the other side of the mirror: through the looking glass toward other destinations for the imagination.

“San Galagno”, “Sardor” and “Le main et l’oiseau” are collective improvisations by Couturier, Lechner, Larché and Matinier, their musical depth testimony to the way in which the group has developed in the last five years. All other pieces are composed by Couturier, who points out that “A celui qui a vu l’ange” is inspired by “Qui est homo” from Pergolesi’s “Stabat mater” and “Maroussia” by Johann Sebastian Bach’s “Das alte Jahr vergangen ist”. “La passion selon Andreï” references “Herr, unser Herrscher” from Bach’s “Johannespassion”, and “Doktor Faustus” makes allusions to Shostakovich’s Sonata for violoncello and piano, op. 40.

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*Standing in the foreground is a musicality nourished at other wellsprings. Couturier, born near Orléans in 1950, has played with jazz musicians and is equally at home with avant-garde improvisers or oud player Anouar Brahem. Along the way, in various formations, he met Jean-Louis Matinier and Jean-Marc Larché. The cellist Anja Lechner moves just as freely across musical boundaries. She feels as closely attuned to Dino Saluzzi as to Misha Alperin or Gurdjieff, to whom she dedicated the moving Chants, Hymns and Dances... It is their attitude that has brought them together, not their backgrounds.*

-Konrad Heidkamp, writing in *Die Zeit* in 2006

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François Couturier began playing piano at the age of six. After completing studies in classical music and musicology in the early 1970s, he began improvising in earnest, initially taking his cue from modernists Paul Bley, Chick Corea and Joachim Kühn. By the end of the 1970s he was working regularly with drummer Jacques Thollot, one of the key protagonists of the French ‘free’ movement. Inside Thollot’s group he befriended bassist Jean-Paul Celea. Couturier and Celea played in duo, then developed their concept to include other musicians. Amongst them: Daniel Humair, François Jeanneau, Dominique Pifarély. Couturier’s first appearance on ECM was on Anouar Brahem’s “Khomsa” in 1994, a recording that also marked the ECM debut of Jean-Marc Larché. Contact between Brahem and the pianist had been initiated in 1985 when they worked together at the Festival of Carthage. The association was revived in 2001, and Couturier toured widely with the oud player in trio with accordionist Jean-Louis Matinier, and appearing on the albums “Le pas du chat noir” (2001) and “Voyage de Sahar” (2005). Other Couturier recordings on ECM include the duo album “Poros” with Dominique Pifarély (1997)

The Tarkovsky Quartet made its international debut at the Bergamo Festival in April 2006. Since the release of “Nostalghia – Song For Tarkovsky”, the quartet has become a regular presence on the European concert circuit and at the festivals. Together, the four musicians have made strong contributions to ECM events in Dinant, Frankfurt, Athens, Florence and Umbria. Upcoming performances include festival slots in Basel, Barcelona and Lisbon, as well as a number of concerts in France.

The group has been warmly received by the international press. Reviewing “Nostalghia” in the Irish Times, Ray Comiskey summed up the ensemble’s approach: “Mixing classical rigour with improvisation both formal and free, what emerges is austere beautiful, etched in sombre hues and redolent of an unslakeable thirst to connect with a deeper well of the spirit.”