

## REGARDS SUR L'INFINI

an album of songs by Debussy,  
Delbos, Dutilleux, Messiaen,  
and Saariaho

recorded by  
Katharine Dain, soprano  
and Sam Armstrong, piano

*"Months of quarantine have yielded an unprecedented result of nearly heavenly beauty ... The symbiosis between voice and piano is awe-inspiring. Rarely can such unity be found in this music: momentous irruptions of light; consonances chosen for their specific colours"*

—Lidy van der Spek, Leidsch  
Dagblad, in an August 2020 review  
of the album program



### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

On 27 November 2020, Dutch label 7 Mountain Records releases "Regards sur l'Infini," an album of French songs centered around Olivier Messiaen's *Poèmes pour Mi*. American-Dutch soprano Katharine Dain and British pianist Sam Armstrong have constructed a meditative program that also includes Claude Debussy's complete *Proses lyriques* as well as individual songs by Henri Dutilleux, Kaija Saariaho, and the little-known Claire Delbos, a violinist and composer and the first wife of Messiaen.

At the beginning of the Covid-19 lockdown in mid-March 2020, Katharine Dain and Sam Armstrong, longtime friends and collaborators, decided to quarantine together. The period of lockdown lasted much longer than anyone anticipated, and the enforced months of isolation at home allowed for unusually deep and slow exploration of repertoire for voice and piano.

Eventually this open-ended work coalesced into a group of songs that share an overarching theme—human restlessness in the face of intense experience—that is highly relevant to the troubled circumstances of the world in the grip of a pandemic. The centerpiece of the disc is Messiaen's extraordinary *Poèmes pour Mi*, composed in the early years of his marriage to Claire Delbos. The composer wrote his own texts to set; they are intensely personal reflections on marriage as a Catholic sacrament and its effects on the young husband. The cycle is riotously colorful, immensely challenging for both pianist and singer.

Little of Claire Delbos's music survives, but her complete cycle *L'âme en bourgeon*, written while she was pregnant and premiered in the same 1937 concert as *Poèmes pour Mi*, is a small masterpiece. It contains eight settings of poems by Cécile Sauvage, Messiaen's mother, written when she herself was pregnant with Messiaen. The music is minimalistic, richly expressive of

the tenderness, dread, and ambivalence toward religion and parenthood apparent in the poetry. Together, music and texts give the impression of a startling modernity of thought. It is clear that further exploration of Delbos's rarely-heard, unique compositional voice is warranted.

Claude Debussy composed *Proses lyriques* at age twenty to texts he wrote himself. It was the only time he attempted to unite his literary and musical worlds so closely, which gives the music an unusually personal sense of poignancy and nostalgia. The songs are romantic and almost orchestral in scope, but they also see Debussy experimenting with new modes of text-setting which presage later breakthroughs, especially in *Pelléas et Mélisande* (one of Messiaen's most treasured sources of inspiration), written shortly thereafter.

The program also includes two early songs of Henri Dutilleux, both written during the Second World War in response to the horror of meeting tragedy at a young age. It begins and ends with contemporary settings of French texts by Finnish composer Kaija Saariaho, a master at creating self-contained worlds of expression in just a few minutes.

This album was conceived when the world in general and the music industry in particular were on hold, stilled in their normally relentless momentum. Although the Covid-19 pandemic has caused catastrophic loss, it has also forced us to pause, to find ways of staying present in an uncomfortable reality. This duo responded to the time with unusually deep musical work, assimilation, and building of trust. The result is the album “Regards sur l’Infini,” a portrait of composers and writers reacting to pivotal moments, a collection of deeply personal stories that together tell a larger story about the restless human gaze, a personal document of an unprecedented time.

Album trailer:

<https://youtu.be/ivFf7J3QtrM>

Dropbox link to all press photos:

[https://www.dropbox.com/s/myqebg4g1s1qll6/Regards Press Photos.zip?dl=0](https://www.dropbox.com/s/myqebg4g1s1qll6/Regards%20Press%20Photos.zip?dl=0)

Katharine Dain website:

<http://www.katharinedain.com/>

Sam Armstrong website:

<http://www.samarmstrongpianist.com/>

For more information and press copies of the CD or a WAV download for review please contact: Jo Carpenter Music PR Consultancy. E: [jo@jocarpenter.com](mailto:jo@jocarpenter.com) Tel: 07771538868

### Notes for Editors

Label: 7 Mountain Records

Number: 7MNTN024

Title: Regards sur l'Infini

Producer: Frerik de Jong

Running time: 69 minutes

## Track List

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|-----|--|-----------------------------------|
| 1.  | Parfum de l'instant ( <i>Quatre Instants</i> )                           | Kaija Saariaho                    |
| 2.  | Henri Dutilleux: Chanson de la déportée<br><i>Proses lyriques</i>        | Claude Debussy                    |
| 3.  | I. De rêve   |                                   |
| 4.  | II. De grève   |                                   |
| 5.  | Ai-je pu t'appeler ( <i>L'âme en bourgeon</i> )<br><i>Poèmes pour Mi</i> | Claire Delbos<br>Olivier Messiaen |
| 6.  | I. Action de grâces  |                                   |
| 7.  | II. Paysage  |                                   |
| 8.  | III. La Maison   |                                   |
| 9.  | IV. Épouvante  |                                   |
| 10. | V. L'épouse  |                                   |
| 11. | VI. Ta voix  |                                   |
| 12. | VII. Les deux guerriers  |                                   |
| 13. | VIII. Le collier   |                                   |
| 14. | IX. Prière exaucée   |                                   |
| 15. | Dors ( <i>L'âme en bourgeon</i> )<br><i>Proses lyriques</i>              | Claire Delbos<br>Claude Debussy   |
| 16. | III. De fleurs   |                                   |
| 17. | IV. De soir  |                                   |
| 18. | Regards sur l'Infini ( <i>Quatre mélodies</i> )                          | Henri Dutilleux                   |
| 19. | Il pleut   | Kaija Saariaho                    |

## Katharine Dain Biography

American-Dutch soprano Katharine Dain is a musician of insatiable curiosity, active in opera, orchestral repertoire, oratorio, and chamber music in Europe and North America. After taking the top prize in the Clermont-Ferrand Competition (in which Diapason called her a “revelation”), Dain debuted as Konstanze in a production of Mozart’s *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* at the opera houses of Clermont-Ferrand, Avignon, Rouen, Massy, and Reims. Other recent highlights include Mozart’s *Donna Anna* with the Orchestra of the 18th Century under Kenneth Montgomery, orchestral song cycles of Dutilleux and Berlioz with the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra under Ryan Bancroft, Brahms *Requiem* with Cappella Amsterdam under Daniel Reuss, Mahler’s *Fourth Symphony* with LUDWIG, and songs of Berg and Zemlinsky with Het Collectief under Reinbert de Leeuw at Austria’s Osterfestival. A passionate promoter of chamber music and song, she is a co-founder of Damask Vocal Quartet, whose 2018 debut album “O schöne Nacht” won France’s Choc de Classica award and universal acclaim in the press. Dain holds degrees from Harvard University (Boston), Guildhall (London), and Mannes (New York), and she currently lives in the Netherlands.

## Sam Armstrong Biography

Hailed as “a major new talent” (*International Piano*) and a “pianist of splendid individuality” (*The Arts Desk*), British pianist Sam Armstrong brings equal passion and seriousness of approach to solo, chamber and song repertoire. He has played solo recitals at the Concertgebouw Amsterdam Kleine Zaal, Carnegie Hall’s Weill Recital Hall in New York, and Wigmore Hall in London and has appeared as concerto soloist with the National Symphony of

Ecuador as well as several appearances in Asia at venues including Esplanade (Singapore), Seoul Arts Centre, and Kuhmo Art Hall. Recent projects include appearances at King's Place London in Bartok's Sonata for Two Pianos and Percussion, chamber appearances at Manchester's Bridgewater Hall, the Krzyzowa Music and Just Classik festivals as well as solo recitals in Germany and the Netherlands. He maintains longstanding collaborations with soprano Katharine Dain, violinist Fenella Humphreys and clarinettist Lars Wouters van den Oudenweijer. Sam has been a guest at festivals including Aldeburgh, Cheltenham, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Muensterland, Prussia Cove Open Chamber Music and Ravinia and has been broadcast on BBC Radio 3, France Musique, Radio Suisse-Romande, Radio New Zealand, and WQXR New York. Sam's major teachers were Helen Krizos and Richard Goode, and he also worked with John O'Connor and in masterclasses with Leon Fleisher, Murray Perahia, Pierre-Laurent Aimard and Roger Vignoles.