



COURTESY PLEIN JOUR

NOSTALGIA FOR THE FUTURE

BY FRANK J. OTERI

The New York Philharmonic performs Franck Krawczyk's *Après*, the final work resulting from the inaugural Kravis Prize for New Music.

Thanks to the generosity of Marie-Josée Kravis and the late French composer Henri Dutilleux (1916–2013), New York Philharmonic audiences will hear the World Premiere of *Après* by Franck Krawczyk (born in 1969) in concerts, April 27–30, that set it alongside Brahms's Second Symphony and Schumann's Cello Concerto, featuring Philharmonic Principal Cello Carter Brey. This is a particularly appropriate juxtaposition given Krawczyk's idiosyncratic stylistic inclinations.

Many of the French-trained composer's works have been a conscious dialogue with the music of previous eras, the most notable being his free adaptations/re-compositions of two of the most famous masterpieces in the classical music canon: Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* (for the Ballet National de Marseille) and Mozart's *The Magic Flute* (for a Peter Brook production that received its New York Premiere during the 2011 Lincoln Center Festival). Even in some of Krawczyk's works that have no direct quotations from earlier music, there

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Henri Dutilleux with Alan Gilbert (left), in 2011, when the former was named the inaugural recipient of the Philharmonic's Marie-Josée Kravis Prize for New Music and announced he would share the proceeds with three composers, including Franck Krawczyk (right)

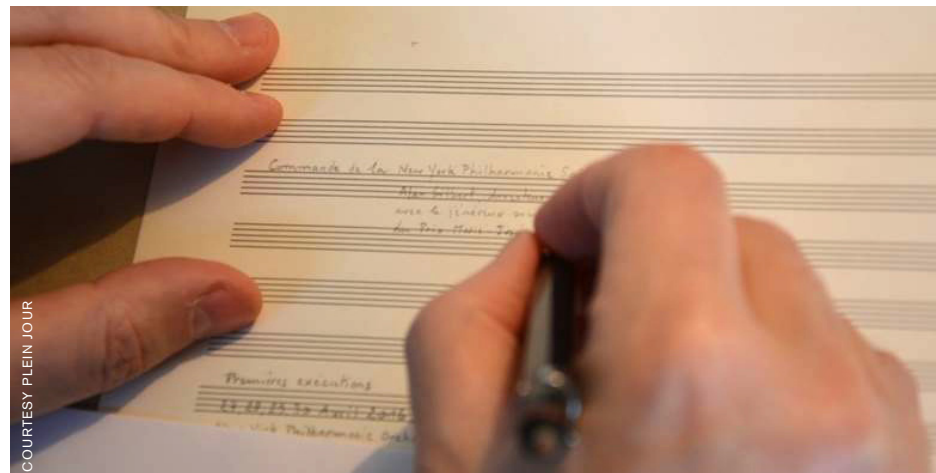
are numerous allusions to the harmonic progressions and dramatic narratives of 18th- and 19th-century repertoire. A striking example is his hauntingly beautiful *Coda* for string quartet, a work whose title, the composer notes, acknowledges his “urge to add something to a story in which all has already been said, like a small post-script.” While his music still sounds unmistakably contemporary, it is worlds away from 20th-century modernism.

“Modernity is very difficult to define,” Krawczyk believes. “I’ve never been at ease with such a concept in art. I do not feel modern, nor antiquated, but rather like a musician who is nostalgic for the future. I aim for a music which is far behind history — at best, pre-historical! There is, of course, a causal relationship between two successive time periods, but I by far prefer time jumps, a true challenge to style and to history.”

While Krawczyk’s compositional lan-

guage is far removed from that of most European composers of the last few generations, there is a composer with whom he shares a deep aesthetic kinship: Henri Dutilleux, the eminent French composer who in 2011 was the inaugural recipient of the Philharmonic’s Marie-Josée Kravis Prize for New Music. “Maître Henri Dutilleux kept a relationship to truth in everything he perceived,” says Krawczyk. “He wrote with the constant worry that it should sound true, which is what had probably kept him away from the sirens of a certain easy modernity, in favor of a staggering dive into his own personal language.”

In December 2011, at the age of 95, Dutilleux was awarded the Kravis Prize for New Music — a \$200,000 grant, made possible by a gift to the New York Philharmonic by Henry R. Kravis in the name of his wife, an avid champion of the arts. (This honor has since been awarded only one other time,



Franck Krawczyk created *Après* on commission from Alan Gilbert and the Philharmonic, the result of the generosity of both a benefactor and an eminent composer.

to Per Nørgård, the esteemed elder statesman of Danish music.) Upon receiving the prize Dutilleux himself performed an act of remarkable generosity: instead of using the prize as a commission to create a new work of his own, he chose to share the proceeds with three other composers, each of whom was commissioned to write an orchestral work. The first of these works, Anthony Cheung’s *Lyra* (2013), which was completed shortly after Dutilleux’s death and dedicated to his memory, was premiered by Alan Gilbert and the New York Philharmonic in June 2014; the second, Peter Eötvös’s opera *Senza sangue* (*Without Blood*) — co-commissioned with the Cologne Philharmonie — had its World Premiere in Cologne on May 1, 2015, followed a week later by its American Premiere, also given by the Philharmonic, in New York City.

Krawczyk’s *Après* is the final result of Dutilleux’s Kravis Prize. “Being one of those

whom he honored with this prize is priceless to me,” Krawczyk says. The title offers some clues about what the new piece will sound like. The composer points out that the French word *après* means “after” and *d’après* means “based on,” but even though his piece will be the opener on the New York Philharmonic program, he intends for *après* to mean “after.” “Here’s a puzzle for ‘translation!’” he exclaims.

“The past is, for me, like a punctured memory in which oblivion interests me as much as memory. The mechanism that makes us say ‘This reminds me of ...’ or ‘I’ve heard that somewhere before’ is still a mystery to me. And this enigma is the impulse to everything that I write, but only to grab an imprint, the pattern being lost. So, I come after.”

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