

Le Coucou sur la montagnes russes – program note

I had always been attracted to the beautiful stasis of *Le Coucou au fond des bois* from The Carnival of the Animals. There is a beautiful cell-like quality to the musical materials that pre-figures the work of Messiaen: Saint-Saens uses multiple repeating phrase structures with subtly varied piano voicings coupled with a freely interjected, yet never changing motive of the cuckoo. The block-like stasis of this approach is very similar to (yet much more classically oriented than) the way in which Messiaen deploys his musical materials. This movement in particular has for me a strange premonition of Messiaen's *Liturgie de cristal* from *Quatuor pour la fin du Temps*.

Given all of this cellular stasis which lies at the heart of this music, coupled with the bizarre, yearning repetitions of the cuckoo cry, I can never escape a feeling of real desolation, isolation and even perhaps loss in this strange music.

So, it was with sense of trying to finally infuse the cuckoo with freedom, fun and life energy that I began to imagine moving the cuckoo cry from its desperate repetition to something that is more varied and muscularly undulating; while also moving the tempo to something more dance-like and fun. These musical elements moved the cuckoo, in my mind, from the deep woods onto a rollercoaster and that is the image that was in my mind for the few days I was occupied with this piece. The result, I think, is fun, exciting and brimming with life energy, or at least some funky cuckoo energy. The title of my short little movement is therefore called *Le Coucou sur la montagnes russes* or *The Cuckoo on the Rollercoaster*. I, of course, hope you enjoy the ride!