

Gris-brume – Camille PEPIN (2020)

Duration : approximately 10 minutes

After *Autumn Rhythm* (for violin and piano, 2018) and *Number 1* (for solo piano, 2019), Camille Pépin continues her cycle of chamber music works inspired by the all-over paintings of the American painter Jackson Pollock: a first foray for the composer into the cello and piano repertoire, *Gris-brume* draws its singular expressiveness from painting *Number 14* with its intertwined dark lines and the silver-grey halo formed by the dilution of the black paint on the canvas.

If *Gris-brume* does not use Pollock's title, it is because Camille Pépin departs from her customary affinity with American composers to align herself more clearly with the French tradition. The fluid character of *Number 14* gives rise to a Debussy-esque experimentation reminiscent of the orchestral textures developed by the composer in *The Sound of Trees* (2019). Subtly soliciting timbres and registers, the first bars are imbued with fog and smoke: the piano imperceptibly booms in the left hand while the right one resounds in a pealing of bells of an archaic modal color. Throughout the work, one notices the use of keyboard processes calling to mind the composer of *Estampes*—particularly in the low keys that illuminate the piece once the harmony is established.

For it is indeed the piano that introduces the atmosphere of the work and welcomes the cello to form an intensely close tandem, far from the melodic supremacy long attached to the romantic cello. Nonetheless, a lyrical theme eventually emerges from the latter. The duo escalates throughout the work until it reaches its final apotheosis, following an irresistible progressive trajectory reminiscent of certain major works by Maurice Ravel (*Boléro*, *The Waltz...*). In the meantime, the composer has brought forth her own musical language into the initial mist of the emblematic patterns: increasingly insistent swinging rhythmic formulas propels it into a dance. At first playful and luminous, the *pas de deux* of the string instrument gives way to surprising contrasts in articulation and major dynamic disruptions that take on a threatening turn. The dark entanglements of Pollock's canvas then seem to gush forth, turning into a fantastic ballet of ghosts.

Translation: Anne de Fornel