

## **Jeu de Tarot**

***Jeu de Tarot*** is a chamber violin concerto commissioned by Ensemble LINEA, and its conductor J.P Wurtz, with solo violinist extraordinaire Irvine Arditti, and is dedicated to these musicians. The work was composed in 2016-17, and is in seven movements. It is scored for flute, doubling, oboe doubling, clarinet doubling, horn, percussion, harp, and keyboard (piano, harpsichord, keyboard controller for electronic samples), solo violin, violin (doubling mandolin optionally), viola, cello, and contrabass.

The composition is in seven movements titled after seven selected cards from the twenty-two major arcana of the Tarot deck. They are:

The Juggler  
The Fool  
The High Priestess  
The Hermit  
The Empress (Whorld)  
The Hierophant  
Moonlight

In each movement the soloist, and the ensemble, explore a scene suggested by the rich symbology of the images upon the cards –fantastic images made by H. Bosch and Blake to name but two - and by the very poetic pen-pictures, created by Russian mathematician, mystic, and writer P.D. Ouspensky in his remarkable publication “A New Model of the Universe” from 1919, revised and published again in 1929. Ouspensky writes of some potential histories of the cards, and following that in a separate chapter, he imagines confronting a particular array of the cards laid out ceremonially. These descriptions are immensely powerful suggesting deeply profound spiritual dimensions and purposes for the cards of the major arcana. I chose an array of seven cards for this piece; future projects will likely explore the remainder.

Here are a few lines from Ouspensky’s pen-pictures: (The Symbolism of the Tarot chapter V, part II, in A New Model of the Universe, Knopf, 1931)

**The Juggler:** I saw a strange looking man...The face of the Juggler was radiant and confident. His hands flitted about swiftly as though playing with the four signs of the elements – he held some mysterious threads which connected the earth with the distant luminaries. His every movement was full of significance...I could not follow everything that was presented. I again lifted my eyes to the man in a jester’s dress and I saw that he was changing all the time – he himself was both The Juggler and the spectators, and it seemed to me that I saw myself in him, reflected as in a mirror, and it seemed as if I was looking at myself through his eyes...

**The Fool:** I saw another man...Weary and lame he dragged himself along a dusty road...he crawled along neither seeing, nor knowing whither, plunged in his own chimerical dreams, which moved eternally in the same circle...he stumbled but dragged himself ever further, carrying over his shoulder a sack full of unnecessary, useless things, which only his madness forced him to carry...And I heard The Voice saying to me, "Behold, this is the same Man. He carries the symbols with him, but he does not understand what they mean. Do you not see that it is you, yourself?" And with a thrill of horror I felt this was also I.

**The High Priestess:** When I had lifted the first veil and entered the outer court of the Temple of Initiations, I saw in the half-darkness the figure of a woman seated on a high throne between two columns of the Temple, one white and one black. Mystery breathed from and around her...In order to enter the temple it is necessary to pass between the two columns and to obtain possession of the keys, to read the book and understand the symbols. "Are you ready?" My heart nearly stopped with fear...I knew that I should not enter the temple...

**The Hermit:** After long wanderings in a sandy waterless desert, where nothing lived but snakes, I met a Hermit...in one hand he held a lighted lantern, even though it was broad daylight, and the sun was shining. "I searched for Man, said the Hermit, but I have long since abandoned the search. Now I am searching for buried treasure. And understand the first mystery – we do not know what treasure it is we search for, whether it is buried by our ancestors, or that which will be buried by our descendants."

**The Empress:** I felt the breath of spring... the soft singing of elves was borne towards me...**(Whorl):** An unexpected vision rose before me. A circle resembling a wreath woven from rainbows and lightning revolved between earth and sky...and at the sides of the circle there became visible to me the four Beasts of the Apocalypse. The voice said, "This is the World in the circle of time amid the four principles – this is what you always see but never understand".

**The Hierophant:** I saw the great master in the temple. Under his feet I saw two crossed keys, and he spoke to two initiates. I heard the sound of his voice, but could not understand one word he said. Either he spoke in a language unknown to me, or there was something that prevented me from understanding the meaning. And the Voice said to me: "He speaks only to those who have ears to hear. But woe to those who believe that they hear before they have really heard...they will never receive the keys of understanding."

**Moonlight:** A desolate plain stretched out before me. The full moon looked down as if in meditation. Under her light the shadows lived their own peculiar lives. A cold heavy dew was falling...A feeling of dread overcame me. I felt the presence of a mysterious world...In the pale light of the moon, I seemed to feel the presence of phantoms; shadows seemed to be crossing the path, someone was waiting for me behind the towers- and it was dangerous to look back.

