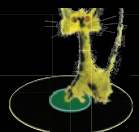


# Meditations for String Quartet



**ANDELAIN**  
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Koben  
Sprengers

# Meditations for String Quartet

After Marcus Aurelius' Writings

Track listing and timing

Music with narration		Instrumental version			
1	Meditation I	0:48	21	Meditation I	0:39
2	Meditation II	0:54	22	Meditation II	0:53
3	Meditation III	0:59	23	Meditation III	0:58
4	Meditation IV	7:49	24	Meditation IV	7:40
5	Meditation V	1:03	25	Meditation V	1:03
6	Meditation VI	0:56	26	Meditation VI	0:55
7	Meditation VII	5:11	27	Meditation VII	5:05
8	Meditation VIII	1:39	28	Meditation VIII	1:41
9	Meditation IX	5:36	29	Meditation IX	5:27
10	Meditation X	3:35	30	Meditation X	3:38
11	Meditation XI	0:52	31	Meditation XI	0:52
12	Meditation XII	7:41	32	Meditation XII	7:34
13	Meditation XIII	2:12	33	Meditation XIII	2:13
14	Meditation XIV	0:40	34	Meditation XIV	0:41
15	Meditation XV	5:10	35	Meditation XV	5:06
16	Meditation XVI	0:35	36	Meditation XVI	0:38
17	Meditation XVII	3:10	37	Meditation XVII	3:10
18	Meditation XVIII	7:25	38	Meditation XVIII	7:25
19	Meditation XIX	13:26	39	Meditation XIX	13:21
20	Meditation XX	6:15	40	Meditation XX	6:15





## PREFACE

My album *Meditations for String Quartet* is based on the writings of Roman emperor and philosophy enthusiast Marcus Aurelius Antonius Augustus. I say philosophy enthusiast, because he never actually considered himself to be a philosopher, despite his rigorous education. His writings, in a few editions titled *The Meditations*, were never intended for publication. They were meant for himself, as a sort of diary or personal notebook; to frequently remind himself of the important lessons and wisdom he had learned from the ancient philosophers. Since his writings were aimed at himself, I found that these paragraphs had a very intimate, familiar voice to them. Like a grandfather patiently explaining something to his overly curious grandchild, almost soothing in its kindness.

While my friend Denver Harrington and I were assembling and writing the text together, I was working on the music separately, so they kind of evolved side by side. In that sense, they can really be considered as two sides of the same coin: they tell the same story, in their own language. In the end, we decided to add the dialogue format for dramatic intent. The female narrator recites Aurelius' words, whereas the male narrator was thought of as a regular person, like you or me, being confronted with his wisdom.

The idea behind the work is to offer people a sense of perspective again. To have them take a few steps back, to take a few deep breaths and to observe the universe around them. They might just rediscover its beauty and magnificence. In the end, whether economically, physically, politically, ethnically or culturally, the walls between us are merely imaginary. Many people seem to have forgotten that we are all part of one large living, breathing organism; that we're all connected somehow. This connection means: that which hurts one, hurts the other as well.

As a species, we need to learn how to listen to the right voices again. Not the ones shouting the loudest, or saying what is most convenient, but the ones speaking the truth, even if it's a mere whisper. And precisely these voices have been given a stage in Aurelius' writings. Through his wisdom, they speak to us. Softly, but clearly.

## DEDICATION

A project as large as the making of this album involves so much input from so many people that I cannot consider it as anything less than a group effort. To take sole credit for it would in all honesty be unjustified. The various collaborators of this project have my deepest gratitude and respect for their amazing work on this album. In particular I would like to thank Stef Lenaerts, with whom I have been playing and writing music since we were teenagers and who has had an enormous influence on me as an artist and a human being.



## PERSONNEL

Ma'at Ensemble:

Violin I: Griet Wiame

Violin II: Charlotte Verdoodt

Viola: Esther Coorevits

Cello: Jolien Deley

Acoustic bass, synths & sound effects: Koben Sprengers

Female voice: Dawn Foster

Male voice: Bob Attiyeh

Male voice pre-production: William Schmidt

Text: Marcus Aurelius/Denver Harrington/Koben Sprengers

Sound engineer string quintet: Stef Lenaerts

Sound engineer female voice: Andris Kiss

Sound engineer male voice: Cliff Harris

Mixing engineer: Stef Lenaerts

Mastering engineers: Bob Attiyeh/Arian Jansen

Strings recorded live in MoterMusic Studios; Mechelen, Belgium

Synths recorded in Animal Shelter Studio; Brussels, Belgium

Female voice recorded in Heavy Rain Sound Studio; Kendal, UK

Male voice recorded in Imhof Studio; Taos, New Mexico, USA



## PROLOGUE

If you want to defeat your grief and pain,  
Unfold this book and read its blessed leaves  
And read it again  
Whereby you soon will see  
The past, the present, and the days to be  
With opened eyes; and all delight, all grief  
Will be like smoke, as empty and as brief.

*What is this? Where am I?  
Whose voice am I hearing?*

## ON THE COMMUNITY

As you are a completing part of a social system, so also let every action of yours be a completing part of a social life. If, then, any action of yours has not its tendency, either immediate or distant, to the common-good as its end, this action disorders your life, and hinders it from being uniform, and it is seditious; as a man who, by pursuing a separate interest, breaks off his own party from the general harmony and concord. Because, what is not the interest of the hive, is not the interest of the bee.

*I feel fuzzy, like I'm floating, weightless. Everything is dark, except for a few distant lights fading.  
The lights look like cities and streets at night. Where am I?*

## ON MENTAL AGILITY

You may so manage, that, in whatever place or time one comes upon you, you may be found a man of a happy lot. He has the happy lot, who distributes one to himself. The happy lots are good dispositions of soul, good desires and purposes, and good actions.

When the governing part is in its natural state, it can easily change and adapt itself to whatever occurs as the matter of its exercise. Remember, it equally becomes a man truly free to change his course of himself, when he thinks fit, and to follow the advice of another who suggests better measures.

*Who are you? Can you tell me what's going on? I don't see anything, I can't feel anything.  
Hello?*



## ON REASON

Reason, and the art of the rational agent, are powers which are satisfied with themselves and their own proper action, without the aid of what is external or foreign to them. They act from their internal principle, and go straight forward to the end set before them. The actions are called right, from their straight road to their end.

For, what are all things but exercises for that rational power which has viewed all things that occur in life, with accuracy, and according to their true natures? Stay, then, till you make all these things familiar to yourself: as the healthy stomach adapts all things to itself; as the shining fire turns whatever you throw on it, into flame and splendor.

*Like this, it will not be difficult to follow  
the path of reason, and you will find peace.*

*What are you saying? Am I supposed to reason myself out of this? Figure it out myself?  
There's nothing here. What is there to figure out?*

# ON REASON

REASON, AND THE ART OF THE RATIONAL AGENTS, AND THOSE WHICH ARE SATISFIED WITH THEMSELVES AND THEIR OWN REASONING, WITHOUT THE AID OF WHAT IS EXTERNAL OR FOREIGN TO THEMSELVES, FROM THEIR INTERNAL PRINCIPLE, AND GO STRAIGHT FORWARD TO THE END, BEFORE THEM, THE ACTIONS ARE CALLED RIGHT, FROM THE VERY STRAIGHT ROAD TO THEIR END.

FOR, WHAT ARE ALL THINGS BUT EXERCISES OF REASON, WHICH HAS VIEWED ALL THINGS THAT OCCUR IN LIFE, WITH REFERENCE TO THEIR TRUE NATURES? STAY, THEN, WITH THEM, AND MAKE THEM AS FAMILIAR TO YOURSELF; AS THE HEALTHY STOMACH ADAPTS ALL THINGS TO ITSELF, AS THE SHINING FIRE TURNS WHATEVER YOU THROW INTO IT, INTO ITS OWN SPLENDOR.

On Reason

WHAT ARE YOU SAYING ? AM I SUPPOSED TO REASON MYSELF OUT OF THIS ?  
FIGURE IT OUT MYSELF ?  
THERE'S NOTHING HERE... WHAT IS THERE TO FIGURE OUT ?  
CAN YOU EVEN HEAR ME ?!

## ON EXTERNAL EVENTS

Let nothing which befalls you from without distract you; and take leisure to yourself, to learn something truly good. Stand firm like a rock upon which the waves are always breaking. It not only keeps its place, but stills the fury of the waves. Wretched am I, says one, that this has befallen me. No, you say, I am happy. Although this has befallen me, I can still remain without sorrow, neither broken by the present, nor dreading the future. The like might have befallen any one; but every one could not have remained this undejected. Why should the event be called a misfortune, rather than this strength of mind felicity? Can you call that a misfortune, to a person, which does not frustrate the intention of their nature? Take away judgement, and you have removed the complaint, Some might say or feel that they have been disadvantaged. Remove that sentiment and you remove the harm.

Those who slay you, cut you to pieces, pursue you with curses. Does this hinder your soul to continue pure and just? As if one standing by a clear, sparkling fountain, should reproach it, yet it ceases not to send forth its refreshing waters. Should he throw clay into it; it will soon disperse them, wash them away, and become free from all pollution. How, then, shall you get this perpetual living fountain within you, and not a dead pool? Form yourself anew each day into liberty, with tranquility, simplicity and strength. So you can say Today I have escaped from every unpleasantness: or, rather, I have thrown out from me every unpleasantness. For they were not without; but within, in my own judgements.

Remove, therefore, when you incline, your judgement; and then, as when one has turned the rock, and got into a bay, all is calm; Now you are like a still harbour, and all shall become durable to you.

*Okay, I'll try to calm down. I just don't understand what's going on.  
If you could just explain what is happening to me.  
Please.*



## ON INTERNAL EVENTS

Any person may any hour they please retire into themselves; and nowhere will they find a place of more quiet and leisure than in their own soul: especially if they have fortitude within, the view of which immediately gives him the fullest tranquility. By tranquility, I mean the most graceful order. Allow yourself continually this retirement, and refresh and renew yourself.

Look inwards; within is the fountain of good, which is ever springing up, if you be always digging in it.

*Thank you, that was actually very helpful. Go to your happy place, right?  
This has calmed me down. I still don't understand what is going on, but I'm starting to accept it now.*

## ON THE SOUL

The soul is as a polish'd sphere, when it neither extends itself to any thing external, nor yields inwardly to it, nor is compressed in any part; but shines with that light which discovers both the truth in other things, and that within itself.

The things themselves cannot in the least touch the soul; nor have any access to it; nor can they turn or move it. The soul alone can turn or move itself; and such judgments or opinions, as she condescends to entertain, such she will make all occurrences become to her self. These, too, are the properties of the rational soul: love to all around us; truth, and modesty.

These are the privileges of the rational soul: it contemplates itself; it forms or fashions itself in all parts; it makes itself such as it desires; the fruit it bears, itself enjoys. It always obtains its end, whensoever the close of life may overtake it. In the dance, or the dramatic action, if by any thing interrupted, the whole action is made incomplete; but, as to the soul, in whatever part of action, or wheresoever, overtaken by death, the past action may be a complete whole, without any defect. So that, I may say, "I have obtained all which is mine." Even further, it ranges around the whole universe, and the void beyond; views its extent; stretches into the immensity of duration, and considers and comprehends the periodical renovation of the whole. It discerns, also, that those who come after us shall see nothing new; and that our predecessors saw no more than we have seen. Yes, one who has lived but forty years, if of any tolerable understanding, has, because of the uniformity of all things, seen, in a manner, all that is past and future.

*I am dying, am I not?*



*Esther Coorevits*

## ON DEATH

The duration of human life is a point; the body, and all things related to it, are like a river; perpetually flowing. What belongs to the animal life, is a dream, and smoke; a story, and a journey into a strange land. What is it then, which can conduct us honourably out of life, and accompany us in our future progress? Philosophy alone. And this consists in preserving the divinity within us free from all affronts and injuries, superior to pleasure and pain, doing nothing either inconsiderately, or insincerely; independent on what others may do or not do: embracing cheerfully whatever befalls or is appointed, and, above all, expecting death with calm satisfaction, as conceiving it to be only a dissolution of these elements, of which every animal is compounded. And if no harm befalls the elements when each is changed into the other, why should one suspect any harm in the changes and dissolution of them all? It is natural, and nothing natural can be evil.

If you would live three thousand years, or as many eons, you would remember no man loses any other life than that he now lives; and that he now lives no other life than what he is parting with, every instant. The longest life, and the shortest, come to one effect: since the present time is equal to all, what is lost or parted with is also equal to all. And for the same reason, what is parted with, is only a moment. No man at death is deprived of, what is either past or future.

So receive the gifts of fortune without pride; and part with them, without reluctance.

*And be happy that most of what you do is worthy of a human being.*

*Okay, I'll try. I'm ready. What happens next? Will you stay with me?*



## ON VIRTUE

The remainder you have of life is small. So live, as if on a lonely mountain. For it does not matter whether there or here, if one, where ever he lives, considers the universe as a forest. Let men see and know you to be a man indeed, living according to nature.

First, let nothing be done at random, without a reference. Secondly, refer your actions to nothing else than some social kind purpose.

When a lamp continues to shine, and loses not its splendor, till it be extinguished; shall your veracity, justice, and temperance, be extinguished before you are?


Spend your time no longer in discoursing on what are the qualities of the good man; but in actually being one.

Acquire a method of contemplating how all things change into one another. Apply yourself constantly to this philosophy, and exercise yourself thoroughly in it. For there is nothing so fit for raising you to an elevation and greatness of mind as this. He who does this, has already put off the body, and being sensible how instantly he must depart from among men, and leave all these things behind him, resigns himself entirely to justice, in whatever he does himself; and to the nature of the whole, in every thing else which happens. What any one may say or think of him, or do against him, on this he spends not a thought. He satisfies himself with these two things: with acting justly in what he is doing at present; and with loving what is at present appointed for him. He has thrown off all hurry and bustle; and has no other will but this.

Don't give up or lose patience when you don't always succeed in doing the right thing; when faced with a setback, major or minor, you only need to start over and be happy that most of what you do is worthy of a human being. Set yourself to work, with love, and return to philosophy, not as a strict supervisor, but as a kind healer, like the wounded turns to the doctor's ointment. Like this, it will not be difficult to follow the path of reason, and you will find peace.

*I accept your invitation. I will forge a path forwards and silently wait in serenity at the end of the road.*





You see how few these maxims are  
to which, whoever adheres,  
may live a prosperous  
and harmonious life.



## ON FOCUS

Let this be your steadfast purpose to act continually, in all affairs, with true unaffected dignity, kindness of heart, freedom, and justice; and disentangle your soul from other distractions. You shall disentangle yourself, if you perform each action as if it were your last: fully focused, without hypocrisy, selfishness or dissatisfaction at what life appointed you. You see how few these maxims are, to which, whoever adheres, may live a prosperous and harmonious life. If a man observe these things, even the gods require no more of him and he can enter into the soul of the Universe.

*If a man observe these things,  
even the gods require no more of him  
and he can enter into the soul of the Universe.*

*I haven't felt this calm and peaceful in a long, long time.  
At the same time it's like all my senses have sharpened.  
I feel warm and soft, yet strong and focused.*





*even the gods require no more of him*

## ON THE UNIVERSE

Always remember this: what the nature of the universe is, and what your own nature. And how it relates to the universe: what sort of part you are, and of what sort of whole.

Consider this universe as one living being or animal; with one material substance and one spirit; and how all things are referred to the sense of this spirit; and how the whole concurs to the production of every thing; and what a connection and contexture there is among all things.

Asia, Europe, Africa, are but little corners of the universe: the whole ocean is but a drop of it; Athos but a little mound. All the time of this present age is but a point, a tiny speck of eternity. All things are but little, changeable, and presently to vanish. Therefore, he who sees things present, has seen all things which either have been from eternity, or shall be to eternity.

Consider also the connection of all things in the universe, and the relation they bear to each other. All things are, as it were, entangled with each other, and are, therefore, mutually dependent. This is a natural consequence; either by connection of place, or mutual conspiring to the same end.

All things are linked with each other, and bound together with a sacred bond: scarce is there one thing quite foreign to another. They are all arranged together in their proper places, and jointly adorn the same world.

Consider, also, continually, the changes of the elements into each other. Such extensive thoughts purge off the rags of this terrestrial life. All things are in a state of change; and you are yourself under continual transmutation; and so is the whole universe. Through the substance of the universe, as through a torrent, flow all particular bodies; all of the same nature; and all fellow-workers within the whole; as the various members of our body co-operate with each other. All things you behold, shall the nature presiding in the universe change; and out of their substance make other things; and others, again, out of theirs; so that the universe may be always new.

This is beautiful.

Consider now the course of the stars; as thinking that you revolve along with them;

The sun seems to be poured forth, and is diffused all around; but not poured out, or emptied. This diffusion is a sort of extension of its rays, and the nature of a ray you may observe if you see it entering through some small hole into a darkened chamber. Its direction is straight; and it is reflected all around when it falls upon any solid body. Upon this the light is fixed, no part of it is lost, or falls aside.

Now, such ought to be the direction and diffusion of your understanding of the Universe. Not an effusion or emptying of itself, but an extension of it toward any obstacle that occurs: not violently and impetuously dashing against it, nor falling aside, but terminating directly on it, and illuminating whatever will receive it. By comprehending the whole universe; by considering the age you live in; and by considering the quick changes of each thing, in particular; how short the time from its birth to its dissolution; how immense the space of time before its birth; and the time after its dissolution, equally infinite.

Yet a little, and you shall be no more; nor shall any of those things remain, which you now behold.

*How small a part is appointed to each one of the infinite immense duration? For, presently, it must vanish into eternity: how small a part of the universal matter? And, how small, of the universal spirit?*

## ON THE NATURE OF BEAUTY

Whatever is beautiful, is so from itself, and its excellence rests in itself: whether it is a wildflower meadow or a brilliant work of art: its being praised is no part of its excellence. It is neither made better nor worse by being praised. What is truly beautiful, needs not any thing further than its own nature to make it so.

*Thank you, I understand now.*

*I finally understand.*





*Griet Wiame*




## EXECUTIVE PRODUCER'S THOUGHTS

Who are we, and where do we come from? Who or what created the universe, and how did this occur? These are questions that human beings have undoubtedly pondered since the time of cave paintings and before. In this album we consider the ideas of one writer who apparently never intended that his notes would be published. The writings were for the emperor's own reflections; yet they are general enough, and universal enough, for a broad audience today. As we speculate about what makes a human being, we similarly speculate about the origin of the universe.

One answer may be formed through music. Music is a universal language yet its interpretation is ultimately up to the individual listener, performer and composer. Here Marcus Aurelius' text, with its broad propositions, is tied to this universal language, for anyone who might listen.

—RUSSELL WARD



Dwell on the beauty of life.  
Watch the stars,  
and see yourself winning with them.

# AFTER MARCUS AURELIUS' WRITINGS

written for string quartet, live electronics and two voices



Executive Producer Russell Ward | Cover design Studio Matti x Kérosène | Photography Kris Van de Sande

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