

MUSIC OF HEAVEN AND EARTH
OLIVIER MESSIAEN:
A CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION

CONCERT 1

BRIAN CONNELLY, Piano

Vingt Regards sur l'Enfant-Jésus
(Twenty Meditations on the Christ-Child)

Wednesday, October 15, 2008

8:00 p.m.

Lillian H. Duncan Recital Hall

RICE UNIVERSITY

the
Shepherd
School
of Music

PROGRAM

Vingt Regards sur l'Enfant-Jésus
(*Twenty Meditations on the Christ-Child*)

by Olivier Messiaen (1908-1992)
composed in 1944

1. *Regard du Père*
2. *Regard de l'étoile*
3. *L'échange*
4. *Regard de la Vierge*
5. *Regard du Fils sur le Fils*
6. *Par Lui tout a été fait*
7. *Regard de la Croix*
8. *Regard des hauteurs*
9. *Regard du temps*
10. *Regard de l'Esprit de joie*

INTERMISSION

11. *Première communion de la Vierge*
12. *La parole toute puissante*
13. *Noël*
14. *Regard des anges*
15. *Le baiser de l'Enfant-Jésus*
16. *Regard des prophètes, des bergers et des Mages*
17. *Regard du silence*
18. *Regard de l'Onction terrible*
19. *Je dors, mais mon cœur vielle*
20. *Regard de l'Eglise d'amour*

*The performance is approximately
two and three-quarter hours with intermission.*

The reverberative acoustics of Duncan Recital Hall magnify the slightest sound made by the audience. Your care and courtesy will be appreciated. The taking of photographs and use of recording equipment are prohibited.

NOTES FROM THE COMPOSER

More than in any of my earlier works, I have sought here a language of mystical love: varied, powerful, tender, sometimes brutal, of multi-colored patterns.

The Meditation of the God-child in the manger, and the Meditations that fall on him: from the unutterable Meditation of God the Father, to the many-sided Meditation of the Church of Love, by way of the incredible Meditation of the Spirit of Joy, the tender Meditation of the Virgin, then the Angels, the Wise Men, and immaterial or symbolic creatures—Time, the Heavens, Silence, the Star, the Cross.

The Star and the Cross have the same theme because one opens and the other closes the earthly life of Jesus. The Theme of God is found in the Meditations of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit of Joy in "By Him Were All Things Made," in "The Kiss of the Infant Jesus"; it is present in "First Communion of the Virgin" (she carried Jesus within her), it is expanded in "The Church of Love," which is the body of Christ. Not to mention bird-songs, bells, spirals, stalactites, galaxies, photons, and the writings of Dom Columba Marmion, St. Thomas, St. John of the Cross, St. Therese of Lisieux, the Gospels, and the Missal; all influenced me. A Theme of Chords circulates from one piece to another, fragmented or concentrated; also rhythmic canons, polymodalities, palindromic rhythms, note-values progressively shortened or lengthened, asymmetric expansions, changes of register, etc. The writing for piano is comprehensive: inverted arpeggios, resonances, diverse passagework.

1. Meditation of the Father

And God said, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

— Complete statement of the Theme of God.

2. Meditation of the Star

Grace strikes. The star shines innocently; above it, a cross.

— Theme of the Star and the Cross.

3. The Exchange

Showering descent, spiraling ascent; terrible human-divine exchange; God made Himself man to make us gods.

— God is the run in alternating thirds: that which does not move, that which is irreducible. Man is the other fragments which grow, and become enormous.

4. Meditation of the Virgin

Innocence and childlike tenderness; the woman of purity, the woman of the Magnificat, the Virgin contemplates her Child.

5. Meditation by the Son, of the Son

Mystery, rays of light in the night—refraction of joy, the birds of silence — the person of the Word in human nature — marriage of the human and divine natures in Jesus Christ.

— Theme of God and a rhythmic canon. Joy is symbolized by birdsongs.

6. By Him Were All Things Made

Abundance of spaces and times; galaxies, photons, contrary spirals, inverted lightning; in an instant, the creation shows us the luminous shadow of His voice.

—It's a fugue. The subject is never presented in the same fashion; as of the second entry, it has changed rhythm and register. Reprise of the fugue in retrograde. Mysterious stretto. Theme of God behind the flames and seething. The creation sings the Theme of God in a chordal canon.

7. Meditation of the Cross

The Cross said to Him: you will be a Priest in my embrace.

—Theme of the Star and the Cross.

8. Meditation of the Heavens

Glory in the heights. The heavens descend to the manger like the song of a lark.

9. Meditation of Time

Mystery of the fullness of time. Time sees born in Him the One who is eternal.

—A short theme, cold, strange, like the egg-like heads of Chirico; rhythmic canon.

10. Meditation of the Spirit of Joy

A vehement dance, the drunken sound of horns, ecstasy of the Holy Spirit, the joyous love of God, contented in the soul of Jesus Christ. I have always been struck by the fact that God is happy — and that this ineffable and continual joy lived in the soul of Christ. Joy is for me an ecstasy, a drunkenness, in the most extravagant sense.

—Form: Oriental dance in unequal neumes, like those of plainchant. First presentation of the Theme of Joy. Asymmetric expansion. A kind of hunting song in three variations. Second presentation of the Theme of Joy, with the Theme of God. Reprise of the oriental dance in the extreme registers. Coda on the Theme of Joy.

INTERMISSION

11. First Communion of the Virgin

A picture shows the Virgin kneeling, pondering in the night. Her eyes closed she worships the fruit hidden within her: it is the first and greatest of all communions.

—The Theme of God, soft swirls, like stalactites, an interior embrace. An enthusiastic magnificat. Special chords and values in groups of twos whose low pulsations represent the beating of the Infant's heart in His mother's womb.

12. The Omnipotent Word

This Child is the Word who bears up all things by the strength of his saying.

—Monody with low percussion.

13. Christmas

Carillon — the bells of Christmas say with us the sweet names of Jesus, Mary, Joseph.

14. Meditation of the Angels

Scintillations, percussions; powerful blasts from immense trombones; your servants are the flames of fire. Then the song of birds who drink the blue. The amazement of the angels expands — for it is not their race, but the human race, with which God has united.

15. The Kiss of the Infant Jesus

At each communion, the infant Jesus sleeps with us near the door, then He opens it into the garden and runs into the brilliant light to embrace us. All this is a symbol of communion, of divine love. One must love in order to love this subject and this music, which wants to be as tender as the heart of the sky – and there is nothing else.

16. Meditation of the Prophets, the Shepherds, and the Wise Men

Exotic music – gongs and oboes in a concert vast and nasal.

17. Meditation of Silence

Silence in the hand, inverted rainbow. Each silence of the manger reveals musics and colors that are the mysteries of Jesus Christ.

—Alternating chords, music multi-colored and impalpable, like confetti, like delicate jewels, like clashing reflections.

18. Meditation of the Magnificent Unction

The Word takes on a human nature; terrifying Majesty chooses the flesh of Jesus.

—An ancient tapestry shows the Word of God at war on horseback; all one can see is His two hands, on the sheath of the sword He brandishes, amidst lightning.

19. I Sleep, but my Heart Keeps Watch

Poem of love, dialogue of mystical love. This is not the smile of an angel's bow; it is Jesus, sleeping, who loves us in His Sunday and gives us forgetfulness.

20. Meditation of the Church of Love

Grace makes us love God as God loves Himself; after the sprays of night, the spirals of anguish, here are the bells, the glory, and the kiss of love – all the passion of our arms around the Invisible.

—Form (the development precedes the exposition): Development – theme in palindromic rhythm, interrupted by runs in contrary motion. Three appearances of the Theme of God, separated by asymmetric expansions.

The sounding of bells forms a dominant pedal and brings back the chords of the earlier pieces. Exposition – complete statement of the theme of God, in fanfare, in glory. Long coda on the theme of God – triumph of love and joy, tears of joy.

BIOGRAPHY

*Performances of pianist BRIAN CONNELLY span an unusually broad range of historical and modern repertoires. Born in Detroit, he attended the University of Michigan, where he studied with pianists György Sándor and Theodore Lettvin. Mr. Connelly has premiered works by a host of contemporary composers such as William Albright, Karim Al-Zand, Derek Bermel, William Bolcom, Anthony Brandt, Paul Cooper, David Diamond, Ross Lee Finney, Arthur Gottschalk, Richard Lavenda, and many others. He is a frequent guest with new music groups such as the Pittsburgh New Music Ensemble and the Chicago Contemporary Players, and he was recently featured in the Carnegie Hall series Making Music in a tribute to William Bolcom. Known for his affinity for the works of Olivier Messiaen, Connelly's performances this season include recitals of Messiaen's piano music, the song cycles, the chamber music, **Oiseaux exotiques** with conductor Larry Rachleff and the Shepherd School*

Chamber Orchestra, and the *Trois petites liturgies de la Présence Divine* with conductor Donald Runnicles at the Grand Teton Music Festival. Mr. Connelly is also widely respected as a scholar and performer of historical instruments, appearing in the United States and Europe on 18th- and 19th-century pianos by Walther, Rosenberger, Graf, Pleyel, Bösendorfer, and Streicher. He performed nearly 150 solo and chamber works for Da Camera of Houston in its path-breaking first six seasons, and he has for thirteen years been a member of the renowned ensemble CONTEXT. Mr. Connelly has appeared with many of today's most respected instrumentalists, such as violinist Sergiu Luca, cellists Roel Dieltiens, Gary Hoffman, and Lynn Harrell, flutist Carol Wincenc, clarinetist Charles Neidich, and pianists Robert Levin and André-Michel Schub, and he has shared ragtime recitals with jazz pianist Marcus Roberts. He teaches piano performance and chamber music at the Shepherd School.

UPCOMING MESSIAEN CONCERTS

Concert 2 – Monday, October 20, 8:00 p.m., Duncan Recital Hall
Carmen Pelton, soprano (guest)
Brian Connelly, piano

Program: **Songs of Heaven and Earth; Three Melodies; and Poems for Mi.** Messiaen's wildly original early song-cycles portray the transcendent joys of love, marriage, and children as images of Eternity.

Concert 3 – Saturday, October 25, 8:00 p.m., Stude Concert Hall
James Winn (guest) and Brian Connelly, piano
Shepherd School students, Cristian Măcelaru, conductor

Program: **Visions of the Amen** (for two pianos); and **I Await the Resurrection of the Dead** (for chamber orchestra). A double bill – two of Messiaen's most vehement and uplifting works of apocalyptic vision.

Concert 4 – Wednesday, October 29, 8:00 p.m., Edythe Bates Old Recital Hall
John Meier, organist

Program: **The Glorified Bodies** (for organ solo).

Messiaen was one of history's greatest composers for the organ.

He described this 50-minute cycle as "seven visions of the life of the resurrected."

Concert 5 – Sunday, November 16, 7:00 p.m., Duncan Recital Hall
Susanne Mentzer, mezzo-soprano

Brian Connelly, piano

Program: **Harawi.**

Messiaen's largest cycle, the volcanic **Harawi – Songs of Love and Death**, is perhaps the twentieth century's greatest song cycle.

Presented with short instrumental works.

Concert 6 – Sunday, November 23, 4:00 p.m., Duncan Recital Hall
Brian Connelly, piano

Selections from **Catalogue of the Birds** (for piano solo).

Messiaen's rarely-performed "bird music" for piano is some of his most difficult, imaginative, and exuberant. This final program includes selections from the massive **Catalogue of the Birds**. Presented with surtitles that accompany Messiaen's depictions of birds, landscape, and sky.



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