

MUSIC OF HEAVEN AND EARTH
OLIVIER MESSIAEN:
A CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION

CONCERT 6

Selections from
Catalogue d'oiseaux
(Catalogue of the Birds)

Sunday, November 23, 2008

4:00 p.m.

Lillian H. Duncan Recital Hall

RICE UNIVERSITY

the
Shepherd
School
of Music

PROGRAM

Selections from Catalogue d'oiseaux Olivier Messiaen
(*Catalogue of the Birds*) (1956-58) (1908-1992)

Le Chocard des Alpes (*Alpine chough*) (*coracia graculus*)

Le Lorient (*Golden oriole*) (*oriolus oriolus*)

Le Merle bleu (*Blue rock thrush*) (*monticola solitarius*)

L'Alouette calandrelle (*Short-toed lark*)
(*calandrella brachydactyla*)

Le Courlis cendré (*Curlew*) (*numenius arenata*)

INTERMISSION

La Rousserolle effarvatte (*Reed warbler*)
(*acrocephalus scirpaceus*)

Brian Connelly, piano

The performance is approximately one hour and forty minutes with intermission.

NOTES FROM THE COMPOSER

Each piece of the *Catalogue d'oiseaux* was written in honor of a French province and has as a title the name of the bird most typical of the region. This bird is not alone: he is surrounded by his neighbors in the same habitat who also sing, thus lending a greater variety to the language of the pieces. The surrounding landscape and the different times of day and night which change this landscape are also present, along with their colors, their temperatures, and the magic of their scents.

With the exception of certain bird songs that are at times stylized and idealized (such as those of the golden oriole and blue rock thrush), all the melodic lines and rhythms in *Catalogue d'oiseaux* are authentic. The counterpoint of certain birds of different species which occur in the same landscape is also authentic. Finally, the depiction of landscape itself is authentic, with all the visual, auditory, olfactory and thermic sensations that accompany it.

The rendering of the timbre of the bird songs is particularly difficult. As the timbre is determined by a greater or lesser number of harmonics, I had to look for combinations of unexpected, reinvented sounds for almost every note of each bird's song. The piano, due to its extensive register and the immediacy of its attacks, is undoubtedly the only instrument capable of rivaling the rapid tempi and the changes in "altitude" of certain great virtuosos such as the skylark, the garden warbler, the nightingale, the song thrush,

and the reed warbler. The piano alone is able to render the raucous or grating percussive qualities of the raven and the great reed warbler, the howl of the water rail, the barkings of the herring gull, and the sunny charm of the rock thrush.

The music is primarily that of the birds. Their environment, the landscape with its colors, its shadows and light, enabled me to make certain technical experiments: the utilization of Greek metrics and Hindu desi-talas for the hard mountainous rock and the chaos of scree in "Alpine cough"; the use of the fourth "mode of limited transposition" in its fifth transposition, with its intense violet quite overridden by black in the low register, for the death of the sun on the pond of irises in "Reed warbler"; the huge waves and the thickening of the fog over the sea in "Curlew"; and in "Blue rock thrush," the use of crossed hands with repetition of chords over a background of chords of "contracted resonance," reminiscent of the changing effects obtained with the mixture stop on the organ.

The work is doubly dedicated to my winged models, and to the pianist Yvonne Loriod.

A NOTE ON THE SURTITLES

Today's performance with surtitles is, as far as I know, the first such presentation. The published score contains the composer's copious annotations, accompanying the music's shifting depictions of bird and landscape; I imagine the listener, as well as the performer, would wish to enjoy these detailed and evocative references as the music passes.

Of course Messiaen did not write his comments with surtitles in mind, and it would be impossible to project all of his words. I have chosen the words and phrases that seem to describe the music most clearly. I have also made choices affecting frequency, repetition, and pace.

— Note by Brian Connelly

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 Michael Kannen, 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.

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