

17 December 2007

The Complete Organ Music of Messiaen

As part of Southbank Centre's festival

From the Canyons to the Stars: The Music of Olivier Messiaen

18 February – 7 December 2008

2008 sees the centenary of Messiaen's birth, and to celebrate this, Southbank Centre has put together a celebration of his music - *From the Canyons to the Stars: The Music of Olivier Messiaen* – spanning 11 months. One of the highlights of the festival is a complete survey of Messiaen's organ music performed by some of the composer's great interpreters and collaborators with organists including **Olivier Latry, Dame Gillian Weir, Jennifer Bate, James O'Donnell, Charles Cole, Patrick Russill, John Scott, David Titterington, John McGreal and Huw Williams**. Performances will take place in some of London's great churches and cathedrals – Westminster Abbey, Westminster Cathedral, St Paul's Cathedral, St Marylebone Parish Church and London Oratory. In addition to this, some of the works will be performed by organ students at the Royal Academy of Music (RAM) and there is the opportunity to attend masterclasses with Olivier Latry and the students.

Messiaen (1908 – 1992) was the organist of the Church of the Holy Trinity in Paris from 1930 until his death in 1992, and his Roman Catholic faith was deep and lasting. He revolutionised 20th-century organ music and much of his music has an explicitly religious theme. He believed that all his music was written to glorify God and over one quarter of his compositions were written for organ.

The organ events begin with RAM student Iliia Kudryavtsev performing the composer's *Livre d'orgue* on 19 February – a work which, when premiered in Paris, caused an unexpected stampede. The evening also provides the opportunity to hear the **world premiere** of *Umbra* by Diana Burrell. Burrell was awarded an Arts & Humanities Research Council Fellowship at the Royal Academy of Music for a period of five years from 2006, during which time she will write a major series of ensemble organ works. *Umbra* is the first of these works.

The church organ concerts begin on 20 February with a recital by David Titterington at St Marylebone Parish Church. Titterington is the Head of Organ at the RAM and his recital begins with Messiaen's first published work, *Le banquet céleste* (1928). The complex soundworld of the organ very much appealed to Messiaen and this work shows some of the hallmarks of Messiaen's musical pallet. In this work he uses colours and stops in a revolutionary and unconventional register. Also in the recital is *Diptyque*, a work he

dedicated to the teachers who had the most direct formative influence on him – Paul Dukas and Marcel Dupré.

The following day, 21 February, masterclasses with Olivier Latry (organist of the Cathedral of Notre-Dame in Paris and Professor of Organ at the Conservatoire de Paris) take place at St Marylebone Parish Church. Latry has been hailed as one of the finest interpreters of Messiaen and on 22 February there is the chance to hear him in recital at Westminster Abbey. The programme includes the nine-movement suite *La Nativité du Seigneur (The Nativity of Our Lord)*. This work shows Messiaen playing with number symbolism – the nine movements representing the number of months of gestation, as well as reflecting the Mediaevalists' view of the Trinity (3x3).

On 1 May the Ascension Day Service at Westminster Abbey includes a liturgical presentation of Messiaen's four-movement cycle *L'Ascension*, originally written as a set of symphonic meditations for the orchestra and arranged for organ in 1934. This will be performed by Robert Quinney. Later the same month (11 May), movements from Messiaen's organ work, the Pentecost Mass, can be heard in the context of High Mass, together with Gregorian chant for Pentecost Sunday, one of the great musical inspirations in the composer's life.

Two concerts in May and July profile female organists, both of whom collaborated with Messiaen. Jennifer Bate collaborated with Messiaen in concerts and recordings and gave the British premiere of the *Livre du Saint Sacrement* in 1986. On 22 May she returns to Westminster Cathedral (the venue of that premiere) to perform this last great organ cycle of Messiaen's. Dame Gillian Weir performs *Méditations sur le Mystère de la Sainte Trinité* in Westminster Abbey on 15 July. This work in particular shows the musical ideas Messiaen developed in his organ music, with quotations of unadorned plainsong melodies juxtaposed with birdsong and expressions of flashes of colour manifest through his synaesthesia. (Messiaen experienced a mild form of synaesthesia resulting in the perception of colours when he heard certain harmonies, particularly harmonies built from his modes, and he used combinations of these colours in his compositions. The theme of improvisation and synaesthesia is explored in a workshop at RAM on 15 February with artist Mark Rowan-Hull.)

James O'Donnell explores the relationships between Messiaen and his peers in a concert at Westminster Abbey on 22 July. The composer greatly admired the music of Jehan Alain (they were great friends), and fellow organist Maurice Duruflé used the letters of Alain's name to spell out the musical theme of his *Prélude et fugue sur le nom d'Alain*. Both of these works alongside Messiaen's *Verset pour la fête de la Dédicace* and *L'Ascension* are performed in this evening concert. Duruflé's music appears alongside Messiaen's in two further events in the festival – a recital on 27 August by John Scott in Westminster Cathedral which includes the colourful five-movement Pentecost Mass of 1950; and one by Thomas Trotter on 27 November in St Paul's Cathedral with the Duruflé Suite, Op.5 coupled with Messiaen's *Les corps glorieux*, best known for its sensational central movement *Combat de la mort et de la vie*.

The first in a series of four concerts at the London Oratory, placing Messiaen's organ works in the context of the liturgical French organ tradition, begins on 6 October. This first concert by Charles Cole with members of the London Oratory Choir includes the *Vespers* of Messiaen's organ teacher Dupré. The following concerts on 13 (with John McGreal), 20 (with Patrick Russill) and 27 October (with David Titterington) include works by Migot, fellow Dupré pupil Demessieux and Tournemire. The final London Oratory concert presents movements from Messiaen's devotional final testament as a liturgical organist, *Livre du Sacrement*, together with Gregorian chant associated with the Blessed Sacrament.

For the final organ recital, organist Huw Williams plays Messiaen's *La Nativité du Seigneur* as part of meditation for Advent in St Paul's Cathedral on 7 December.

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Notes to Editors

From the Canyons to the Stars: The Music of Olivier Messiaen runs throughout 2008, 2 February – 10 December. The Festival Artistic Director is Pierre-Laurent Aimard. A specific website, www.southbankcentre.co.uk/messiaen will be launched in January which will give insights into the composer, look at the influences on Messiaen's music and include video interviews with those who worked with him such as George Benjamin and Pierre-Laurent Aimard, and those artists and musicians who have been inspired by him, from James MacMillan to *Goldfrapp's* Will Gregory.

From the Canyons to the Stars: The Music of Olivier Messiaen
Organ Events

Tuesday 19 February, St Marylebone Parish Church, 7.30pm

Royal Academy of Music students

Iliia Kudryavtsev *organ*

Stravinsky: Three Pieces for string quartet; Double Canon for string quartet

Diana Burrell: *Umbra* (world premiere)

Stravinsky: *Pastorale*

Messiaen: *Livre d'orgue*

£6

Wednesday 20 February, St Marylebone Parish Church, 6pm

David Titterington *organ*

Messiaen: *Le banquet céleste; Prélude; Verset pour la Fête de la Dédicace; Monodie;*

Diptyque; Offrande au Saint-Sacrement; Offrande et Alleluia final

Admission free

Thursday 21 February, St Marylebone Parish Church, 10.30am & 2.30pm

Organ masterclasses with Olivier Latry

Admission free

Friday 22 February, Westminster Abbey, 7.30pm

Olivier Latry *organ*

Messiaen: *Apparition de l'église éternelle; La Nativité du Seigneur*

£15

Thursday 1 May, Westminster Abbey, 5pm

Ascension Day service

The Choir of Westminster Abbey

James O'Donnell *director*

Robert Quinney *organ*

Messiaen: *L'Ascension*

Admission free

Sunday 11 May, Westminster Cathedral, 10.30am

Pentecost Mass

Westminster Cathedral Choir

Martin Baker *conductor*

Messiaen: *Messe de la Pentecôte* for solo organ

Victoria: *Missa Dum complerentur*

Admission free

Wednesday 21 May, Westminster Cathedral, 7.30pm

Jennifer Bate *organ*

Messiaen: *Livre du Saint Sacrement*

£10

Tuesday 15 July, Westminster Abbey, 7pm

Dame Gillian Weir organ

Messiaen: *Méditations sur le Mystère de la Sainte Trinité*

£10

Tuesday 22 July, Westminster Abbey, 7pm

James O'Donnell organ

Alain: *Intermezzo; Deuxième fantaisie; Litanies*

Durufilé: *Prélude et fugue sur le nom d'Alain*

Messiaen: *Verset pour la fête de la Dédicace; L'Ascension*

£10

Wednesday 27 August, Westminster Cathedral, 7.30pm

John Scott organ

Durufilé: *Prélude, adagio et choral varié sur le 'Veni Créator', Op.4*

Messiaen: *Messe de la Pentecôte*

£10

Monday 6 October, The London Oratory, 7.30pm

Charles Cole organ

Members of the London Oratory Choir

Messiaen: *Le Banquet Céleste*

Dupré: *Vespers of the Blessed Virgin Mary* (1920)

Langlais: *Paraphrase sur 'Salve Regina'*

Admission free

Monday 13 October, The London Oratory, 7.30pm

John McGreal organ

Programme includes:

Migot: *Les Chérubins du Paradis; La Rosace*

Demessieux: *Chorale Preludes*

Messiaen: *La Nativité du Seigneur* (selected movements)

de Grigny: *Récit de tierce en taille*

Admission free

Monday 20 October, The London Oratory, 7.30pm

Patrick Russill organ

Titelouze: *Hymn - Ave Maria Stella*

Satie: *Kyrie (Messe des pauvres)*

Tournemire: *L'Orgue Mystique* (selected movements)

Messiaen: *Méditations sur le Mystère de la Sainte Trinité* (selected movements)

Admission free

Friday 24 October, Royal Academy of Music, 12.30pm-2pm

Research forum: *Messiaen's late organ music*

With organist **David Titterington** and author **Christopher Dingle**.

Admission free

Monday 27 October, The London Oratory, 7.30pm

David Titterington *organ*

Members of the London Oratory Choir

Messiaen: *Livre du Saint-Sacrement* (selected movements), interspersed with Gregorian chant for the Blessed Sacrament

Admission free

Thursday 27 November, St Paul's Cathedral, 7pm

Thomas Trotter *organ*

Durufle: Suite, Op.5

Messiaen: *Les corps glorieux*

£10 - £20

Sunday 7 December, St Paul's Cathedral, 6pm

Huw Williams *organ*

Messiaen: *La Nativité du Seigneur*

Admission free

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Ticket Office: 0871 663 2500

Online booking: www.southbankcentre.co.uk