

CLASS RECITAL
featuring organist students of
Ken Cowan

Olivier Messiaen's
La Nativité du Seigneur

Tuesday, December 10, 2013
7:30 p.m.
Edythe Bates Old Recital Hall
and Grand Organ

RICE UNIVERSITY

the
Shepherd
School
of Music

PROGRAM

La Nativité du Seigneur (1935)

Olivier Messiaen

The Nativity of our Lord

(December 10, 1908-April 27, 1992)

I. La Vierge et l'Enfant

The Virgin and the Child

Dorothy Van Dine

II. Les Bergers

The Shepherds

III. Desseins éternels

Eternal Purposes

Sarah Sabol

IV. Le Verbe

The Word

V. Les Enfants de Dieu

The Children of God

Yuri McCoy

VI. Les Anges

The Angels

Monica Czausz

VII. Jésus accepte la souffrance

Jesus Accepts Suffering

VIII. Les Mages

The Wise Men

Michael Ging

IX. Dieu parmi nous

God Among Us

Daryl Robinson

PROGRAM NOTES

I. *La Vierge et l'Enfant* *The Virgin and the Child*

Behold a virgin shall conceive, for unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given. Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee: He is just and lowly.

- Book of the Prophet Isaiah 7:14, 9:6; Book of the Prophet Zechariah 9:9

Form A, B, A. In the first part we hear a cadence in the 2nd "mode of limited transpositions," whose rhythms use the "added value" and a Greek foot: antibacchius. Hollow timbre: Quintaton 16', Flute 4', Nazard 2 2/3 – violet color. The middle part represents the rejoicing of the Holy Virgin and, through ornamentation, makes a variation on the Introit of Christmas: "Puer natus est nobis." It is written in the 6th "mode of limited transpositions," and treats the pedal like a carillon. The return of the first part in an echo, on a Flute 8'.

II. *Les Bergers* *The Shepherds*

Having found the babe lying in a manger, the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God.

-Gospel according to St. Luke 2:16, 20

Polymodal introduction, using the superimposition of the 2nd and 3rd "modes of limited transpositions," giving a color of stained glass: blue-violet, a touch of red, gold, and silver. There follows a naïve melody, in the style of popular Noël's of the French countryside, played sometimes on the Clarinet, sometimes on the Oboe, with two simple strophes and two ornamented strophes. One again finds here some of the Greek poetic feet: bacchius, amphimacer, 2nd epitrite, and dochmius rhythm.

III. *Desseins éternels* *Eternal Purposes*

God in His love, has predestined us to be His adoptive children through Jesus Christ, to the praise and glory of His grace.

-Letter of St. Paul to the Ephesians 1:5, 6

A long, single, flowing phrase, sung by the Quintaton 16' and Cor de Nuit 8'.

IV. *Le Verbe* *The Word*

The lord hath said unto me: Thou art my Son. From his breast, before the dawn existed, He begat me. From the beginning, I am the image of the goodness of God; I am the Word of Life.

-Psalm 2:7; Psalm 110 (109):3; the Book of Wisdom 7:26;

First Letter of St. John 1:1

The eternal generation of the Word is an inexpressible thing. Nevertheless, one must comment on it, even if it is very unworthy, because it is a suggested meditation for Christmastide.

The piece divides itself into two parts. The fundamental theme of the first part is a slow descent on the reeds of the pedal, which makes one think of the terrible fortissimo of the long trumpets of Michelangelo's Last Judgment and also of certain themes for trombones in Wagner's scores. Notice in this theme the added value which accelerates the fall, and the added dot which retards it. Further, the use of the "harmony on the dominant" of the color white with reflections of gold, one will hear again a rhythmic canon in the 3rd "mode of limited transpositions" on the antibacchius rhythm of the theme.

The 2nd part symbolizes the Utterance of the Word. It is a long solo on the Cornet-which, at the same time, comes from sequences of plainsong in its phrases, Hindu ragas in its character, and ornamented chorales of Bach in its arabesques, which highly decorate the solemn melody – and which combines rather strangely the 2nd "mode of limited transpositions," chromatic harmonies or tonalities, and the 7th plainsong mode or the "mode of G."

V. *Les Enfants de Dieu*
 The Children of God

To as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the children of God. And God hath sent forth the spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Father! Father!

-Gospel according to St. John 1:12; Letter of St. Paul to the Galatians, IV, 6

Development in crescendo above a dominant pedal, followed by the cry: Father! Father! – and a slow, tender phrase in diminuendo over a tonic pedal.

VI. *Les Anges*
 The Angels

A multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, Glory to God in the Highest.

-Gospel according to St. Luke 2:13, 14

The "Gloria in excelsis" is the first of the chants for Christmas: it was taught to us by the angels. It is a song of joy. This joy, this exultation is expressed here. But by angels, pure spirits, invisible, incorporeal, endowed with a total freedom and subtlety.

The piece is written in two voices, registered at the beginning: Principals 8', 4', 2' and Cymbale- to which one adds the Plein Jeu and the 16' stops for the "perpetual movement" which concludes. The music evolves constantly in the high register. The rhythm is extremely free: not any division equal, constant use of the added value, the 4th Greek epitrite (3 longs and 1 short), Hindu rhythm vasanta (3 shorts and 3 longs), rocket groups, accelerated iambic sequences- all contribute to a majestic movement of joy, freed of all bodily impediment.

VII. *Jésus accepte la souffrance*
Jesus Accepts Suffering

Wherefore when He cometh into the world, Christ saith to his Father: In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin Thou hast had no pleasure, but a body hast Thou prepared me. Lo, I come.

-Letter of St. Paul to the Hebrews 10:5, [6], 7

This extraordinary text, drawn from Psalm 40 and applied by St. Paul to Christ in the letter to the Hebrews, reveals to us the first movement of the soul of Jesus at the moment of the Incarnation. In this solemn instant, he accepts the cross, and all the sufferings of his life and of his Passion. Before the angel of the annunciation, before the crib of Christmas, there was already the cross. The unique sacrifice, demanded by the first two chords, is immediately granted by the response of the Basson 16' in the bass. The progressive increases and decreases of the intervals depict with realism the tension of the Crucifixion. At the end of the piece, the phrase of the acceptance with full organ: "Lo, I Come."

VIII. *Les Mages*
The Wise Men

The Wise Men departed, and the star went before them.

- Gospel according to St. Matthew 2:9

This star – seen by the magi kings of the Orient, disappeared during the long voyage-behold that it reappears and guides them toward the precise place where the infant is found. And they follow, with their camels, their servants, their presents – serene and majestic caravan.

Observe the iridescence of the "harmony on the dominant": one passes from green and gold to a velvety blue, deep violets alternate with orange. Observe also the pedal which sings on the mixtures with Flute 4', Nazard 2 2/3, Tierce 1 3/5. The whole piece is based on a rhythm followed by its diminution, which is complicated by the addition of a dot: 3 longs, 3 shorts whose 2nd unit is dotted. Toward the end, the registration becomes tender and mysterious: the magi kings are kneeling before the infant.

IX. *Dieu parmi nous*
God Among Us

Words of the communicant, of the Virgin, of the whole Church: Then the Creator of the universe laid a command upon me; my Creator decreed where I should dwell. The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us. My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Savior.

*-Ecclesiasticus 24:8; the Gospels according to St. John 1:14;
St. Luke 1:46, 47*

First theme and principal theme: a great descent on the reeds of the pedal fortissimo. It is the glorious, unutterable descent of the second person of the Holy Trinity in human form – it is the Incarnation. Second theme of love: it is the Communion. Third theme of joy: it is the "Magnificat" (treated like a song

of a bird). Development of the first and third themes. Development of the third theme in jubilant 2-voice counterpoint. Development of the second theme of love. First principal theme over a dominant pedal, whose second element in contrary motion bursts like the thunder and produces a joyous and vigorous toccata. This toccata in E major is the piece itself, all the extensive development which precedes being only the preparation. In the upper voices: the Hindu rhythm candrakalâ and the 4th Greek epitrite. In the fortissimo of the basses: the principal theme – its penultimate note, the F, hesitates for a long time before concluding on the E tonic.

-Notes by the composer



RICE