Vingt regards sur l’enfant Jésus
Olivier Messiaen

2008-09

concert no. 2

2 November 2008
Kaul Auditorium, Reed College, PDX
Dear Fearless Friends,

Across the globe, musicians and music lovers have been observing this hundredth birthday year of Olivier Messiaen with festivals, conferences, exhibitions, concerts, recordings, and joyous celebrations of every sort. Tonight, pianist Jeffrey Payne presents Portland with a rare complete performance of Messiaen’s *Vingt regards sur l’enfant Jésus*, widely regarded as one of the masterpieces of twentieth-century piano music. The seventeenth season of fEARnoMUSIC is off to a thrilling start!

This year we have something for everyone, including collaborations in dance (with the Agnieszka Laska Dancers, and with Gavin Larsen of the Oregon Ballet Theater), and in film (with Portland-based filmmakers Johanna Priestly, and Leo and Anna Daedalus, among others), as well as some of the most innovative music you can imagine.

We couldn’t miss the opportunity to celebrate Oregon’s 150th anniversary of statehood in our own inimitable way: with four new works, and two new pieces of choreography. And you just can’t miss the exciting premieres of works by the talented participants of the Young Composer’s Project in *Hearing the Future*!

We hope that you will join us throughout the season, and that you’ll bring your friends. We thank our sponsors for supporting us and for believing in the FNM mission, and we thank you, fearless supporters and volunteers, lovers of new music, for your loyalty. Seventeen seasons couldn’t have happened without you. Thanks!

P. O. Box 1262 Portland, OR 97207
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Inés Voglar — Artistic Director
Olivier Messiaen conceived the *Vingt regards*, written in 1944, as a set of pieces to be performed as a complete work. Three main themes reappear throughout the movements, interweaving and binding them together, and providing recurring guideposts to the listener. The first, which Messiaen entitled the “Theme of God,” is presented at the very beginning of the work: the five chords played in the piano’s lower register at a pianissimo level. The second, the “Theme of the Cross,” is presented in the second movement. Spaced at the outer registers of the piano, it is a chantlike, slow-moving theme covering a small range of intervals. The third theme, the “Theme of the Chords,” a series of four chords each with four notes, does not appear until the sixth movement, and then it is barely noticeable in the headlong cascade of subject and countersubject that form that movement’s main material.

These themes function more as cyclic ideas than as readily identifiable themes (such as one might encounter in a rondo). For instance, the Theme of God is heard not only as an underlying chord progression (the first movement), but as a cantus firmus under a pirouetting bird song (the fifth movement), as a “victorious” “face behind the flames,” (the sixth movement), as a vehement dance (the tenth movement), as a lullaby (the fifteenth movement), and as a triumphant depiction of love and joy (the last movement). The Theme of the Cross, when it first appears in the second movement, is heard in a glacial unison, widely spaced on the keyboard. In the seventh movement, the note values have been dramatically stretched, now forming a cantus firmus to upper layers of circling, plangent harmonies.

The *Vingt regards* show Messiaen incorporating on a more frequent basis than previously the birdsongs he so dearly loved. He regarded birds as the “greatest musicians on our planet”; during his travels about the globe, when not occupied with rehearsals or master classes, he would venture into the countryside, music paper at hand, and notate the birdsongs that he heard. In France, he could identify 50 species by their songs alone; throughout Europe, he could identify some 550 other species — although he admitted that he sometimes had to consult a manual or resort to binoculars for those. Critics wryly noted that they could tell where Messiaen had recently visited by the birdsongs in his most recent works. In the *Vingt regards*, birdsongs appear most prominently in the fifth movement, where a single bird chatters and trills as the Theme of God slowly unfolds beneath it, and in the eighth movement, where two birds engage in dueling counterpoint at the upper range of the piano.
For the uninitiated, Messiaen’s rhythms can create a sense of disorientation. Among his stated goals in writing his music was to destroy the sense of time moving forward, and the subdivision of meter that forms the basis of Western music. Messiaen avidly studied Hindu and ancient Greek rhythms, adapting them to his own purposes, as a means of creating music static in nature, stripped of the traditional sense of upbeat and downbeat. As an example, in the first movement, although a steady note repeats in the upper part of the piano, the constantly changing number of repetitions denies the listener a sense of arrival. Instead, the ear hears a phrase that rises and falls as though following a pattern of breathing, rather than a foot tapping.

Messiaen sometimes uses two different speeds simultaneously. At the beginning of the sixteenth movement, as the right hand maintains a steady pulse, the left hand gradually speeds up its pulse. At the end of the movement, Messiaen reverses the process: the left hand slows down its pulse simultaneously with the steady pulse of the right hand. In the eighteenth movement he takes the idea of simultaneous different speeds even further: he writes two rhythms, one accelerating and one decelerating. At the beginning, the right hand slows down, while at the same time the left hand speeds up; at the end of the movement the hands reverse the tempos.

Messiaen’s harmonies evoke a similar loosening of identifiable tonic, dominant, and subdominant relationships of chords. Although the listener readily hears major chords, they slip from one major chord to another, as though Messiaen were treating them as glass beads in a kaleidoscope, arranging them and rearranging them more for their coloristic aspects than to develop a sense of “home” or finally. He accomplishes this through the use of an octatonic scale, a scale of eight notes rather than the usual seven, with alternating whole and half steps. While the traditional major scale contains three major chords, all closely “related” to one another, the octatonic scale contains four major chords, none of which has a strong relationship to any other.

Additionally, Messiaen treats the piano as a mini-orchestra, often using the three bottom notes of the piano as a gigantic bass drum or tom-tom to punctuate the flow of harmony in the upper registers. Messiaen’s extraordinarily acute ears — remember all those bird songs he notated — allowed him to recreate the sounds of gongs on the keyboard. Listen to the quiet, shimmering Asian gongs that end the second movement, the lightly brushed tam-tam that ends the seventh movement, and the thundering bass drum that ends the tenth, twelfth, and thirteenth movements.

When I first encountered the Vingt regards in graduate school, I was, like most pianists when they encounter this music, fascinated with the extraordinary sounds that came from the instrument. In performing individual movements over the years, I have usually introduced each of them with an explanation and brief analysis of the music. I used to worry that music of such complexity might not be sufficiently communicative on a first listening. But, an experience a number of years ago taught me that I was vastly underestimating the power of these works to speak for themselves.

I was teaching an adult piano student, who taught philosophy at the Portland branch of Linfield University. He invited me to give a presentation on twentieth-century music to his aesthetics class. We met at his house because it had the advantage of a piano from which I could demonstrate the various pieces I was discussing. After dashing through Stravinsky, Schoenberg, Shostakovich, et al., I introduced an excerpt from the Vingt regards by telling the students that I was going to give them no information whatsoever about the composer or the music — no name, no country, no background, nada — I would just play for them and then ask for their comments on what they had heard. I played the first two minutes of the eleventh movement, “The First Communion of the Virgin,” the depiction of the Virgin Mary after the annunciation, “adoring” the unborn child in her womb.

The students were hesitant, but several of them stated that the music was “spiritual” or “prayerlike.” Then one young woman shyly raised her hand and said, “I may be wrong, but it seems to me that this is either music by a woman or about a woman.” I was speechless. After that experience, I have ceased to doubt that Messiaen’s music, no matter how complicated it may be at the keyboard, has the power to communicate his ideas far better through sounds than I, or anyone else, can ever articulate through words.

— program notes by Jeffrey Payne

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Olivier Messiaen's comments on the *Vingt regards*, taken from the score (translations by Dennis Vannier):

I. *Regard du Père* (Gaze of the Father)
   Complete phrase on the theme of God.
   And God said: “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”

II. *Regard de l'étoile* (Gaze of the star)
   Theme of the star and the Cross.
   Jolt of grace… The star shines naïvely, surmounted by a cross.

III. *L'échange* (The exchange)
   Descent in a trail of light, ascent in a spiral; awesome human–divine communion; God becomes man so that we may become gods…
   God is the motif of alternating thirds: that which does not change, that which is small.
   Man is the remaining fragments, which grow and grow and become huge, following a process of development I call “asymmetrical swelling.”

IV. *Regard de la Vierge* (Gaze of the Blessed Virgin)
   Innocence and tenderness… The woman of Purity, the woman of the Magnificat, the Blessed Virgin contemplates her Child…
   I have tried to express purity in music: this requires a certain degree of strength — coupled with much naïveté and childlike gentleness…

V. *Regard du Fils sur le Fils* (Gaze of the Son upon the Son)
   Mystery, rays of light through the night — refraction of joy, the birds of silence — the person of the Word in a human nature — marriage of the human and divine natures of Jesus Christ.
   — This represents, of course, the Son–Word contemplating the Son–Child–Jesus. Three sonorities, three modes, three rhythms, three superimposed tunes. “Theme of God” and rhythmic canon through the addition of a dotted note. Joy is represented by birdsongs.

VI. *Par lui tout a été fait* (Through Him everything was made)
   Multiplicity of spaces and times; galaxies, photons, reverse spirals, inverted thunderbolts; through “Him” (the Word) everything was made… in an instant, creation reveals the luminous shadow of its Word.
   This is a figure in which the subject is never repeated: as early as the second entrance, it changes rhythm and register. Notice the divertimento during which the upper voice expresses the subject as a non-retrograde rhythm, and where the fortissimo bass repeats a fragment of that subject in asymmetrical swellings. The middle incorporates very short and very long values (representing the infinitely small and infinitely large). Then, retrograde reprise of the fugue, like a crayfish. Mysterious stretta. Fortissimo theme of God: victorious presence, the face of God behind the flames and turmoil. Creation reprises and sings the theme of God as a chordal canon.

VII. *Regard de la Croix* (Gaze of the Cross)
   Theme of the star and the Cross.
   The Cross said to him: you shall be priest in my arms…

VIII. *Regard des hauteurs* (Gaze of the heights)
   Glory in the heights… the heights descend upon the manger like the song of a lark…
   Birdsongs: nightingales, thrushes, warblers, chaffinches, goldfinches, warblers, serins, and mostly larks.

IX. *Regard du temps* (Gaze of time)
   Mystery of the plenitude of time; Time sees within itself the birth of He who is eternal…
   This theme is short, cold, strange, like de Chirico’s egglike heads; rhythmic canon.

X. *Regard de l’Esprit de joie* (Gaze of the Spirit of joy)
   Vehement dance, drunken horn-like tonalities, transport of the Holy Spirit… the joy of God’s love in the soul of Jesus Christ.
   — I have always been struck by the fact that God is happy — and that His continual and ineffable joy inhabited the soul of Christ. Joy is, for me, a transport, an intoxication in the maddest sense.
   — Form: Oriental dance in the extreme-low range, in unequal neumes, like plainchant. First development on the “theme of joy.” Asymmetrical swelling. Three hunting-tune-like variations. Second development on the “theme of joy” and “theme of God.” Then, reprise of the Oriental dance, with the extreme-low and extreme-high ranges together. Coda on the “theme of joy.”

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**Portland Youth Philharmonic**

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XI. Première communion de la Vierge (First communion of the Blessed Virgin)
A tableau in which the Blessed Virgin is shown kneeling, bent forward in the night — a luminous halo surrounds her form. Her eyes shut, she worships the fruit hidden within herself. This scene takes place between the Annunciation and the Nativity: it is the first and greatest of communions.
Theme of God, soft volutes, stalactites, and interior embrace. Recall of the theme of the “Virgin and Child” in my “Nativity.” Ever more enthusiastic Magnificat. Special chords with pulsations in the low register, representing the heart of the being Child within his mothers’ breast. The theme of God vanishes.
— After the Annunciation, the Virgin Mary worships Jesus within herself… my God, my Son, my Magnificat! — my love without voice.

XII. La parole toute-puissante (The all-powerful Word)
Monody with pulsations in the low register.
This child is the Word, which sustains all things though the power of its voice.

XIII. Noël (Christmas)
Carillon — the bells of Christmas sing with us the sweet names of Jesus, Mary, Joseph…

XIV. Regard des Anges (Gaze of the Angels)
Shimmering, percussion; powerful breaths sounding immense trombones; thy servants are flames of fire… — and then, the songs of birds drinking azure — and the angels are amazed: for God has joined, not with them, but with the human race…
In the first three stanzas: flames, rhythmic canon, and breaking up of the chordal theme. Fourth stanza: birdsongs. Fifth stanza: the angels are amazed.

XV. Le baiser de l’enfant Jésus (The kiss of the Child Jesus)
At every communion, the Child Jesus sleeps beside us near the door; He then opens it upon a garden and throws Himself in the light to embrace us…
Theme of God in the style of a lullaby, Sleep — the garden — arms extended toward love — the kiss — the shadow of the kiss. An etching furnished my inspiration for this movement: it showed the Child Jesus leaving the arms of His mother to kiss little sister Thérèse. All this is symbolic of communion, of divine love. One must love in order to love that picture and this music, which aims to be as soft as the heart of heaven; there is nothing else.

XVI. Regard des prophètes, des bergers et des mages
(Gaze of the prophets, the shepherds, and the magi)
Exotic music — tom-toms and hautboys, huge and reedy consort…

XVII. Regard du silence (Gaze of silence)
Silence in the palm of the hand, inverted rainbow… Every silence in the manger reveals music and color that are the mysteries of Jesus Christ…
Polymodality, rhythmic canon through the addition of a dotted note, special chords, “theme of chords.” The entire piece is intricately chiseled, for a piano work.
Deborah Cleaver

Deborah Ingram Cleaver received her Master’s degree in piano performance from Boston University, where she studied with Leonard Shure, becoming his teaching assistant at New England Conservatory. After ten years in Berlin, she moved to Portland where she teaches at Reed College. Other teaching positions have included Willamette University, St. Andrews College, and the Southshore Conservatory of Music. In 2005 she joined the associate faculty of the Golandksky Institute which holds its summer seminar at Princeton University.

An avid performer, she has appeared with the De Rosa Chamber Players and fEARnoMUSIC. Her presentations in the Northwest have included lectures at Portland State University and for the Oregon and Washington State Music Teachers’ Associations, master classes, and lecture recitals. In addition, she is a frequent master clinician and adjudicator for regional competitions, and is chairman of the OMTA Baroque Festival.

Jeffrey Payne

Heralded by the Boston Globe as “a pianist of chameleon abilities” pianist Jeffrey Payne has performed on WGBH National Public Radio in Boston, KING radio in Seattle, and KBPS radio in Portland; at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston and the Norton Gallery in Palm Beach; at the Seattle Spring Festival, Eugene’s Music Today Festival, the Ernest Bloch Festival, the Oregon Bach Festival, and the Yellow Barn and Sandpoint Chamber Music Festivals. The Palm Beach Post praised his performance of Messiaen: “The best part of the evening came with the Messiaen pieces chosen from Vingt regards. Payne loves this music and has the fingers for it. Let Payne return for a full evening of the modern music which he plays with such enthusiasm and conviction.” He has also performed with the Vancouver Symphony, the Yaquina Chamber Symphony, the Willamette Falls Symphony, Portland Opera Chorus, and the Oregon Repertory Singers. In praising his playing, the Oregonian opined that “Payne did a terrific impersonation of an orchestra,” and the Boston Globe singled out his performance with fellow pianist Yukiko Takagi of Ligeti’s Three Pieces for Two Pianos as “a performance of special distinction.”

Jeffrey Payne founded the fEARnoMUSIC ensemble with percussionist Joel Bluestone in 1992. He has appeared in performance with the group across the United States, including performances in New York City, California, and Colorado, as well as throughout the Pacific Northwest. During his tenure as Artistic Director for the group he was responsible for presentation of twenty World Premiere or American Premiere performances of works by Pacific Northwest composers. In 1997 he founded the Young Composers Workshop, as part of the mission of Fear No Music, and continues as its Director, overseeing the development of aspiring young creative minds around the region.

Payne studied with Fern Davidson while he was in high school and from 1979-81 while he attended the College of Idaho. He graduated Cum Laude with a Bachelor of Music from Boston University, where he studied with Bela Nagy and Luis Batlle, and he holds a Master of Music in Piano from the New England Conservatory, where he studied with Stephen Drury. He has taught at Willamette University, Portland State University, and Reed College, and he can be heard on CD performing with the Fear No Music 21st Century Ensemble and the Oregon Repertory Singers.
Olivier Messiaen, considered by many to be the most important French composer since Debussy, was born December 10, 1908 in Avignon, the elder son of the poet Cécile Sauvage and Pierre Messiaen, an English teacher and translator of Shakespeare. Literature was an early influence on Messiaen, and while still a young child, he taught himself to play the piano, shortly thereafter beginning formal study.

In 1919 the family moved to Paris, and at the age of eleven Messiaen entered the Conservatoire, where he would study with Maurice Emmanuel, Marcel Dupré and Charles-Marie Widor, and Paul Dukas. In the mid 1930s, Messiaen joined fellow composers André Jolivet, Daniel Lesur, and Yves Buadrier to form the group La Jeune France (Young France), dedicated to promoting “living music, having the impetus of sincerity, generosity and artistic conscientiousness.” Among the major compositions of this period is La Nativité du Seigneur (The Nativity of the Lord), an extended suite for organ, one of his many significant compositions for the instrument. (Messiaen himself served as organist at the church of Sainte-Trinité in Paris for nearly sixty years.)

Messiaen was called up as a medical auxiliary in the French army at the beginning of World War II, and was captured at Verdun. During his stay in a prisoner-of-war camp in Germany, he composed the Quatuor pour la fin du temps (Quartet for the End of Time), for the unusual combination of piano, violin, cello, and clarinet — the instruments that were available. This masterpiece remains one of Messiaen’s best-known works. The “end of time” of the title is both an allusion to the Apocalypse of the New Testament and a reference to Messiaen’s entirely new approach to musical time.

After his release in May 1941, Messiaen was appointed a professor of harmony at the Conservatoire, where he taught until his retirement in 1978. Among his students there were Pierre Boulez, Yvonne Loriod (later to become his second wife), Karlheinz Stockhausen, György Kurtág, and George Benjamin. While still in his mid thirties Messiaen developed a reputation as an excellent teacher, encouraging his students to find their own voices rather than adopting his ideas.

In addition to his researches into ancient Greek and Hindu rhythm, Messiaen’s mystical Christian faith and his close study of birdsong were perhaps the most profound influences on his works. His large-scale compositions include the Turangalîla-Symphonie (for piano, ondes Martenot, and orchestra), an opera Saint-François d’Assise, and many other orchestral and chamber works, and his contributions to the organ and piano literature are particularly notable. Messiaen created a sound world of great specificity and brilliant color, and it has often been said that it is impossible to mistake a composition of Messiaen for the work of any other composer.

Olivier Messiaen died in Clichy, near Paris, on April 27, 1992.
fEARnoMUSIC has been consistently praised for its unusual and innovative programs, offering performances of the highest artistic quality that are passionate and humorous. Now in its seventeenth season, the ensemble is committed to promoting the chamber music of our time, from the masters of the twentieth century to the young composers working right here in our city.

fEARnoMUSIC members have been featured artists on Seattle’s KING Radio and Portland’s KBPS All- Classical Radio. As recipients of a Continental Harmony grant in 2003–04 (sponsored by the American Composers Forum and the National Endowment for the Arts), fEARnoMUSIC premiered David Drubay’s Northwest Passages in collaboration with the Lewis and Clark Bicentennial, a work chosen to represent Oregon in the celebration. fEARnoMUSIC has also received grants from the Copland Fund for Performing Ensembles, the Regional Arts and Culture Council, the Templeton Foundation, and the JackStraw Foundation. The ensemble is proud to have performed in Merkin Hall in New York in September 2001, at the invitation of acclaimed young composer (and Portland native) Kenji Bunch. In the Spring of 2008, fEARnoMUSIC were Artists in Residence at Brigham Young University, invited by composer Steve Ricks.

The Young Composers Project offers the only program of its kind in the country. Currently sponsored by the Templeton Foundation, this innovative program gathers young composers (grades 6–12) from around Oregon for workshops over a nine-month period. During the workshops, the students develop their compositional ideas, experiment with orchestration, and have their works professionally performed and recorded. More than a hundred students have taken advantage of this exceptional opportunity, and they have won more than two dozen state, regional, and national awards for their compositions.

KBPS Classical Radio has annually broadcast interviews with students along with performances of their pieces, and segments of the workshop have been featured on Oregon Public Broadcasting’s ArtBeat. Students have also participated in master classes with Pulitzer Prize winning composer William Bolcom, and Indiana University faculty member David Drubay.

fEARnoMUSIC can be heard on The Bridge, Vol. I (released by the Regional Arts and Culture Council), and on the recently released Electric Fences performing music of Shaun Naidoo and Jackie T. Gabel’s Spring Quartet.

fEARnoMUSIC

about FNM + Young Composers Project

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Upcoming Concerts

Further details at www.FearNoMusic.org

Feb 13: Concert No. 3

Home Grown
Fresh, Delectable Sounds by Oregon Composers
Friday, February 13, 2009, 8:00 p.m.
Preconcert talk at 7:00 p.m.
Imago Theatre
17 SE 8th Avenue, PDX
A celebration of Oregon’s 150th Anniversary of Statehood including four world premieres and special guests Agnieszka Laska Dancers & Gavin Larsen.

March 13: Concert No. 4

The Inaugural Concert of Cascadia Composers
Friday, March 13, 2009, 8:00 p.m.
The Old Church
1422 SW 11th Avenue, PDX
www.cascadiacomposers.org

April 17: Concert No. 5

Parallax: Music and Moving Pictures
Friday, April 17, 2009, 8:00 p.m.
Imago Theatre
17 SE 8th Avenue, PDX
Works by contemporary composers and film/video artists.
Co-curated with HELSINGQI.

April 26: Concert No. 6

Hearing the Future: Young Composers
Sunday, April 26, 2009, 3:00 p.m.
Evans Auditorium at Lewis & Clark College
0615 SW Palatine Hill Road, PDX
directions at www.lclark.edu/GENERAL/MAPS/
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