

The Church of the Ascension

Fifth Avenue at Tenth Street
New York City

The Rev. Andrew W. Foster III, *Rector*
Dennis Keene, *Organist & Choirmaster*

Olivier Messiaen's

Méditations

sur le Mystère de la Sainte Trinité

Meditations on the Mystery of the Holy Trinity, 1969

Jon Gillock, Organist

Tuesday, November 15, 2011 at 8:00 p.m.

The audience is cordially invited to greet Dr. Gillock at the reception following the concert in the Parish Hall (enter the doors next to the side altar).

*The use of recording and photographic equipment is prohibited.
Please be sure to turn off all cell phones and pagers.*

I invite you to join me in a musical-spiritual journey, to meditate with Messiaen (and me) on the religious texts that he chose and which inspired him to compose each movement of this work. Although the inspiration for this music definitely comes from Catholic-Christian teachings, I also believe that through the universal language of music Messiaen's music transcends this and also speaks of a universal spiritual truth. As with any great work of art, it can be interpreted on many different levels: I hope that each of you will be able to find the proper way for it to speak to you.

It is also interesting to remember these words of Messiaen himself regarding his music: "I'm a Christian... and I think that in the present age of ecumenism — and, furthermore, in every era — we shouldn't attach too much importance to religious differences. Everyone — Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant Christians, Israelites, even Buddhists — is seeking God, finding God. My work is addressed to all who believe — and also to all others."

- Jon Gillock

Méditations sur le Mystère de la Sainte Trinité

Meditations on the Mystery of the Holy Trinity, 1969

A HISTORY OF THE WORK

The second rebuilding of the organ during Messiaen's tenure as organist at La Trinité began in 1962, thirty-two years after his appointment. At this time the organ was given a new console with a crescendo pedal, the action was electrified, seven new stops were added, and finally in 1966 a combination action was added which comprised six general pistons. The organ remained silent during this whole time.

The end of the organ project in 1967 coincided with the 100th anniversary of the church itself. Canon Holande, rector of La Trinité, asked Messiaen for ideas about how to celebrate this important occasion. Messiaen, in fact, had only one idea — to invite the great preacher and rector of Sacré-Cœur, Monseigneur Charles, to speak about the "Mystery of the Holy Trinity" (after all, it was the 100th anniversary of the "Church of the Holy Trinity"), and that he (Messiaen) would improvise on the same subject around the three sermons of Msgr. Charles.

This celebration took place on November 23, 1967. Before the ceremony, Msgr. Charles and Messiaen had agreed on a musical formula that would indicate (without question) the end of each improvisation, thus pointing out to Msgr. Charles when he was to begin his next sermon. This signal was the tender call of the bird Yellowhammer — seven repeated notes and a final sustained tone. Besides celebrating the anniversary of the church, this was also an important musical event because Messiaen, since 1950 (with the writing of *Messe de la Pentecôte*), had ceased to improvise in public except in his role as church organist during services. Messiaen remarked at the time that "perhaps something very good will happen, perhaps something very bad — but nevertheless, I will play with love."

These improvisations (including the call of the Yellowhammer, which now ends meditations II, V, VIII, and IX) were the beginning of his ideas for this work, *Méditations sur le Mystère de la Sainte Trinité*. Composed in 1969, it was his first major work for organ in 28 years, since *Livre d'Orgue* in 1951. It was heard for the first time in public on March 20, 1972, when Messiaen himself gave the premiere in Washington, D.C., at the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception before a capacity audience. It was published in 1973.

Méditations is quite different from the works of the 1950's, which were more austere and included experiments with serialism. In this work we begin to hear a more mature Messiaen, music marked by great warmth and longer forms (it was his longest work for organ up to that time). It also contains many more birdsongs, God's most natural musicians, and many more references to specific colors. In a way, this music is characterized by a kind of return to the music of earlier periods but with greater refinement and depth of expression. Because its movements are even more integrated into a whole, they are more difficult to extract and play separately than movements from earlier suites. It is a work

in which we begin to sense that Messiaen is summarizing his life's work. At its appearance, many felt that it was his masterpiece for organ and that it might be his last work for that instrument.

A veritable religious-opera in sound, theatrical, dramatic, and expansive, *Méditations* even includes Wagnerian-like leitmotifs for the three principal characters (God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), which are used throughout the work. A new compositional device first encountered here is Communicable Language: this comprises a complete alphabet in music (26 exact pitches with exact rhythms) and a grammatical system, which Messiaen used to translate (by “spelling out”) certain passages of Saint Thomas Aquinas’ *Summa Theologica* directly into music. It is interesting to note that Messiaen’s musical translation of these passages was made from a French translation rather than the original Latin. Thus, in order to “hear” what Messiaen has translated into music one must be thinking in the French text.

This is certainly his most programmatic work for organ, where he has indicated within the score that certain passages represent exact qualities, emotions, ideas. Unlike his earlier organ works that have as subtitles quotations from the Bible, this work contains religious quotes (not only from the Bible, but also from the *Summa Theologica* by St. Thomas Aquinas) within the movements themselves, where they are associated with specific musical passages. In the original, the nine meditations have no titles except for their numbers. After years of other people adding their own titles, Messiaen officially named them himself. These titles appear in his personal catalog and are shown within brackets here.

The program notes that follow, based on Messiaen’s own notes, are designed to lead the listener through this “opera”. Each new paragraph of text represents a new aural event, usually marked by a change in color and tempo.

Méditation I

[*Le Père Inengendré* / The Father Unbegotten]

The first meditation is a theme with three variations, interrupted by a “duet” in Communicable Language. It is about the act of creation, setting the cosmos into motion, bringing order out of chaos, all acts of God, because he is the Father of the Universe — he “is not from another”, but was, is, has always been, and will be forever. The Communicable Language section is like an intimate conversation in which mysteries of the universe are being revealed.

Statement of the theme, *The Father of the Stars* (a fortissimo melodic line in three sections, with silence between each section).

First Variation: in two voices — the theme is in the lower voice; the counter-subject is an angular melody.

Second Variation: the theme is in the pedal punctuated by chords.

Section in Communicable Language: the first voice to enter (on the clarinet stop) spells out the quoted passage; the second voice is a free counter-subject.

“In relation to the Persons who proceed from Him, the Father is signified thus: paternity and spiration; as for God as the ‘Principle

who has no principle,’ He is signified thus: He is not from another; that is precisely the property of innascibility, designated by the word unbegotten.” St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* - the Trinity, Book II, question 33, “The Person of the Father” - article 4, conclusion

Third Variation, *The Stars Turn Around*. A turning sensation is created by using three ostinatos of different lengths simultaneously, one of which is the first section of the Theme.

A sweeping succession of clustered harmonies, which crescendos to full organ, brings a powerful restatement of the word “unbegotten” (in French, i-n-e-n-g-e-n-d-r-é, ten notes) in the pedal.

Méditation II

[*La Sainteté de Jésus Christ / The Holiness of Jesus Christ*]

This meditation is in strophic form, a form that Messiaen loved because it allowed him to reiterate certain points and slightly develop them at the same time. Birdsongs abound expressing their joy and freedom.

First Stanza (made-up of five elements)

God Is Holy (plainsong theme, *Alleluia of the Feast of Dedication*, without accompaniment).

“You alone are the Holy One, You alone are the Lord, You alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ.” *Gloria of the Mass*

(expressed by colored chords in clusters which resolve to a major harmony).

Song of the Wren.

Continuation of “You alone are the Holy One...” (chords in clusters coming to rest on another major harmony).

Other birdsongs continue:

- 1) Blackbird
- 2) the crescendo/diminuendo/closing flourish of the Chaffinch
- 3) the long, virtuoso solo of the Garden Warbler
- 4) the sweet response (with the faintly

luminous accompaniment of a major chord) of the Blackcap

Second Stanza

All of the preceding elements are repeated in the same order, sometimes modified musically by transposition and extension.

Conclusion

God Is Holy (a fragment of the *Alleluia*, fortissimo).

“Give us the love of Your Holy Name!”

Litanies of the Holy Name of Jesus (the same *Alleluia*, now very quietly, slowly expressively in an accompanied version).

The call of the Yellowhammer (a simple bird-song of seven repeated notes and a final sustained note).

Méditation III

[*La Relation réelle en Dieu est réellement identique à l'Essence / The True Relation in God Is Truly Identical To His Essence*]

The third meditation is an “aria”, trumpet stops taking the solo line, declaiming the sentence of Saint Thomas Aquinas, affirming God’s identity — that relation and essence in him are the same, he is eternal, omnipresent, infinite.

The right hand, totally in Communicable Language, spells out the following sentence:

“The true relation in God is truly identical to His essence.” St. Thomas Aquinas,

Summa Theologica - the Trinity, Book I, Question 28,

“The Divine Relations“ - article 2, conclusions

In the musical version of this sentence, expansive and passionate, both spellings (forward motion and retrograde) of the Theme of God are heard. The accompanying voices (on rich foundation stops) use several Hindu rhythms or *deçi-tâlas*, provincial rhythms of ancient India.

Méditation IV

[*Je suis, Je suis!* / I Am, I Am!]

Messiaen describes the effect of this meditation: “All that we can know of God is summarized in these words so complicated and yet so simple: he is. They are words that we can only understand in flashes, in rare and short illuminations. Practically the whole of this piece establishes a climate, preparing the final vision. The strangeness of the timbres and the birdsongs chosen here must bring to mind some unknown dimension.”

This meditation is composed of four sections, the beginning of each announced by the Shriek of the Black Woodpecker. It is a movement made-up almost entirely of birdsongs.

Shriek of the Black Woodpecker.

Call of the Ring Ouzel.

Sad Chimes, in regular values, of the Wood Owl of Tengmalm.

Shriek of the Black Woodpecker.

Cluster of trills.

A short passage in trio suggests the three persons of the Holy Trinity.

Cluster of trills continues.

Shriek of the Black Woodpecker.

Extended solo of a Song Thrush (with alternations between changes in timbre and attack,

which Messiaen describes as pizzicato, drops of water, and silk being torn).

Shriek of the Black Woodpecker.

Cluster of trills.

Call of the Ring Ouzel.

Final Vision (full organ, chords in iambic rhythm — short/long — in rapid descent, imitating the words “I am”):

“And ‘I am’ passed before him [Moses] crying: ‘I am,’ ‘I am!’”

Exodus 34:6

Silence

Call of the Wood Owl of Tengmalm fades away, expressing our smallness overpowered by the flashing light of the sacred.

Méditation V

[*Dieu est Immense, Éternel, Immuable — Le souffle de l'Esprit — Dieu est Amour /*
God Is Immense, Eternal, Immovable — The Breath of the Spirit — God Is Love]

A meditation on the divine attributes. God the Father's character has many qualities to describe; the Holy Spirit's tempestuous character bursts forth in a toccata; and, the Son's compassion, at the end, is one of the most moving moments in the entire cycle.

First Section

Three adjectives applicable to the Father alone:

God Is Immense - he is present everywhere (the Theme of God).

God Is Eternal - he is without succession, without beginning or end (rapidly moving chordal colors - light golden yellow with reflections of violet-purple, silver-gray, a little brown, red, and pale green).

God is Immovable - he is beyond change (quiet, solemn timbres on the foundation stops).

The Breath of the Spirit - in the Bible the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Holy Trinity, is often pictured as wind or breath (a quick run in octaves, composed of the Theme of God and its retrograde, which is the Theme of the Son, signifying that The Holy Spirit Is God; then, under trilled chords are two fragments of the Theme of God, followed by a tempestuous passage which abruptly ends the section).

Second Section *is a second stanza — it repeats all the preceding elements in the same order, transposed and slightly modified.*

Third Section (The Paternity of God)

God the Father Omnipotent (three slow-moving chords), answered by *Our Father* (six chords).

Fourth Section evokes again the third person of the Trinity

The Breath of the Spirit (a brilliant toccata: perpetual motion in the manual; the Theme of God developed in the pedal).

God Is Eternal, extended (from the First Section with changes in color: golden yellow, Chartres blue, violet-purple, green and red, orange, amethyst-purple, mauve, and pearl-gray).

God the Father Omnipotent, again answered by *Our Father* (from the Third Section); these last two are then repeated.

Sixth Section evokes the Son, the second person of the Holy Trinity, and the Cross, which is the supreme testimony of God's love for us.

God Is Love (voix celeste).

“And Jesus said: ‘Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.’” *St. John 15:13*

Call of the Yellowhammer (2nd Meditation), like a refrain, ends the movement.

Méditation VI

[*Le Fils, Verbe et Lumière* / The Son, Word, and Light]

The sixth meditation is about the light that came into the world with the birth of Jesus, the light of the star that led the Wise Men to Jesus, Jesus as the light of the world through His preaching of the Word of God. As this meditation progresses it becomes brighter and brighter until, at the conclusion, our opera stage is flooded with intense, brilliant, white light.

First Stanza

“In him was life; and the life was the light of men...”

St. John 1:4

First Plainsong Theme, *Offertory Antiphon of Epiphany* (without accompaniment).

Colored chords, which form a contrast to the bareness of the chant, come to rest on a major chord.

First Plainsong Theme continues.

Second Plainsong Theme, *Gradual of Epiphany* (harmonized, cadences on the dominant of C major).

“The Son being the brightness of his [God’s] glory!...”

Hebrew 1:3

Third Plainsong Theme, *Alleluia of Epiphany* (in luminous chords, fortissimo, cadences again on the dominant of C major).

Second Stanza

The same themes are repeated with some changes: 1) Another phrase of the *Offertory Antiphon* is used, 2) the *Gradual* theme is further developed, 3) the *Alleluia* is played a fourth higher, still fortissimo but even more luminous, ending on the tonic chord of C major.

Méditation VII

[*Le Père et le Fils aiment par le Saint-Esprit eux-mêmes et nous* /
The Father and the Son Love Themselves and Us Through the Holy Spirit]

The introduction shows Messiaen’s fascination with the French Horn during this time. (Des Canyons aux Étoiles of 1974 even includes a solo movement for this instrument.) The middle section, in Communicable Language, is a “trio” which states — in intimate conversation like the duet of Méditation I — that Love emanates from the third person of the Holy Trinity.

Introduction

Seven mysterious chords.

Call of the Bird of Persepolis (hearing this bird-song at dusk and being unable to see the bird, Messiaen was unable to identify it).

Motif of Four Horns “moving away” (on foundation stops, with the effect of gaining distance by progressively subtracting stops).

Main Body in Communicable Language

“The Father and the Son love themselves and us through the Holy Spirit (the source of Love).”

St. Thomas Aquinas,
Summa Theologica - “The Trinity”,
Book II, question 37, article 2, conclusion

In trio style:

The first voice to enter (on the trumpet stop) is in Communicable Language; it spells out the quoted passage. The second voice, in the pedal, is a rhythmic ostinato; the third voice is the song of the Bulbul.

Coda (a restatement of the introduction)

Seven mysterious chords (repeated in retrograde order, but retaining the original rhythm).

Bird of Persepolis with a slightly different song. The “Four Horns”, ending very quietly and solemnly in E major.

Méditation VIII

[*Dieu est simple* / God Alone Is God]

This is a very tender and expressive movement. It is a celestial meditation that transports us far away into the heavens on the wings of a dove. Through understatement, it gently declares that God alone is God. The plainsong theme that expresses this idea is beautifully developed throughout the meditation, becoming an invitation and a consolation.

First Section

God Alone is God (plainsong theme, the *Alleluia of All Saints' Day*, without accompaniment).

The Three Are One (three chords, repeated several times with changing rhythms, followed by the Themes of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, in single lines answering each other).

“O depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!” *Romans 11:33* (a single line in the low register of the clarinet, which is answered by a slow cascade of chords; this is followed by two repeated chords in a Hindu rhythm which diminuendo).

Second Section is a second stanza: all of the preceding elements are repeated in the same order with slight variations.

Third Section

“And Jesus said, ‘Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden.’” *St. Matthew 11: 28* (the *Alleluia* accompanied).

Fourth Section

“And Jesus said: ‘For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.’” *St. Matthew 11:30* (the last notes of the *Alleluia* are developed melodically in dialogue over the accompaniment of the *voix celeste*).

“Oh that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away, and be at rest.” *Psalms 55:6* (on the *voix celeste*, in movement like the slow up and down motion of gently moving wings, ascending harmonies become more and more calm; from this comes forth another call of the Yellowhammer, like a refrain [heard in Meditations II and V]).

Méditation IX

[*Je suis Celui qui suis / I Am That I Am*]

The ninth meditation is a grand summary of the entire piece, a recapitulation of the major musical themes with references to ideas from several movements. It is very dramatic, grandiose, rhapsodic, and somewhat overwhelming. And yet at the end, it is tenderness that prevails with the calls of several birds.

Introduction

“I AM THAT I AM.” *Exodus 3:14*
(the Theme of God, fortissimo) answered
by two chords from
God Is Eternal (5th Meditation, colored chords
which mix blue-violet, the principal color,
with red-orange, reddish brown, violet,
with a little green and silver)
Song of the Garden Warbler (2nd Meditation)
answered by the
Song of the Blackcap (2nd Meditation, now
more smiling, more the charmer)
Transitional passage that ascends and crescendos.
Second statement of “I AM THAT I AM.”
(Theme of God).

Development

Several contrasting elements are interwoven with fragments of the Theme of God. The Themes of the Father, the Son, and the Breath of the Holy Spirit (5th Meditation) are recalled, and the Theme of the Son is stated in augmentation in the pedal. All this is developed at length, arriving at the Third and final statement of “I AM THAT I AM.” (Theme of God).

Coda

Transitional passage that descends and diminuendos (the reverse process of the Introduction).
Song of the Garden Warbler in dialogue with the Blackcap.
Final call of the Yellowhammer (heard as a refrain in Meditations II, V, and VIII).

© Jon Gillock 2011

Olivier Messiaen

a biographical sketch by Jon Gillock

Olivier Messiaen — musician, theologian, ornithologist — is one of the great composers of our the 20th Century. As a musician, he was first of all a composer, but he was also a superb organist, improviser, teacher. As a theologian, he “meditated” on certain religious themes in his music by trying to find everything which has to do with those particular subjects in the Bible (and sometimes other religious writings), and then translating those passages into music. As an ornithologist, he collected birdsongs from around the world (birds for him were a symbol of freedom), reproducing as faithfully as possible all their characteristics (rhythm, variety of structure, and timbre) within the confines of our musical instruments, our twelve note scale, and human hearing. All these appear in his compositions. He was also an extraordinary human being, warm, kind, caring, and humble.

Olivier Messiaen was born into a literary family at midnight on December 10, 1908, in Avignon (he was baptized fifteen days later on Christmas). His father, Pierre, was an English teacher, who made a definitive translation of Shakespeare’s plays into French; his mother, Cécile Sauvage, was a poetess. Thus, his father introduced him to drama, and his mother provided sensitivity through her poetry. In her *L’Âme en Bourgeon* (Soul In Bud), conceived after a premonition while contemplating and awaiting the birth of her son, she wrote, “I suffer from a distant musical



presence, which I do not know”. Messiaen claimed that this collection of poetry particularly affected him and his career as a musician. Therefore, it was Messiaen’s parents who provided the first great influences on his artistic development.

During the years of World War I (1914-1918), Messiaen lived with his mother and grandmother at Grenoble, which is surrounded by the Dauphiné Mountains of the Alps. During this time, he taught himself to play the piano, wrote his first musical composition (*La Dame de Shalotte*), and became aware of theatre through Mozart’s *Don Giovanni* and by acting out Shakespeare’s plays. The sensational geography of the Alps, which Messiaen considered his true “native land”, provided another great influence on his artistry. Later, it was in this area, living in his summer retreat in Petichet (looking up at the Alps from a small strip of land between Lake Laffrey and Lake Petichet), that he wrote practically all of his works.

After the war, in time for the beginning of the 1918 school

year, the family moved to Nantes where he received his first formal piano and harmony lessons. Here, when he was only ten years old, he became acquainted with the score of Debussy’s *Pelléas et Mélisande*, a gift from his harmony teacher.

In 1919, at age 11, he entered the Paris Conservatory and studied there until 1930. He won first prizes in counterpoint and fugue, piano accompaniment, organ, improvisation, and composition. It was around this time that he was introduced to Greek metrical rhythms (the poetic feet *Iamb*, *Dactyl*, *Spondee*, *Amphimacer*, *Choriambe*, *Dochmius*, and the four *Epitrites*, etc.), Hindu rhythms (the 120 “*deçi-tâlas*” of ancient provincial India), the rhythms of Far Eastern music, the philosophy of time and duration, and plainsong, which he studied independently.

In the preface to his *Technique de mon Langage Musical* (1942) Messiaen acknowledged *all of the above* as influences on his development as a composer as well as “my wife (Claire Delbos), Claudel, Reverdy and Eluard, Hello and Dom Columba Marmion (shall I dare speak of the *Holy Books* which contain the only *Truth?*), Russian music, and finally, all that evokes stained-glass window and rainbow.” He also thanked his master-teachers: “Jean and Noël Gallon, who stimulated in me the feeling for the ‘true’ harmony, Marcel Dupré, who oriented me toward counterpoint and form, Paul Dukas, who taught me to develop, to orchestrate, to study

the history of the musical language in a spirit of humility and impartiality.” All of these varied aspects contributed to the development of Messiaen’s unique, personal musical language that was to continue to evolve throughout his career.

In 1930, he was appointed organist at l’Église de la Sainte-Trinité in Paris, a position he assumed in 1931 and which he held until his death, thus a tenure of 61 years. It was around this time that he wrote his first compositions for organ: *Le Banquet Céleste* (1928), *Diptyque* (1928), *L’Apparition de l’Église Éternelle* (1932), *L’Ascension* (1933), and *La Nativité du Seigneur* (1935).

In 1936, he married the violinist Claire Delbos; and, in 1937, their son, Pascal, was born. The year 1936 also marked the beginning of Messiaen’s career as a teacher: until 1939, he taught sight-reading at the École Normale de Musique and organ and improvisation at the Schola Cantorum, both in Paris. It was also during this year that he joined with three other

composers — André Jolivet, Daniel-Lesur, and Yves Baudrier — to form the movement “Jeune-France”, a group committed to serious music with a human and spiritual quality.

Messiaen finished *Les Corps Glorieux* (August 25, 1939) one week before the outbreak of World War II. He then joined the army, serving as a hospital attendant until 1940, when he was taken prisoner. He spent one year in Stalag VIII A at Görlitz in Silesia (a region of Poland), during which time he wrote his *Quatuor pour la Fin du Temps*. This work received its first performance in the prison camp on January 15, 1941, with Messiaen at the piano and other prisoners playing the violin, clarinet, and cello. From this point onward, Messiaen ceased to be primarily an organist-composer.

After his repatriation in 1941, Messiaen was appointed Professor of Harmony at the Paris Conservatory. Because he was not allowed to teach composition there, he began private composition classes in the house of a friend, Guy-Bernard Delapierre. It was in these classes that he first came into contact with his most famous pupils: Marius Constant, Nguyen-Thien Dao, Michael Levinas, François-Bernard Mâche, Gilbert Amy, Iannis Xenakis, Jean-Guy Bailly, Antoine Duhamel, Paul Mefano, Karlheinz Stockhausen, Serge Nigg, Maurice Le Roux, and especially Pierre Boulez and Yvonne Loriod. During this time he became very interested in writing for the piano, his favorite instrument, having found the ultimate interpreter in Loriod. It was also during this period that he began making use of birdsong in his compositions. In 1947, he was appointed Professor of Analysis, Aesthetics, and Rhythm (Philosophy of Music) at the Conservatory.

This was also a time of personal despair for Messiaen. After his return from war, his wife became increasingly ill, causing first a separation from her husband, and eventually hospitalization until her death in 1959; it was an illness that lasted almost twenty years. During this long period of solitude and loneliness (realizing that his wife would never regain her health) his devoted disciple Yvonne Loriod gained a larger and larger place in his heart. This impossible human love (because of his marriage) is reflected in three important works during this time which are based on the Tristan-Isolde theme: *Harawi* (1945, voice and piano), *Turangalila-Symphonie* (1946-48), and *Cinq Rechants* (1948, twelve mixed voices).

At the same time, Messiaen began to enjoy international recognition. In 1949, his *Turangalila-Symphonie*, which had been commissioned by Serge Koussevitsky, was premiered in Boston by Leonard Bernstein. Invitations came from Hungary (Budapest), the United States (Tanglewood), Germany (Darmstadt), Italy, Japan, Bulgaria, Argentina, Finland, etc., to give courses in composition, and his Paris studio now enjoyed worldwide appeal.

His compositions from the next few years represent his most austere and cerebral phase. The organ works dating from this period are *Messe de la Pentecôte* (1950, a summary of his ideas on improvisation) and *Livre d'Orgue* (1951, the

summit of his work in serial techniques, rhythm, and time). Then, beginning in 1952, Messiaen traversed an almost barren artistic period of seven years (producing only three works), feeling he had come to an end, not knowing how to continue — he found consolation and inspiration in the music of birds. It was during this time that he undertook the project of transcribing into music all the songs of the birds in France, classified by habitat and region: birds of the fields, the edge of the forest, the high mountains, the seacoasts, the rushes, ponds, and marshes. It was an immense undertaking, without an end. This research produced the superhuman work, *Catalogue d'Oiseaux* (1956-58) for piano, a work lasting two and three-quarters hours. The work was premiered in April 1959 by Yvonne Loriod. (That same month Claire Delbos died.) His masterpiece *Chronochromie* (“The Color of Time”, 1959-60, large orchestra) marks his successful return from that artistic desert, uniting all of his most recent creative interests: birds, rhythm, sound/colors. The organ piece *Verset pour la Fête de la Dédicace* (1960) comes from this time, and it includes two virtuoso solos of the Song Thrush.

The next decade began a period of personal rebirth for Messiaen: he returned to theologically centered subjects as a basis for composition, all surrounded by birdsongs (from this point onward, he traveled all over the world collecting new birdsongs for his compositions); in 1962, he married Yvonne Loriod in a simple, private ceremony; and, in 1966, he was finally officially appointed Professor of Composition at the Paris Conservatory. He retired from teaching in 1978.

It was also the time of the development of his *Son/Couleur* (sound/color) relationships. In Claude Samuel's *Conversations with Olivier Messiaen* (1967), Messiaen states, “When I hear a score or read it, hearing it in my mind, I also see in my mind's eye corresponding colors which turn, mix and blend with each other just like the sounds which turn, mix and intermingle, and at the same time as them...and I've sometimes even precisely indicated these correspondences in my scores. One should, of course, be able to prove this relationship scientifically, but I'm incapable of it”. In his *Conférence de Notre-Dame* (December 4, 1977), he explains that “colored music does that which the stained-glass windows and rose-windows of the Middle Ages did: it dazzles us. At the same time touching our noblest senses, hearing and sight, it shakes our sensitivity, excites our imagination, augments our intelligence, pushes us to go beyond concepts, to grapple with that which is higher than reasoning and intuition, that is to say Faith.”

The sixties were also years of official recognition and honors — official commissions, such as *Et expecto resurrectionem mortuorum* (1964) commissioned by André Malraux and dedicated to those who died in the two World Wars, participation in festivals, and his nomination to the French Institute. He traveled all over the world supervising performances of his compositions, while world commendation and demand for his presence continued to grow, with festivals, competitions, and awards being organized in his honor.

In 1972, he gave the world premiere of *Méditations sur le Mystère de la Sainte Trinité* (1969) for organ at the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C. Shortly afterwards in 1974, his cycle *Des Canyons aux Étoiles* (1971-74, after a visit to Bryce Canyon and Zion National Park in Utah), for chamber orchestra, piano, and French horn, was premiered in New York City. These works are characterized by a summation or synthesis of all of his ideas on a very large scale. This process continued in his most recent compositions: his opera, *Saint-François d'Assise* (1975-83), his last work for organ, *Livre du Saint Sacrement* (1984), and his final work, *Éclairs sur l'Au-Delà* (1988-91).

In 1989, the *Primio Internazionale Paolo VI 1988* was bestowed on him in a moving ceremony in the Cathedral of Notre-Dame in Paris. This prize had been awarded only one time previously, to the great Swiss theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar.

Olivier Messiaen died in Paris on April 27, 1992, following surgery. His funeral was held in Petichet on May 5, and a memorial service was held in Paris at La Trinité on May 14. At the time of his death Messiaen had just finished orchestrating *Éclairs sur l'Au-Delà*, an eleven movement work for orchestra which had been commissioned by the New York Philharmonic to celebrate its 150th anniversary. It was premiered in New York on November 5, 1992. On September 26, 1994, the last premiere of a work by Messiaen occurred in Paris at the Opéra Bastille: a *Concert à Quatre*

(concerto for piano, flute, violoncello, and oboe with orchestra), an unfinished work (four of five movements were completed) conceived in 1990. Since 1994, volumes of his *Traité de Rythme, de Couleur, et d'Ornithologie* have been appearing one by one, edited for publication by Yvonne Loriod. To date, four of the anticipated seven volumes are in print (Leduc, Paris).

In the preface of his *Technique de mon Langage Musical*, Messiaen describes the kind of music he believed his era was in need of and awaiting: “a true music, that is to say, spiritual, a music which may be an act of faith; a music which may touch upon all subjects without ceasing to touch upon God; an original music, in short, whose language may open a few doors, take down some yet distant stars”. He also described the kind of artist he believed necessary to produce this music: “To express with a lasting power our darkness struggling with the Holy Spirit, to raise upon the mountain the doors of our prison of flesh, to give to our century the spring water for which it thirsts, there shall have to be a great artist who will be both a great artisan and a great Christian.” He also gave this advice to this “liberator”: “First, that of Reverdy: ‘May he draw in the whole sky in one breath!’ And then that of Hello: “There is no one great except him to whom God speaks, and in the moment in which God speaks to him.”

This great artist that Messiaen was in search of, awaiting, was, in fact, himself! Olivier Messiaen was a genius of our time.

JON GILLOCK, *Organist*

“Again I remember with emotion your marvelous performance of my *Méditations sur le Mystère de la Sainte Trinité* in New York...I was infinitely touched by your wonderful interpretation: registration, touch, understanding — all were ideally beautiful. You will never know how much I admired your playing. Again thank you and bravo!!!”

-Olivier Messiaen

“My dear friend, Jon Gillock, thank you so much for playing my works and for always playing them magnificently! With all my gratitude, Olivier Messiaen”

“Certain ones [organists] play it better than me...there is the excellent American organist Jon Gillock in New York...”

-Olivier Messiaen

in Claude Samuel's 1986 book,
Entretiens Avec Olivier Messiaen

On January 15, 1974, Jon Gillock gave the New York premiere of Olivier Messiaen's *Méditations sur le Mystère de la Sainte Trinité* at The Church of the Ascension. That single performance launched him into a career as a concert artist almost over night, giving premieres of this fabulous work from coast to coast. The following year, he gave the first New York performance of Messiaen's then Complete Works for Organ — the *Livre du Saint Sacrement* had not yet been written — in a series of five concerts. Soon afterwards, he met Messiaen for the first time, who invited Gillock to visit him in Paris. In 1977, Gillock went to Paris to study with his Maître at the Paris Conservatory.

In 1978, Gillock performed the *Méditations* in the presence of the composer at the Cathedral of Saint John the Divine, NYC, in a very moving concert in honor of Messiaen's 70th birthday. This performance cemented a long friendship between the two: Messiaen was very touched by Gillock's artistry, and it was at this time that he became one of Messiaen's favorite interpreters.

In 1986, Messiaen presented Gillock with a copy of his manuscript for the new *Livre du Saint Sacrement*, authorizing him to give performances of this epic masterpiece before its publication. Again, Gillock gave the New York premiere, which was again followed by a transcontinental

tour premiering this piece around the country to wide critical and public acclaim. He has given several other special New York performances of this work — in 1988, to celebrate Messiaen's 80th birthday; in 1992, as a memorial tribute to Messiaen at the time of his death; and in 1996, for the opening concert of the Convention of the American Guild of Organists which celebrated their 100th anniversary.

In 1995, Gillock was the only American chosen to give a solo concert in Festival Messiaen "Man of Faith", organized by l'Église de la Sainte-Trinité (the church Messiaen served as organist for 61 years) to commemorate the third anniversary of his death. After the Festival he released his program, *Diptyque* and *Les Corps Glorieux*, on CD. This recording was awarded, among several other top prizes, the *Deutsche Schallplatten Preis* (the Grand Prix in Germany).

In 1999, Gillock again performed Messiaen's Complete Works for Organ in New York City to honor the composer's 90th birthday — this time at The Riverside Church. In selecting this festival of six concerts as one of the highlights of the concert season, *The New York Times* hailed Gillock as "one of the most persuasive champions of Messiaen's mystical and mysterious organ works". These concerts were given unprecedented coverage by *The New York Times* during the course of the festival, including a feature article on the front page of the Sunday Arts and Leisure Section. During this series he had the unusual distinction of premiering three recently discovered pieces by Messiaen: *Monodie*, *Prélude*, and *Offrande au Saint Sacrement*. Soon afterwards Gillock performed other major Messiaen celebrations in San Francisco and Boston.

In 2000 (to honor the Jubilee year of the Catholic Church), Gillock was again presented in concert at La Trinité in Paris where he performed Messiaen's *Méditations sur le Mystère de la Sainte Trinité*. In 2002, on All Saints' Day, Gillock was featured in a televised broadcast from Trinité which honored the 10th anniversary of Messiaen's death. And, in 2004, Gillock traveled to Tokyo where he gave the Japan premiere of *Méditations* (the same work he premiered in New York thirty years earlier) as the featured artist for the 30th Anniversary Celebration of the Japan Association of Organists.

In 2008, Jon Gillock celebrated the centenary of Messiaen around the world: in Paris at La Trinité in Festival Messiaen "A Theological Rainbow", in the Alps of southern France in Festival Messiaen "In the Country of La Meije", in Boston and New York, and gave the first performance in Japan of Messiaen's Complete Organ Works. He also participated as a judge in the International Organ Competition Musaschino-Tokyo, where a special Messiaen Prize was awarded.

After a decade of work, Jon Gillock's book, *Performing Messiaen's Organ Works: 66 Masterclasses*, was released in 2010 by Indiana University Press, USA. It stands without peer as the most exhaustive work on Messiaen's organ music in the English language.

Thus, over the last thirty-four years Jon Gillock, known for his sensitive and moving performances, has become the leading American interpreter of Messiaen's marvelous and unusual repertoire for organ.

Jon Gillock is also known for his programs which draw on all periods and nationalities of organ music. Dubbed by the Parisian organists as "the most French of the American organists", he is especially fond of performing the French Spiritual Repertoire. Often a featured soloist in international festivals, he has also been a featured recitalist and master teacher for conventions of both the American Guild of Organists and the Royal Canadian College of Organists.

From 1970 until he moved to France in 1993 he was Professor of Organ at The Juilliard School, NYC. He has also served on the organ faculties of the Manhattan School of Music, NYC, and Montclair State University, NJ. For several years, he participated as Artist Faculty with Yuko Hayashi in the Boston Organ Academy. And last June, with Dennis Keene, founded the annual Ascension Organ Academy featuring the new French organ by Pascal Quoirin.

In 1999, he was named "International Performer of the Year" by the New York City Chapter of the American Guild of Organists. This prestigious honor was awarded to him "in recognition of his outstanding achievements and contributions to organ performance". He was also named ONE OF THE MOST NOTABLE ORGANISTS OF THE 20TH CENTURY by the AGO. Among the awards he has received for his recordings are the "Golden Diapason" and the "10 of Répertoire" in France and the *Deutsche Schallplatten Preis* in Germany.



Olivier Messiaen and Jon Gillock at the Paris Conservatoire, 1977

The Manton Memorial Organ

The Manton Memorial Organ at the Church of the Ascension was made possible by a grant from The Manton Foundation to honor the memory of Sir Edwin and Lady Manton, who were active members of this church for over fifty years. The Mantons were avid lovers of music, particularly the music of Olivier Messiaen and other French composers.

To meet the needs of the parish's rich music program, an eclectic organ of the highest artistic level was sought. A world-wide search finally led to Pascal Quoirin of Saint Didier, France. M. Quoirin has spent half his career building new instruments, the other half restoring many of the great historical instruments of France, including the Dom Bedos masterpiece at Sainte-Croix in Bordeaux and the Cavaillé-Coll in Saint-Cloud. He feels that it is through the knowledge he acquired during the renovations of these historical monuments that he has been successful at building new eclectic organs, which comprise elements of many different styles.

The Ascension organ was designed to play as large a part of the solo organ repertoire as possible, as well as to provide accompaniments for the important choral program of the church. At its core is a three-manual and pedal organ, modeled after Dom Bedos, one of the greatest organ builders of the French Baroque. Thus, on the left side of the altar are the *Grand-Orgue*, *Positif*, and *Récit-Echo* divisions, as well as the bulk of the *Pédale*, all controlled by a three-manual mechanical-action ("tracker-action") console. The direct, mechanical connection between the keys of this console and the pallets that let the air into the pipes allows the player exceptional control over the speech of the pipes – an essential part of serious interpretation of Early organ music. A second, movable four-manual electric-action console controls that Baroque core as well as all the other stops on the right side of the altar: some *Pédale* pipes, some large-scale foundation stops (*Montres*) in the North aisle façade, and the *Grand-Récit Expressif* division. The pipes of the *Grand-Récit* and the *Montres* were modeled after those of the great 19th Century organ builder Cavaillé-Coll. Quoirin's great gift is his ability to mix all these various sounds from different periods into an organic unity. In that way, the Manton Memorial Organ can be seen not just as a synthesis of historical styles, but in its own terms, as a 21st Century instrument.

In designing the four elaborate organ cases, the intent was to create an important work of art from our time of history that: 1) would be a visual representation of the musical personality or soul of the instrument, and 2) would harmonize with the church's magnificent mural and reredos from the 1880's. Design elements were inspired by objects from more than a century ago: mosaic peacocks on the reredos and mosaic friezes on the high altar led to the beautiful carved peacocks and birds of paradise and to the swirled bands of polychrome and gold leaf on the organ façades. The sculptures and polychrome work were done by Babou Vauquois-Quoirin, wife of the builder. The cases and all the veneer work were done by master *menuisier* Alain Poupinet, using French walnut and ash woods. Laurent Mesme was the head engineer of the entire project.

The organ was built at the Quoirin Atelier in Saint Didier, France, between May 2008 and June 2010. It was then shipped to Ascension where it was re-assembled in October-November 2010, and tuned and voiced from December 2010 through February 2011. The instrument was dedicated on May 1, 2011. It is the first French-built organ ever installed in New York City, and the largest new French organ built in almost a half-century.

**THE MANTON MEMORIAL ORGAN
CHURCH OF THE ASCENSION
NEW YORK CITY**

PASCAL QUOIRIN
SAINT-DIDIER, FRANCE

DEDICATED MAY 1, 2011

Three-manual mechanical (suspended) action console
Four-manual electric console (movable)
95 stops, 111 ranks

GRAND-ORGUE	16	Basson	PÉDALE
16 Montre	8	Trompette	32 Bourdon
16 Bourdon	4	Clairon	16 Flûte
8 Montre	8	Cromorne	16 Principal
8 *Second (large Cavaillé-Coll-style Montre)	8	Tremblant	16 Bourdon
8 Flûte traversière	8	*Trompette Harmonique en chamade (Récit)	16 *Petit Bourdon (Récit)
8 Bourdon			10 2/3 Grande Quinte
8 Gambe	GRAND-RÉCIT EXPRESSIF		8 Flûte
5 1/3 Gros Nasard	16 *Bourdon		8 Violoncelle
4 Prestant	8 *Principal		8 Bourdon
4 *Second (large Cavaillé-Coll-style Prestant)	8 *Flûte Harmonique		6 2/5 Grande Tierce
4 Flûte ouverte	8 *Bourdon		5 1/3 Quinte
3 1/5 Grosse Tierce	8 *Gambe		4 Prestant
2 2/3 Quinte	8 *Voix Céleste		4 Flûte
2 2/3 Nasard	8 *Aéoline		3 1/5 Tierce
2 Doublette	8 *Aéoline Céleste		2 Quinzième
2 Flûte	4 *Prestant		Plein Jeu IV
Grande Fourniture II	4 *Flûte octavante		32 Bombarde
Fourniture IV	2 2/3 *Nasard Harmonique		16 Bombarde
Cymbale III	2 *Octavin		16 Basson (Schnitger-type Posaune)
Cornet VII (c3)	1 3/5 *Tierce Harmonique		8 Trompette
16 Bombarde	*Plein Jeu V		8 Basson (Schnitger-type Posaune)
8 1ère Trompette	*Sur Cymbale III		4 Clairon
8 2ème Trompette (chamade)	16 *Basson		8 *Trompette Harmonique en chamade
4 Clairon	8 *Trompette Harmonique		
Tremblant	4 *Clairon Harmonique		
8 *Trompette Harmonique en chamade (Récit)	8 *Basson Hautbois		
	8 *Voix Humaine		
	*Tremblant		
	8 *Trompette Harmonique en chamade		* playable only on the electric console
POSITIF			
16 Quintaton	RÉCIT-ECHO (expressif)		
8 Montre	8 Bourdon		
8 Flûte conique	4 Flûte allemande		
8 Bourdon	2 2/3 Nasard		
8 Salicional	2 Flûte		
4 Prestant	1 3/5 Tierce		
4 Flûte conique	8 Trompette		
2 2/3 Nasard	8 Hautbois		
2 Doublette	8 Voix Humaine		
2 Quarte de Nasard	8 Basson (Cor anglais)		
1 3/5 Tierce	8 Clarinette		
1 1/3 Larigot	Tremblant		
1 Flageolet	8 *Trompette Harmonique en chamade		
Fourniture IV			
Cymbale III			



This program is supported, in part, by public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council.

Voices of Ascension programs are made possible by the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of Governor Andrew Cuomo and the New York State Legislature.