

Sunday, January 27, 2008, 3pm
Hertz Hall

Christopher Taylor, *piano*

PROGRAM

Olivier Messiaen (1908–1992)
Vingt regards sur l'Enfant-Jésus

1. Regard du Père (Gaze of the Father)
Extremement lent. Mystérieux, avec l'amour
2. Regard de l'Étoile (Gaze of the Star)
Modéré
3. L'échange (The exchange)
Bien modéré
4. Regard de la Vierge (Gaze of the Virgin)
Bien modéré
5. Regard de Fils sur le Fils (Gaze of the Son upon the Son)
Très lent
6. Par Lui tout a été fait (By Him All Has Been Made)
Modéré, presque vif
7. Regard de la Croix (Gaze of the Cross)
Bien modéré
8. Regard des hauteurs (Gaze of the Heights)
Vif
9. Regard du temps (Gaze of Time)
Modéré
10. Regard de l'esprit de joie (Gaze of the Spirit of Joy)
Presque vif

INTERMISSION

11. Première communion de la Vierge (First Communion of the Virgin)
Très lent
12. La parole toute puissante (The Omnipotent Word)
Un peu vif
13. Noël (Christmas)
Très vif, joyeux
14. Regard des anges (Gaze of the angels)
Très vif
15. Le baiser de l'Enfant-Jésus (The Kiss of the Infant Jesus)
Très lent; calme
16. Regard des prophètes, des bergers, et des Mages
(Gaze of the prophets, Shepherds and Wise Men)
Modéré
17. Regard du silence (Gaze of Silence)
Très modéré
18. Regard de l'Onction terrible (Gaze of the Awesome Unction)
Modéré
19. Je dors mais, mon coeur veille (I Sleep, But My Heart Is Awake)
Lent
20. Regard de l'Église d'amour (Gaze of the Church of Love)
Presque vif

Presented in cooperation with UC Berkeley's Mathematical Sciences Research Institute.

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Olivier Messiaen (1908–1992) Vingt regards sur l'Enfant-Jésus

Born in Avignon, December 10, 1908; died in Paris, April 27, 1992.

Original thinkers appear on this planet only rarely—such was Olivier Messiaen. One of the most creative musical voices of the 20th century, Messiaen possessed a boundless curiosity and astonishing vision. As a lover of nature, a mystic Roman Catholic, mathematical whiz and phenomenally gifted musician, he incorporated myriad elements in the invention of his own musical language. He had a lifelong interest in bird song, for instance, that led him to transcribe, without the aid of a tape recorder, the calls of more than 250 species for use in his music. Fascinated with rhythm, he incorporated Greek and Balinese rhythms, and employed Hindu formulae even before he understood their origin. He worked mathematical intricacies into his compositions: permutations, “irrational” values and complex augmentations and diminutions. Captivated by the concepts of time and space, he created elaborate schemes to represent these complex ideas in musical terms.

While never embracing serialism altogether, Messiaen adapted it to his own purpose, for his treatment of pitch, rhythm, dynamics and articulation. Conventional chords were part of his vocabulary, but he erased their traditional function by separating them from expected contexts. His harmonic vocabulary included his own system called “modes of limited transposition,” based on the modern chromatic scale divided into equal intervals. He often used these seven modes and their “limited transpositions” to represent aurally the colors of the visual world. It is a testament to his genius and inner ear that these seemingly rigid constructions yielded creations of such compelling beauty.

Almost all of Messiaen’s works for 15 years, beginning in 1943 with *Visions de l’Amen*, were composed for piano or featured the piano prominently. His great inspiration was virtuoso pianist Yvonne Loriod, a student in his famous advanced harmony class—later elevated to composition

class—at the Paris Conservatory. (She eventually became his second wife, in 1961, several years after the death of his first wife, violinist Claire Delbos.) The complexities of his piano parts were all written fearlessly with Loriod’s incomparable abilities in mind. Beginning with *Visions de l’Amen*, which she premiered in 1943 with the composer at the other piano, she premiered and recorded all of his works containing a piano part. *Vingt regards sur l’Enfant-Jésus* was composed between March and September 1944. Phenomenally difficult and lasting an imposing span of over two hours, the piano cycle was first performed by Loriod on March 26, 1945, at the Salle Gaveau in Paris.

The 20 *Regards*—variously translated as contemplations, looks, gazes, glances, views, aspects—masterfully combine Messiaen’s seemingly eclectic interests. We find numerology and Roman Catholic symbolism; the musical representation of time and eternity; bird song, elevated for the first time to a soloistic role; pianistic representations of bells, tam-tams, drums, trombones and oboes; rhythmic puzzles and canons; and modes that evoke certain colors. He achieved a cohesive whole by employing several motto themes. The most important of these, the Theme of God (five chords emphasizing F-sharp major in a short–short–short–long–long rhythm), returns in various guises in at least seven of the *Regards* (Nos. 1, 5, 6, 10, 11, 15 and 20), symbolizing the constancy and all-embracing nature of the “supreme being.” Messiaen’s preface to the score (*see below*) reproduces the Theme of God and also the chromatic Theme of the Star and Cross and the Theme of Chords (a sequence of four chords in no particular rhythm). For utter clarity he labels them where they occur in the score, also noting the appearances of the exuberant, chordal Theme of Love (derived from the Theme of God) and the triumphant Theme of Joy.

Master of the slow tempo, Messiaen imposes such disciplined majesty, calm and stasis in the first five *Regards* that the outburst of speed and wild virtuosity in No. 6, *Par Lui tout a été fait*, makes a true “big bang” (Messiaen’s characterization) of the creation story. This great fugue—or “anti-fugue” as it has been deemed—is considered one of the greatest challenges in the piano repertoire, not only in

digital dexterity, but in the mental agility required to master the composer’s complex rhythmic and melodic patterns. These include what he called “*agrandissements asymétriques*” (asymmetrical enlargements), that is, in succeeding repetitions of a passage, the transposition of some notes upwards and or downwards by a half tone, while others remain unchanged. Fascinated also by rhythms that read the same backwards as forwards, Messiaen used such constructions which he called “non-retrogradable rhythms” here and elsewhere in the *Vingt regards*.

Other extroverted and virtuosic movements reflect Messiaen’s philosophy that religious music should not be insipid—No. 10, *Regard de l’esprit de joie*, with its ferocious energy and jazzy hunting horns; No. 12, *La parole toute puissante*, with its percussion imitations (tam-tam and drum); and No. 13, *Noël*, with its pealing bells. In No. 14, *Regard des anges*, Messiaen unleashes scintillating contrary motion and imitations of percussion, trombone and bird song. No. 16, *Regard des prophètes, des bergers, et des Mages*, is striking for its “exotic” and “reedy” evocations. No. 18, *Regard de l’Onction terrible*, presents a special challenge with its framing sections in which one hand speeds up while the other slows down. The ecstatic No. 20, *Regard de l’Église d’amour*, building toward its apothecic glorification of the Theme of God, stands as one of the most overwhelming utterances in the piano repertoire.

No less spellbinding are the slow movements, which require a different kind of virtuosity—the conclusion of No. 1, *Regard du Père*, for example, in which only supreme control can bring about the most gradual possible decrease in volume. No. 11,

Première communion de la Vierge, allows us to hear the heartbeats (very fast and low) of the unborn baby Jesus. The tender No. 15, *Le baiser de l’Enfant-Jésus*, transforms the Theme of God into a lullaby and ends with a lovely wash of sound representing the shadow of the child’s kiss. No. 17, *Regard du silence*, bathes the listener in a treble shimmer evoking a “rainbow in reverse.” The extremely slow and harmonically static framing sections of No. 19, *Je dors mais, mon coeur veille*, produce an extraordinary atmosphere of reverie. Naturally not all of the *Regards* maintain the same tempo throughout, nor is fast always loud and slow always soft. The moderate pace and only slightly changing motives of No. 3, *L’échange*, are intensified by a gradual progression from very soft (*pp*) to extremely loud (*ffff*). A remarkably fast but quiet *Regard* is No. 8, *Regard des hauteurs*, the point in the composer’s work in which specific birds become soloists for the first time.

Messiaen ordinarily spent as much time researching various theological, ornithological, or ancient Greek and Hindu sources as he spent composing the music itself. Because he wanted his performers and listeners to be precisely aware of his inspirations and how he constructed various passages, he wrote extensive program notes, which appear as prefaces to his scores or as liner notes for nearly every recording of his music that he supervised. We would be remiss not to provide his descriptions in full, which often take the form of suggestive phrases rather than complete sentences. The ellipses below are the composer’s and not signs of omission.

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Notes by the Composer: *Vingt regards*

Contemplation of the Infant-God of the manger and Gazes that fall on him: from the inexpressible Gaze of God the Father to the multiple Gaze of the Church of Love, passing through the extraordinary Gaze of the Spirit of Joy, through the very tender Gaze of the Virgin, then the Angels, the Wise Men, and the incorporeal or symbolic creatures (Time, the Heights, Silence, the Star and the Cross).

The Star and the Cross have the same theme because one opens and the other closes the earthly existence of Jesus. The Theme of God is found, of course, in the Gazes of the Father, of the Son, and of the Spirit of Joy, in *By Him All Has Been Made*, in the Kiss of the Infant Jesus; it is present in the First Communion of the Virgin (she carried Jesus within her); it is expanded in the Church of Love, which is the body of Christ. Not to mention the songs of the birds, bells, spirals, stalactites, galaxies, photons and the texts of Dom Columba Marmion, St. Thomas, St. Jean of the Cross, St. Theresa of Lisieux, the Gospels and the Missal that influenced me. A Theme of Chords circulates from one piece to another, split up or concentrated into a rainbow; also rhythmic canons, polymodalities, nonreversible rhythms amplified in both directions, note values progressively accelerated or slowed, asymmetric enlargements, changes of register, etc.—the writing for piano is very mannered: inverted arpeggios, resonances, diverse strokes—Dom Columba Marmion (*Le Christ dans ses mystères* [Christ in His mysteries]) and after him Maurice Toesca (*Les douze regards* [the 12 gazes]) spoke of the gazes of the shepherds, the angels, the Virgin, the heavenly Father; I have taken up the same idea, treating it a bit differently and adding 16 new gazes. More than in all my preceding works I have sought here a language of mystical love, at once varied, powerful, and tender, sometimes brutal, in multicolored arrangements.

Theme of God



Theme of the Star and Cross



Theme of Chords



1. *Regard du Père* [Gaze of the Father]. The statement of the Theme of God in its entirety. And God said: “This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased...”

2. *Regard de l'Étoile* [Gaze of the Star]. Theme of the Star and Cross. The impact of grace...the Star shines naively, surmounted by a cross...

3. *L'échange* [The Exchange]. Descent in a cascade, ascent in a spiral; terrible trading of the human-divine; God made man to make us gods...

God, this is the passage in alternate thirds: that which does not move, that which is very small. Mankind, these are the other fragments, which grow, grow and become enormous, according to a development procedure I call “asymmetrical enlargement.”

4. *Regard de la Vierge* [Gaze of the Virgin]. Innocence and tenderness...the woman of Purity, the woman of the Magnificat, the Virgin gazes at her child...

I wanted to express purity in music: there had to be a certain energy—and especially a great deal of innocence, of childlike tenderness.

5. *Regard du Fils sur le Fils* [Gaze of the Son upon the Son]. Mystery, rays of light in 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 in Jesus Christ...

This is, of course, the Son-Divine Word contemplating the Son-Child Jesus. Three sonorities, three modes, three rhythms, three superimposed musics. The Theme of God and rhythmic canon by the addition of the note value of a dot. Joy symbolized by the songs of birds.

6. *Par Lui tout a été fait* [By Him All Has Been Made]. Expansion of spaces and durations; galaxies, photons, reversed spirals, inverted thunderbolts; by “him” (the Word) all has been made... at one moment, the creation has opened for us the luminous shadow of his Voice...

It is a fugue. The subject is never presented the same way: from the second entry it is changed in rhythm and registers. Note the divertissement where the upper voice treats the subject in nonretrogradable rhythm taken out to the left and right, where the bass repeats *fortissimo* a fragment of the subject in asymmetrical enlargement. Middle [section] on very short and very long values (infinitely small and infinitely large). Reprise of the retrograded fugue, a “crab” canon [the second voice enters with the notes of the leading voice in reverse]. Mysterious *stretti* [layered entries]. The Theme of God *fortissimo*: victorious presence, the face of God behind the flame and the gushing out. The creation takes up and chants the Theme of God in a canon of chords.

7. *Regard de la Croix* [Gaze of the Cross]. Theme of the Star and Cross. The Cross says to him: you will be a priest in my arms...

8. *Regard des hauteurs* [Gaze of the Heights]. Glory in the heights...the heights descend to the manger like the song of a lark...

Songs of birds: nightingale, thrush, warbler, chaffinch, goldfinch, Cetti's warbler, canary and, above all, the lark.

9. *Regard du temps* [Gaze of Time]. Mystery of the plenitude of time; Time sees born inside itself one who is eternal...

Short, cold, strange theme like the egg-shaped heads of Chiroco; rhythmic canon.

10. *Regard de l'esprit de joie* [Gaze of the Spirit of Joy]. Vehement dance, drunken sound of horns, rapture of the Holy Spirit...the joy of the love of God happy in the soul of Jesus Christ...

I have always been very struck by the fact that God is happy—and that this ineffable and continuous joy lived in the soul of Christ. Joy is for me a rapture, a drunkenness in the *maddest* sense of the term.

Form: Eastern dance, in the lowest range, in unequal *neumes*, like a plainchant. First development of the Theme of Joy. Asymmetrical enlargement. A sort of hunting air in three variations. Second development of the Theme of Joy and Theme of God. Reprise of the eastern dance, shrillest and lowest ranges together. Coda on the Theme of Joy.

11. *Première communion de la Vierge* [First Communion of the Virgin]. A tableau in which the Virgin is shown kneeling, bowed down in the night—a luminous halo around her womb. Eyes closed, she adores the fruit hidden within her. This comes between the Annunciation and the Nativity: it is the first and greatest of all communions.

Theme of God, gentle scrolls, in stalactites, in an inner embrace. Recall of the theme of *La Vierge et l'Enfant* from my *Nativité* [*du Seigneur* for organ, 1935]. Magnificat more enthusiastic. Special chords and durations of two and two in which the weighty pulsations represent the heartbeats of the Infant in the breast of his mother. Disappearance of the Theme of God.

After the Annunciation, Mary adores Jesus within her...my God, my son, my Magnificat!—my love without the sound of words.

12. *La parole toute puissante* [The Omnipotent Word]. Monody with low percussion.

This child is the Word who bears up all things by the power of his utterance.

13. *Noël* [Christmas]. Carillon—the bells of Christmas say with us the sweet names of Jesus, Mary, Joseph...

14. *Regard des anges* [Gaze of the Angels]. Scintillation, percussion; powerful sound of immense trombones; your servants are the flames of fire—then the song of the birds who drink of the blue—and the amazement of the angels grows: for

it is not to them but to the human race that God is united...

In the first three strophes: blazing, rhythmic canon and fractioning of the Theme of Chords. Fourth strophe: songs of birds. Fifth strophe: the amazement of the angels grows.

15. *Le baiser de l'Enfant-Jésus* [The Kiss of the Infant Jesus]. At each communion, the child Jesus sleeps with us near the door; then he opens it onto the garden and runs into the light to embrace us...

Theme of God in a lullaby. Sleep—the garden—arms outstretched toward love—the kiss—the shadow of the kiss. An etching inspired me, representing the child Jesus leaving the arms of his mother to kiss little sister Theresa. All this is a symbol of communion, of divine love. One must love to love both this subject and this music, which would like to be as tender as the heart of the sky—and there is nothing else.

16. *Regard des prophètes, des bergers, et des Mages* [Gaze of the Prophets, Shepherds and Wise Men]. Exotic music—tam-tams and oboe, enigmatic and nasal concert...

17. *Regard du silence* [Gaze of Silence] Silence in the hand, reversed rainbow...each silence of the manger reveals music and colors that are the mysteries of Jesus Christ...

Polymodality, rhythmic canon by the addition of the note value of a dot, special chords, the Theme of Chords. The entire piece is highly figured like the piano writing. The ending: alternating chords, multicolored and impalpable music, in confetti, in light jewels, in colliding reflections.

18. *Regard de l'Onction terrible* [Gaze of the Awesome Unction; referring to Christ's coronation]. The Word assumes a definite human na-

ture, selection of the flesh of Jesus by the appalling Majesty...

An ancient tapestry represents the Word of God battling under the images of Christ on horseback: one sees only his two hands on the sheath of the sword, which he brandishes amid the lightning. This picture influenced me.

In the Introduction and the Coda, progressively slowing note values are superimposed on progressively accelerating values and the reverse.

19. *Je dors, mais mon coeur veille* [I Sleep, But My Heart Lies Awake]. Poem of love, dialogue of mystical love. Here *silences* play a major role.

It is not an angel's bow that smiles,—it is the sleeping Jesus who loves us on Sunday and who gives us oblivion...

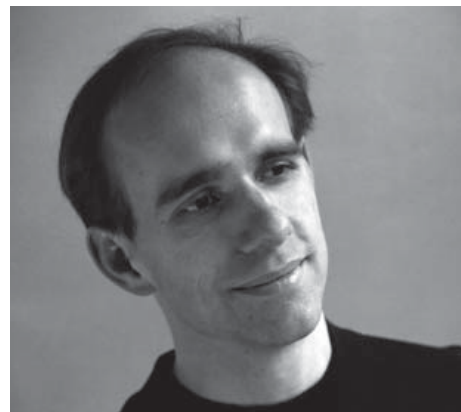
20. *Regard de l'Église d'amour* [Gaze of the Church of Love]. Grace of God compels us to love God as God loves himself; after the cascades of night, the spirals of agony, here are the bells, the glory and the kiss of love...all the passion of our arms around the Invisible...

Form (the development here precedes the exposition):

Development: First theme in nonretrogradable rhythm. Amplified to the left and right; it is interspersed with the strokes of the piano in contrary cascades. Three summons of the Theme of God separated by asymmetrical enlargements. Development of the third melodic theme. First theme with cascades, new asymmetrical enlargement. Pealing of bells forming a dominant pedal and recalling the chords of the preceding pieces.

Exposition: Complete phrase on the Theme of God, in fanfare, in glory. Long coda on the Theme of God—triumph of love and joy, tears of joy.

Olivier Messiaen



Among his generation of pianists, **Christopher Taylor** stands out as an innovative musician with a diverse array of talents and interests. During the past few years, he has appeared regularly in many important concert halls and developed a loyal following throughout the United States and abroad; critics hail him as “one of the most impressive young pianists on the horizon today” (*The Washington Post*) and “frighteningly talented” (*The New York Times*). He is known for a passionate advocacy of music written in the past 100 years—Messiaen, Ligeti and Bolcom figure prominently in his performances—but his repertoire spans four centuries and includes the complete Beethoven sonatas, the Liszt *Transcendental Etudes*, Bach's *Goldberg Variations* and a multitude of other familiar masterworks. Whatever the genre or era of the composition, Mr. Taylor brings to it an active imagination and intellect coupled with heartfelt intensity and grace.

In recent seasons Mr. Taylor has concertized around the globe, performing throughout Europe, Asia, and the Caribbean. At home in the United States, he has appeared with such orchestras as the New York Philharmonic, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Detroit Symphony, St. Louis Symphony, Atlanta Symphony, Houston Symphony and Boston Pops, and has toured with the Polish Chamber Philharmonic. As a soloist, he has performed in New York's Carnegie and Alice Tully halls, Washington's Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, the Ravinia and Aspen festivals and dozens of other venues. In chamber

settings, he has collaborated with many eminent musicians, including Robert McDuffie, Robert Mann, and the Borromeo, Shanghai, Pro Arte and Ying quartets. His recordings have featured works by Liszt, Messiaen and present-day American composers William Bolcom and Derek Bermel. Apart from concertizing and recording, he has undertaken various unusual projects. Recent examples include: the commission and premiere of a piano concerto by Bermel with the Indianapolis Symphony, made possible by a Christel Award from the American Pianists' Association; investigations into the compositions of the legendary pianist Gunnar Johansen; performances and lectures on the complete etudes of György Ligeti; and a series of performances of the *Goldberg Variations* on the unique double-manual Steinway piano in the collection of the University of Wisconsin, an instrument whose rediscovery and refurbishment he has actively promoted.

Numerous awards have confirmed Mr. Taylor's high standing in the musical world. He was named an American Pianists' Association Fellow for 2000, before which he received an Avery Fisher Career Grant in 1996 and the Bronze Medal in the 1993 Van Cliburn International Piano Competition, where he was the first American to receive such high recognition in 12 years. In 1990, he took first prize in the William Kapell International Piano Competition, and also became one of the first recipients of the Irving Gilmore Young Artists' Award.

Mr. Taylor owes much of his success to several outstanding teachers, including Russell Sherman, Maria Curcio-Diamand, Francisco Aybar and Julie Bees. In addition to his busy concert schedule, he currently serves as Paul Collins Associate Professor of Piano Performance at the University of Wisconsin in Madison. He pursues a variety of other interests, including mathematics (he received a *summa cum laude* degree from Harvard University in this field in 1992), philosophy (an article he co-authored with the leading scholar Daniel Dennett appears in the *Oxford Free Will Handbook*), computing (one project being to create a compiler for a new programming language), linguistics and biking, which is his primary means of commuting. Mr. Taylor lives in Middleton, Wisconsin, with his wife and two daughters.