

MUSICAL PRAYER

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L'Ascension — The Ascension of our Lord

Quatre Méditations symphoniques – Four symphonic meditations

by

Olivier Messiaen

1908-1992

I

Majesté du Christ demandant sa gloire à son Père

Majesty of Christ praying that his Father should glorify Him

Père, l'heure est venue, glorifie ton Fils, afin que ton Fils te glorifie.

Father, the hour has come. Give glory to your son, so that your son may glorify you.

John 17:1

The exaltation of Christ, begun on the cross and continued through the Resurrection, is not complete until the day of the Ascension. This glory, which Christ prays for in his priestly prayer at the end of his address at the Last Supper, has already been obtained, through the union of humanity and deity in the unique person of Christ. – Olivier Messiaen

II

Alléluias sereins d'une âme qui désire le ciel
Serene alleluias from a soul longing for heaven

Nous vous en supplions, ô Dieu,... faites que nous habitons aux cieus en esprit.
We beseech thee, almighty God, that we may in mind dwell in Heaven.
Mass for Ascension Day

To dwell in heaven in spirit, that is the appropriate prayer of this festival. Contemplative style. Refrain-Couplets form. The couplets blend the supple swirls of neume-like passages, as in plainsong, with embellishments of a pastoral character. Each presentation of the refrain is a new variation. In the second presentation: refrain on a solo Cornet with Quintaton 16', accompanied by a higher ostinato in the 3rd "mode of limited transpositions" on a Flûte 4', Octavin 2', and Cymbale. – Olivier Messiaen

III

Transports de joie d'une âme devant la gloire du Christ qui est la sienne
Outburst of joy from a soul before the Glory of Christ which is its own glory

Rendons grâces à Dieu le Père, qui nos a rendus dignes d'avoir part à l'héritage des Saints dans la lumière,...
nous a ressuscités et fait asseoir dans les cieus, en Jésus Christ.
Giving thanks to the Father, who has made you fit to share in the inheritance of the holy ones in light...
He raised us up with him, and seated us with him in the heavens in Christ Jesus.
Colossians 1:12; Ephesians 2:6

The Resurrection and the Ascension of Christ are the prelude to our entry into heaven. This truth fills us with joy – joy which expresses itself in a new Alleluia, less inward, more exuberant than that of the preceding piece – and it joins all the brilliances of the full organ. – Olivier Messiaen

IV

Père du Christ montant vers son Père
Prayer from Christ ascending towards His Father

Père,... j'ai manifesté ton nom aux hommes... Voilà que je ne suis plus dans le monde;
mais eux sont dans le monde, et moi je vois à toi.
*I revealed your name to those whom you gave me out of the world. And now I will no longer be in the world,
but they are in the world, while I am coming to you.*
John 17:6, 11

It is in the cenacle [the upper room in which the Last Supper was shared], and in advance, that Christ pronounced these words, thus abolishing the idea of time and place. They were said again at the same moment of the Ascension, and summarize all the solemnity of this departure from earth for an elevation which infinitely exceeds the celestial orders. – Olivier Messiaen

Olivier Messiaen composed the first version of *L'Ascension* for orchestra in 1933; in 1934 he transcribed the work for organ, keeping three of the four original pieces and writing a new third movement. The work was an important step in the development of Messiaen's distinctive musical voice, including extensive use of the "modes of limited transposition," scales developed by Messiaen as a highly individual resource for both melodic and harmonic material. The composer gave the first performance of the organ version on January 29, 1935 in a recital at the Church of Saint-Antoine-des-Quinze-Vingts, near the Gare de Lyon; eleven days later, the original orchestral version was premiered to great acclaim. Messiaen gave a second performance of the organ version on May 28, 1935, at the inauguration of the newly-reconstructed organ at the Church of the Trinity (*La Trinité*), where Messiaen had been appointed Titular Organist in 1931, and would continue to serve until his death sixty-one years later.

JOSEPH ADAM was first appointed Cathedral Organist at St. James Cathedral in 1993, and was named Director of Music in 2018. There he leads a program that includes three adult choirs and three youth choirs that provides music for nearly 600 services annually, as well as an extensive concert series that presents a wide range of choral and organ programs.

A dedicated educator, for twenty years he taught organ and harpsichord as a faculty member at the University of Puget Sound in Tacoma. Continuing this work, he was named Artist in Residence in Organ at the University of Washington School of Music for the 2019-2020 academic year. As Resident Organist of the Seattle Symphony Orchestra since 2003, he performs regularly as a member of the keyboard section of the orchestra, undertaking organ, harpsichord, piano and celesta parts, as well as frequent solo recitals.

His playing received international attention when he was awarded the First Prize in the St. Albans International Organ Competition in 1991, one of the most prestigious organ competitions in the world. His subsequent performances have included recitals in notable venues throughout Europe and America. During the coming year, he will be a part of a series of recitals at St. James Cathedral that will present performances of the complete organ works of Louis Vierne in celebration of the 150th anniversary of the composer's birth. His performances this season include recitals at St. Mark's Cathedral in Seattle, St. Cecilia Cathedral in Omaha, and Stanford University. He recently gave performances of the Poulenc Concerto and Respighi Suite for Organ and Strings with the North Carolina Symphony at the new Cathedral of the Holy Name of Jesus in Raleigh.

Joseph Adam was educated at The University of Iowa, the Eastman School of Music, and the University of Washington, and concertizes as a member of the Windwerk Artists cooperative.