

PROGRAM

SONATA FOR PIANO..... ELLIOTT CARTER (b. 1908)

- I. *Maestoso-Legato Scorrevole*
- II. *Andante-Allegro giusto*

Lee Hancock, *piano*

ESPRIT RUDE/ESPRIT DOUX..... ELLIOTT CARTER

Zhao Chen, *flute* / Cindy Chou, *clarinet*

VINGT REGARDS SUR L'ENFANT JÉSUS..... OLIVIER MESSIAEN (1908-1992)

- No. 1. *Regard du Père*
- No. 6. *Par lui tout a été fait*

Alastair Edmonstone, *piano*

— INTERMISSION —

EIGHT PIECES FOR FOUR TIMPANI..... ELLIOTT CARTER

- No. IV. *Recitative*
- No. V. *Improvisation*
- No. VIII. *March*

Chris Lennard, *timpani*

OISEAUX EXOTIQUES ..... OLIVIER MESSIAEN

Cristina Valdès, *piano solo*

Chung-Lin Lee, *piccolo*

Jessica Polin, *flute*

Chris Aagard, *oboe*

Kent Alstyne, *E<sup>b</sup> clarinet*

Cindy Chou / Evan Yount, *B<sup>b</sup> clarinet*

Yong Kim, *bass clarinet*

Kirsten Alfredsen, *bassoon*

Josiah Boothby / Kenji Ulmer, *horn*

Toby Penk, *trumpet*

Chris Lennard, *glockenspiel*

Chia-Hao Hsieh, *xylophone*

Eric Remme / Ben Krabill / Billy Fidler, *percussion*

Alastair Edmonstone, *piano*

Julia Tai, *conductor*

The two composers whose hundredth birthdays will be celebrated next month, one day apart—Olivier Messiaen on December 10, Elliott Carter on December 11—are as convincing a testament as could be imagined to the diversity of Western music over the past century. Although one was French and the other, thanks to the French governess employed by his parents when he was a baby, probably spoke his first words in French, not English (and later studied with a noted French pedagogue, in France, for three years), the similarities pretty much end right there. One might say that they are typical 20<sup>th</sup>-century composers in their very individuality: Messiaen, a devout Catholic with decidedly mystical tendencies, who developed his highly personal compositional style out of such elements as rhythmic patterns from ancient Indian music theory, exotic scales, synaesthetically stimulated color harmonies, and birdsong; Carter, who wrote in a Coplandesque neoclassical style until his forties, when his modernist sensibilities came to the fore and set him on the path he has famously followed since then, writing in a highly intricate, firmly non-tonal idiom that, as he has continued to compose into his eighties and nineties, has become ever sparer and more luminously transparent.

Tonight's program draws upon Messiaen's and Carter's output from several decades, with a notable emphasis upon their earlier music. From the 1940s, we will hear two of their mighty contributions to the piano repertoire.

Messiaen's *Vingt Regards sur l'Enfant-Jésus* (1944) is one of his many titles that resists graceful translation into English. It might be rendered as "Twenty Gazes upon the Baby Jesus": slightly awkward, but accurately conveying the sense of focus as much on the act of looking as on the one being looked at. Up until the early 1940s, Messiaen had written mainly for the organ, his own instrument, not the piano—but meeting Yvonne Loriod as a student in his analysis class at the Paris Conservatory changed all that. Messiaen quickly became aware of her extraordinary abilities and, as it turned out, extraordinary aptitude for his music, and set about composing music for her—something that he continued to do for the rest of his life (Loriod became Messiaen's second wife in 1961). A complete performance of the *Vingt Regards*, one of the earliest results of this musical partnership, lasts two hours and is an evening's program in itself; tonight it is represented by just two movements, the first and the sixth. "Regard du Père" (Gaze of God the Father) is much the shorter of the two, very quiet at a dynamic of *ppp* almost all the way through, but also of ecstatic expansiveness. It an exposition of the God Theme, a series of five chords that will recur periodically throughout the rest of the work. In the score, Messiaen places the following text immediately below the movement title: "And God says: 'This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.'" By contrast, "Par Lui tout a été fait" (By Him all things were made: a phrase taken from the Apostles' Creed) is one of the longest of the twenty and in vigorous, restless motion from beginning to end. Messiaen supplies a rather technical note, pointing out that this movement is a fugue in which "the subject is never presented twice in the same manner: from the second entry it is altered in rhythm and register" and noting that this subject will later undergo various other metamorphoses: erasure, fragmentation, asymmetric enlargement, retrogradation, three-part canon, a "mysterious" stretto—and, finally, juxtaposition with the God Theme and the Love Theme. (Note to Messiaen enthusiasts: Mr. Edmonstone will play the complete *Vingt Regards* on Messiaen's 100<sup>th</sup> birthday, Wednesday, December 10, in Brechemin Auditorium.)

In one sense, the tonal language of Carter's Piano Sonata (1946) places it squarely within the American neoclassical tradition, with more than a passing resemblance to the style of Aaron Copland. But this work is also something of a watershed for Carter, where the first signs emerge of the coming development of his compositional approach in radical departure from neoclassicism. One telling feature is displayed in the opening pages of the Sonata, where very slow music is suddenly succeeded by

very fast music—not only with no transition from one to the other, but with only the briefest of linking gestures having been expressed between them. This alternation eventually gives way to a third type of music, quite different from either of the first two and about halfway between them in terms of its velocity. Not really quite themes, they might more appropriately be called musical *characters*, as Carter himself would later on. Juxtapositions of this kind, where different musical characters move as if in different worlds of time, would become a hallmark of Carter's style from the 1950s on, when these time-worlds begin to be expressed simultaneously as much as in succession. In the first movement of the Sonata, the three characters, once introduced, continue to reappear recognizably (with some alterations, and with the faster music dominating the scene) throughout. The second movement falls into three large sections. Each of the two outer sections is itself three-part on a smaller scale, with music in slowly moving chords framing a contrasting, fantasy-like middle section in both cases. The large middle section of the whole movement is of markedly different character, a kind of fugue (very different from Messiaen's in "Par Lui tout a été fait"!) worked out at considerable length.

Of the two shorter works by Carter on this program, one, in its original form, was written only four years later than the Piano Sonata—but, situated as it is during Carter's very short transitional period to his new style, it is already quite distant from the old one. As Carter has recounted:

The timpani pieces have a rather complicated history. I wrote six of them [in 1950] as metric modulation exercises. For simplicity's sake I used the four timpani to present some short ideas of how to change from one speed to another, which I was later to use in the First Quartet. I showed them to various timpani players here [in New York], and they didn't like them much, but they played one or two of them anyhow. Then I showed them to Paul Price, who taught timpani at the Juilliard School. He played two of them, I think, fairly frequently, and I had those printed. Nobody liked the other ones, and I didn't think much of them as performance pieces myself. But Price had copies of all of them, and bit by bit he was feeding them to his students, who were learning them. So at a certain point I decided to improve the performance effectiveness of all the pieces—published and unpublished both... I was up at SUNY/Buffalo one year [1966], and got to know the excellent percussionist Jan Williams. I said to him, "You know, maybe we could find a way of making these

sound a little more interesting,” and he helped me to improve them a lot. They’re substantially the same pieces, but they sound better because there’s more variety of attack and color

The improved versions were finally published in 1968, together with two additional, newly composed pieces, as *Eight Pieces for Four Timpani*. The three to be heard tonight were among the original six. *Recitative*, one of the slow movements in the set, interweaves development of three independent ideas: one based on tremolo, another in a kind of bolero rhythm, and a third in an irregular pulsation that initially grows out of the tremolo. As the piece progresses, the tremolo becomes dominant for a while, then merges with the bolero; and other, momentary interrelations are also expressed. Finally, the first two ideas break into fragments and disappear, leaving the irregular pulsation to end the piece. *Improvisation* is a tour de force of interlocking tempo relations, cutting back and forth between figures that are speeding up and slowing down. With six distinct, coordinated tempos, an illusion of improvised speed change is created even though the actual framework is tightly controlled. The timpani are tuned in a widely spaced configuration to promote considerable contrast in sound. The *March* is actually two marches in one, which the listener can try to keep track of, at least, by taking note of the performer’s playing technique: the heads of the sticks are used for one of the marches, the ends or butts for the other, at a different tempo from that of the first. This can certainly be heard as a tribute to Charles Ives, whom Carter knew as an adolescent: Ives reveled in the sound of two bands playing different music at different speeds at the same time—the sort of thing one hears in real life at any parade—and often incorporated it into his own pieces.

*esprit rude / esprit doux* (1985), the most recent work on tonight’s program, was written as a 60<sup>th</sup>-birthday present for Pierre Boulez. The title, as David Schiff remarks, “is something of an in-joke between two classically educated composers.” Carter’s prefatory note to the score explains that it refers to the rough-breathing / smooth-breathing dualism of classical Greek pronunciation. The words transliterated as *hexèkoston etos*, for instance, illustrate this dualism (specifically in the initial epsilon [e] of each: the first is rough, the second smooth): words that just happen to mean “sixtieth year.” Finally, the label on this present, as it were, is the motto that opens and closes the piece: four notes, B flat–C–A–E, derived from the letters B(flat) U(t) L(a) E of the name “Boulez.” Actually listening to the piece will give a much more immediate idea of the musical implications drawn by Carter from “rough breathing /

smooth breathing,” for each of the two instruments partakes of both, setting up contrasts between different kinds of tonguing and different kinds of sustained or connected playing, both in itself and in opposition to (and sometimes in agreement with) the other.

Messiaen’s *Oiseaux exotiques* (Exotic Birds, 1956), for piano with small wind orchestra and metallic percussion, was also written for Yvonne Loriod and belongs to the period of his first and most intense involvement with birdsong as compositional material. This work marks his first foray into the use of birdsong from countries other than his own: hence “exotiques,” which simply means “not from France”: the birds “quoted,” as it were, in this score include such species as the robin and the prairie chicken, which Americans would probably not think of as particularly exotic. Messiaen gathered birdsong in two ways: one, famously, by going out into the fields and woods with music tablet and pencil and transcribing on location; the other, less well known, by transcribing from recordings. Most if not all of the songs of species represented in *Oiseaux exotiques* seem to have been acquired the second way, since this piece was composed before Messiaen had yet had occasion to travel extensively. Of course, the songs can’t really be *quoted*, exactly: they are treated more as raw material, transposed from their original registers (usually down several octaves), adjusted to the tempered chromatic scale of Western music, and (often) fitted out with harmonies that “color” the song in ways that may reflect the environment which the bird inhabits, the time of day at which it sings that particular song, and so forth. Rhythmic patterns are often slightly adjusted as well, although they usually remain quite faithfully intricate. The form of the piece falls into several distinct sections of widely varying length, executing an approximately palindromic arc: in the opening several minutes, ensemble passages of various distinctive characters alternate, blocklike, with solo piano passages; then, standing at the center of the work, comes a long, through-composed tutti section, which could be subtitled “the mad aviary” for its riotous juxtaposition of birdsongs that would never be heard together in any one place in the world: species from India, China, Malaysia, and both North and South America. In the final several minutes, the ensemble/solo/ensemble...pattern of the beginning is recapitulated, mainly in reverse order but with some recomposition: sometimes the resemblance to the corresponding section in the opening is quite strong, sometimes not.

[—Jonathan Bernard]

## 2008-2009 UPCOMING EVENTS

*Information for events listed below is available at [www.music.washington.edu](http://www.music.washington.edu) and the School of Music Events Hotline (206-685-8384).*

*Tickets for events listed in Brechemin Auditorium (Music Building) and Walker-Ames Room (Kane Hall) go on sale at the door thirty minutes before the performance. Tickets for events in Meany Theater and Meany Studio Theater are available from the UW Arts Ticket Office, 206-543-4880, and at the box office thirty minutes before the performance.*

*To request disability accommodation, contact the Disability Services Office at least ten days in advance at 206-543-6450 (voice); 206-543-6452 (TTY); 685-7264 (FAX); or [dso@u.washington.edu](mailto:dso@u.washington.edu) (E-mail).*

- November 19, Jazz Innovations I. 7:30pm, Brechemin Auditorium.  
November 20, Jazz Innovations II. 7:30pm, Brechemin Auditorium.  
November 24, Voice Division Recital. 7:30pm, Brechemin Auditorium.  
November 25, University Chorale and Chamber Singers. 7:30pm, Meany Theater.  
December 1, Percussion Ensemble: "The Beat Goes On." 7:30pm, Meany Studio Theater.  
December 2, CarolFest. 7:30pm, Meany Theater.  
December 3, Studio Jazz Ensemble. 7:30pm, Meany Theater.  
December 4, Brechemin Piano Series. 7:30pm, Brechemin Auditorium.  
December 4, Wind Ensemble, Concert & Campus Bands: "Passages." 7:30pm, Meany Theater.  
December 4, Opera Workshop. 7:30pm, Meany Studio Theater.  
December 5, University Symphony. 7:30pm, Meany Theater.  
December 5, Composers' Workshop. 7:30pm, Brechemin Auditorium.  
December 6, Vocal Jazz Part I. 7:30pm, Brechemin Auditorium.  
December 7, Barry Lieberman & Friends with guests Julian Schwarz and Rie Ando. 2:00pm, Brechemin Auditorium.  
December 7, Littlefield Organ Series with guest Dana Robinson. 3:00pm, Walker-Ames Room.  
January 11, Littlefield Organ Series with guests Alison Luedecke and Susan Barrett. 3:00pm, Walker-Ames Room.  
January 16, JACK Quartet. 7:30pm, Brechemin Auditorium.  
January 20, Faculty Recital: Donna Shin, flute, and guest Alexandra Nguyen. 7:30pm, Meany Theater.  
January 21, Barry Lieberman & Friends with guests Scott Pingel and Rie Ando. 1:30pm, Brechemin Auditorium.  
January 29, University Symphony. 7:30pm, Meany Theater.  
January 31, Guest Recital: Wendy Yamashita, piano. 5:00pm, Brechemin Auditorium.  
February 6, Guitar Ensemble. 7:30pm, Brechemin Auditorium.  
February 7, Guest Master Class: Donovan Stokes, double bass. 2:00pm, Brechemin Auditorium.

*presents the*

# CONTEMPORARY GROUP

*In a Centenary Celebration for*

ELLIOTT CARTER

*and*

OLIVIER MESSIAEN

7:30 PM  
November 17, 2008  
MEANY THEATER