

ANNE PAGE

Anne Page began her career as an organist in her native Australia. Following advanced studies in Paris with Marie-Claire Alain, and with Peter Hurford in England, she gave her London debut in 1988 at the Royal Festival Hall. Now based in Cambridge, Anne Page directed the Cambridge Summer Recitals for eight years, during which time the series grew to international status. An enthusiast for early music, she performs regularly on historic instruments in the Netherlands and Belgium and has studied early performance practice with Jacques van Oortmerssen. She is also committed to music by living composers, commissioning and recording new works. Acknowledged as one of the country's leading exponents of the art harmonium, she performs with leading orchestras and has appeared at the Edinburgh Festival, the Three Choirs Festival and the Proms.

with the fortissimo of the organ, and luminous chords shining with all the colours of the rainbow."

11 *The Apparition of the Risen Christ to Mary Magdalene*

This dramatic descriptive scena is the centrepiece and crowning glory of the *Livre*. It is impossible to improve on Messiaen's own description, which is based on the narrative in St John's Gospel: "The night is drawing to an end; it is still dark, and day has not yet come. Confused ascending chromatic counterpoints describe this moment. Mary Magdalene, in tears near the tomb, returns and sees Jesus, but does not recognise him. Jesus says to her, 'Mary!' Solemn, mysterious chords symbolise the appearance of the risen Lord and his gentle voice, which seems to come from another world. A long crescendo follows. Mary looks, but does not understand. Wide-eyed, staring, she hesitates, and suddenly, seized by wild joy, she recognises him! Chords of contracted resonance in transposed inversions. She kneels before him. The voice continues. To the mysterious chords is added the cry of pain heard in the Crucifixion, for the glorious body of Jesus still bears the marks of his wounds. Then comes the mission: 'Go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father...' Themes of the Son and the Father (accompanied by the song of a bird from Iran and Northern Palestine, the white-throated robin). It is the revelation of the Resurrection and the Ascension: this is why a musical alphabet spells out fortissimo the word *apocalypse* (Revelation). The night comes to an end, and the chromatic counterpoints from the beginning return in descending motion. Reprise of the solemn, mysterious chords pianissimo. In the pale dawn, the apparition vanishes..."

12 *The Transubstantiation*

'Yea, beneath these signs are hidden
Glorious things to sight forbidden:
Look not on the outward sign.' (*Lauda Sion*)
"We leave the chronological order of events in the life of Christ, and move into the church of the present day, to pray to him in the Blessed Sacrament. In theology, the term 'transubstantiation' is used to describe the change in the substance of the bread and wine into that of the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharist. A 'mode' of note-values, pitches and timbres attempts to convey this mystery. Two Israeli birds, the common garden bulbul and the laughing dove, are superimposed on a theme of plainsong, the Communion of Corpus Christi." The initial exposition of these elements is followed by their reprise and development, and an exquisite pianissimo conclusion.

13 *The Two Walls of Water*

'The waters were divided. And the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea upon the dry ground; and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand and on their left.' (Exodus)
'Wine is poured and bread is broken,
But in either sacred token
Christ is here by power divine.
Whoso of this food partaketh
Rendeth not the Lord nor breaketh:
Christ is whole to all that taste.' (*Lauda Sion*)
"The author has drawn a parallel between the presence of God in the sea that divided into two walls of water at the crossing of the Red Sea, and the real presence of Jesus Christ in the two fragments of the broken host. The piece is a fortissimo for the tutti, alternating a vigorous toccata with the song of the melodious warbler. In the middle, wrenched arpeggios in contrary motion represent the

standing waves. Reprise of the toccata. Song of the Egyptian great reed warbler and fortissimo conclusion superimposing complementary colours: acid green on brownish red, yellow on violet."

14 *Prayer before Communion*

'Lord, I am not worthy to receive you... but speak the word...' (Matthew 8)

The two Communion prayers recapture all the sweetness of Messiaen's earlier Eucharist music, from *Le Banquet céleste* onwards. He described this first prayer as 'an act of humility'; themes of unaccompanied plainsong, including a final appearance of his favourite 'Alleluia de la Dédicace' (compare the *Verset* and *Méditations sur le mystère de la Sainte Trinité*), *Lauda Sion* and the 'Gradual' of Epiphany, alternate with serene passages of soft sustained chords.

15 *The Joy of Grace*

'I come to you, Lord, to taste the joy of the sacred banquet which you have prepared for the poor. He who loves, runs, flies! He is full of joy, he is free...' (St Thomas Aquinas)
For Messiaen the birds were always the supreme symbols of joy, and here he illustrates the joy of divine love with a final symphony of birdsong; the birds are the common garden bulbul, Tristram's grackle and the white-throated robin, and their songs ring out high in the treble register, unfettered by any bass notes or lower-pitched stops.

16 *Prayer after Communion*

'My perfume and my sweetness, my peace and my delight...' (St Bonaventure)

Expanding on the colours and textures of the second piece, 'The Source of Life', this exquisite prayer is inspired by the ecstatic words of St Bonaventure, whose essence is perfectly captured in music of utter and disarming simplicity.

17 *The Multiple Presence*

'Thousands are, as one, receivers,
One, as thousands of believers,
Takes the food that cannot waste.' (*Lauda Sion*)
Employing a complex web of multiple canons and Greek rhythms, a short outburst for the tutti boldly declaims the mystery of the Multiple Presence: "Jesus Christ is present in all the consecrated hosts of the world, in all times and places."

18 *Offering and Final Alleluia*

'I offer to you, Lord, all the transports of love and joy, the ecstasies, raptures, revelations and heavenly visions of all the holy saints...' (St Thomas Aquinas)
This final movement brings the *Livre du Saint Sacrement* to a dazzling conclusion. The opening 'Offering' takes the form of a rhapsodic unaccompanied solo for the Cornet in plainsong style, and this is followed by the 'Final Alleluia' illustrating the 'joy of the saints' – ecstatic fanfares and answering motifs on the pedals (recalling the 'Transports de joie' of fifty years earlier), tumultuous cascades of chords, and exultant arabesques inspired by the style of plainsong alleluias. Finally the word *joy* (la joie) – a word that was central to all Messiaen's beliefs both as man and artist – is triumphantly declaimed in the musical alphabet, and the hammered chords of the final bars resolve, in the most emphatic manner imaginable, onto a single pedal note – the bottom C of the pedalboard, sounding all the largest and most resonant pipes of the instrument. ■ **David Gammie**



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