

Massachusetts Institute of Technology

KRESGE AUDITORIUM

Holtkamp Organ

A RECITAL

by

MARILYN MASON

December 11, 1968

8:30 P. M.

I

Le Clerc

Magnificate du 8. em ton en sol Majeur (c. 1790)

Plein Jeu

Duo

Jeu de Clairon

Flutte

Musette

Grand Jeu

(First performance in modern times, edited by Marilyn Mason)

II

Dandrieu

Two Nöels

Nöel de Saintonge

Une Bergere Jolie

III

J. S. Bach

Canonic Variations on the Christmas

Chorale: "*Vom Himmel hoch.*"

Var. 1 Canon at the Octave

Var. 2 Canon at the Fifth

Var. 3 Canon at the Seventh

Var. 4 Canon at the Octave, by augmentation

Var. 5 All the other sorts of Canon:

At the Sixth

At the Third

At the Second

At the Ninth

The mature Bach does not seem to have been very interested in writing Variations, although when asked to do so (for Goldberg) he produced the finest set of all time. The Canonic Variations for organ was one of the very few works published in Bach's lifetime, in 1747, three years before his death. One has to speculate as to why the work is such a technical *tour de force*, when throughout his life he drew on his unlimited virtuosity only when it served his purely musical aims. Was he trying to prove something? Did his publisher demand a show of technical fireworks?

Perhaps he was just making the writing of Variations a little more interesting for himself; the Goldberg set includes nine canonic variations along with many other deliberately self-imposed styles.

What is a canon, and what is so clever about it? It's hard to describe a canon without using technical language, but it is a particular sort of melody that can be played with itself after a short interval of time (wherever it fits) and at any interval of pitch (also wherever it fits). A tune starts and, a moment or so later, the same tune joins it, starting on the same note, or its octave, or a fifth or a third or whatever interval from the leading tune will "work out." There really isn't anything especially clever about writing canons; most students of counterpoint can easily learn to write canons in a dull sort of way. But it takes a genius to write canonic melodies that are attractive and memorable.

The five Variations exhibit canonic treatment at all the possible intervals. Variation 4 shows an intellectual canon that is hard to hear, for the following voice (the bass of the accompaniment) is the same tune as the leading voice (the florid right hand melody) but in notes twice as long. In this variation it is probably better to forget about canons and just enjoy Bach's wonderful *arabesque* melody. The final variation crushes in all the other canonic possibilities, as if to save time. In the final bars scarcely a note is not derived from some phrase of the "*Von Himmel hoch*" melody on which the whole work is based. And indeed, perhaps the greatest joy to the listener is the way Bach slips in this simple and cheerful Christmas tune whenever the moment seems right. It's a pity the tune is not as well known to us as it was to Bach's contemporaries.

INTERMISSION

Music by Contemporary Composers

IV

John Cook Flourish and Fugue

This piece was commissioned by Marilyn Mason, and dedicated to her, in 1959. It was specifically designed for performance at a recital in the Cathedral of Saint John the Divine, in New York City, where the large Aeolian Skinner organ in the Chancel can be played antiphonally with the tremendous State Trumpet high up on the west wall of the Cathedral, more than 600 feet away—and in conditions of long reverberation! Such conditions do not exist in Kresge. Fanfares and Flourishes are the stock-in-trade of a composer who has spent so much time with the plays of Shakespeare, while Fugue is the familiar territory of the organist. This piece tries to combine both worlds, and surely the organ is the only instrument capable of such a synthesis.

V

Iain Hamilton "Threnos; 1966 — In Time of War"
Dawn
Holocaust
Elevation
Purgatory and Requiem

This work was commissioned by Marilyn Mason for her recital in Westminster Abbey (October 4, 1966) as part of the 900th Anniversary celebrations of the Abbey. The composer writes: "This is one of my war works, as you will see. I could be said to be obsessed by the tragedy of war. *Dawn* is the unearthly upbeat and waiting with flicks of equally unearthly jungle sounds. *Holocaust* is the sudden explosion of fire and hell. Three climaxes lead to the *Purgatorio* section, beginning with the Pedal cadenza, and so into the *Requiem*."

VI

Olivier Messiaen Verset pour la fete de la Dedicace (1960)

The use of Plainchant, bird-song, exotic rhythms and characteristic chromatic harmony are some of the hallmarks of Messiaen's style. This music was written for the Festival of the Dedication

of a church. It has a recurrent monodic theme which the composer calls, "Alleluia de la Dedicate." This alternates with sections on the upper reaches of the manuals, which are based on the song of the thrush. A combination of bird songs, Hindu rhythm and Catholic mysticism may be more than the general listener can cope with, but this is the stuff of which Messiaen's music is made.

VII

Anthon van der Horst

Etude de Concert, Opus 104 (1963)

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Marilyn Mason is Professor of Music and Chairman of the Organ Department at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. She has been guest professor at Columbia University, and at Union Theological Seminary, where she received the Doctor of Sacred Music degree in 1954. Dr. Mason was the first American woman to play in Westminster Abbey, where she gave a memorable recital for the International Congress of Organists in 1957. Subsequent tours of Europe have included two return engagements at the Abbey as well as appearances in Edinburgh, Hamburg, Berlin and Vienna. In 1960 she was the first woman organist to play in Latin America, giving four concerts at the Auditorio Nacional in Mexico City, and in 1963 she played in Spain at the International Congress of Organists. Because of her interest in contemporary music Dr. Mason has commissioned numerous composers to write for the organ and has given many premiere performances.

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The next Recital in this Series will be given by Piet Kee on Wednesday, January 29, 1969.