

**In Celebration of Twenty-Five Years at
Euclid Avenue Congregational Church**

of the United Church of Christ
Cleveland, Ohio
Sunday, November 2, 2008, 3:00 PM

Timothy Robson, organ

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| Apparition de l'Église Éternelle | Olivier Messiaen
(1908-1992) |
| Clavierübung, Part III: Kyrie, Gott Vater in Ewigkeit
(Canto fermo in Soprano à 2 Clav. et Ped. BWV 669) | Johann Sebastian Bach
(1685-1750) |
| Monodie (1963) | Messiaen |
| Clavierübung, Part III: Christe, aller Welt Trost
(Canto fermo in Tenore à 2 Clav. et Pedal BWV 670) | Bach |
| Livre d'Orgue: IV. Chants d'oiseaux
"Afternoon of the birds: blackbird, robin, song thrush—and nightingale at twilight ..."
(for Easter time) | Messiaen |
| Clavierübung, Part III: Kyrie, Gott heiliger Geist
(à 5, Canto fermo in Basso, Cum Organo pleno BWV 671) | Bach |

*(Note: the Messiaen and Bach works will be performed as a group. Please hold applause until the interval.
Applause is welcome in the second half of the program.)*

INTERVAL

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| Three Preludes for Organ Founded on Welsh Hymn Tunes
Bryn Calfaria
Rhosymedre
Hyfrydol | Ralph Vaughan Williams
(1872-1958) |
| Organ Partita: "Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme", op. 8, no. 2
I. Toccata
II. Bicinium
III. Fuge | Hugo Distler
(1908-1942) |

Ford Memorial Organ by Karl Wilhelm, 1981

*This recital is dedicated to the memory of Paul Jerabek, EACC music supporter extraordinaire,
whose record of 65 years in the choir will probably never be equalled.*

Please join us for a celebratory reception in the church parlor following the recital.



Timothy Robson has been Director of Music at Euclid Avenue Congregational Church of the United Church of Christ since November 1983, where he is organist, directs the Chancel Choir and oversees the music program of the church. Prior to coming to EACC he had served as interim organist/director at several churches and had been an active substitute in the Cleveland area. He had also served as organist and choirmaster at St. James Episcopal Church, in St. James, Long Island, New York in 1979/80. From 1993-1997 Timothy Robson was the Music Director of the North Coast Men's Chorus in Cleveland. Timothy Robson holds degrees in music from Drake University (Des Moines, Iowa) and Case Western Reserve University, as well as a degree in Library Science from CWRU. His principal teachers include Carl Staplin, Arthur Poister and Larry Smith (organ), C. David Harris (harpsichord), Kenneth Drake (piano) and Allen Lehl (choral conducting).

Although Timothy Robson performs many major works in the standard repertoire, he has been especially active in the area of new music, and he has performed world premieres of several works, including "Les carillons de la destinée et de l'éternité" for solo organ by Frank Ferko and "Lukasson Celebration" for English horn and organ by Lisa Rainsong, both of which were commissioned for him. For over twenty years Timothy Robson has performed in duo concerts with Cary Ebli, English hornist with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra.

In a parallel profession, Mr. Robson is Deputy Director of the Kelvin Smith Library at Case Western Reserve University, where he is responsible for the traditional technical services functions of cataloging, acquisitions, serials and preservation, as well as having oversight for the library's technology initiatives.

Notes on the Program

This is a recital that celebrates anniversaries: my twenty-five years at Euclid Avenue Congregational Church of the United Church of Christ, playing the extraordinary 1981 Karl Wilhelm organ, of which the church can be justly proud; but also the hundredth anniversary of the birth of two modern geniuses of church music, the French Catholic mystic Olivier Messiaen and the German Lutheran Hugo Distler. We also recognize the fiftieth anniversary of the death of the master of English music Ralph Vaughan Williams. Three of Messiaen's organ works are interspersed with three of the large chorale preludes of Johann Sebastian Bach's *Clavierübung, Part III*, perhaps Bach's greatest collection of organ works.

The contrast between Messiaen and Distler could not be more stark although the beginning outlines of the lives were similar: both were born in 1908; both suffered through the aftermath of World War I; both trained as church organists and took church positions early in their lives. Messiaen survived World War II (although held by the Germans as a prisoner of war for a time) and went on to a long lifetime of fame and a large catalogue of recognized musical masterpieces, virtually all in service of his devout Catholic faith. Distler—as a Lutheran musician in the Third Reich—was a victim of Nazi oppression who composed a small body of miniature works that are, undeservedly, not well known outside Germany, and who finally suffered a

nervous collapse leading to his suicide in 1942. But their works bear some striking similarities, especially in their use of rhythm and meter broken free from 19th-century musical tradition. Messiaen was influenced by Indian rhythms, musical modes (scales and harmonies) of his own invention, and, especially, bird songs which he collected and notated on musical staff paper during his travels around the world; Distler's influences were the music of Heinrich Schütz and other German Baroque (17th century) composers being rediscovered in the early decades of the twentieth century.



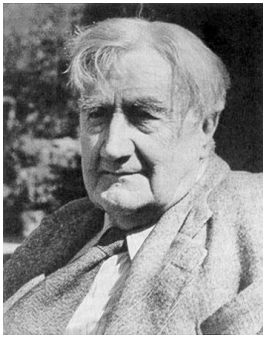
Messiaen notating birdsongs.

Writing in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, Paul Griffiths summarizes Olivier Messiaen's style: "To Messiaen no natural phenomenon was alien, whether a sound ... or something that could be represented by sound: not only birdsongs but the colours and shapes of landscapes. ... Unity of style had not been a consideration with him ... the strict and the free blithely coexist in flights of birdsongs through a monumental musical architecture. ... [This] is not music that moulds a line through time; ... Its disorder is ... not the kind of broken order by which a composer's will might be asserted; it is, rather, a disorder conveying the absence of will." The "Apparition of the Eternal Church" (1932) is monumental, and glacial in pace, with a pulsing pedal line and a huge crescendo to an ecstatic C major chord, then returning to the mystery from which it arose. It is eternal: it comes from nothing and returns there, with time being of

no consequence in between. As a church musician, most of Messiaen's organ works began as improvisations in service of the liturgy. In an interview with the French journalist Claude Samuel, Messiaen is asked if the priests at *La Trinité* in Paris (where Messiaen was organist for sixty years) were horrified by music as daring as that of *Livre d'orgue*. (*Organ Book*, 1951). Messiaen replied, "They weren't horrified because the truths I express, the truths of the Faith, are equally daring; they are fairy tales, in turn mysterious, harrowing, glorious, and sometimes terrifying, always rooted in a radiant, unchanging reality. Indeed, I'm necessarily a hundred thousand degrees shy of each truth. ... [But] the parishioners were [horrified] because they don't always know the texts." The "Birdsongs" movement of the *Livre d'orgue*, is organized into sections, each one of which begins with a "refrain" based on Indian rhythms, rearranged at each appearance of the refrain. The birds' songs themselves are separated by a musical "comma" played by a single pedal phrase. The nightingale closes the movement, as daylight fades to twilight. *Monodie*, as the name implies, has only one musical voice, using one of Messiaen's favorite organ registration combinations, the 16-foot Quintaton, combined with 4-foot, 2-foot, and 2 2/3-foot stops to create what he describes as a "poetic" sound. The work was written in 1963 but not published until 1997, after it was found among Messiaen's papers by his widow, the pianist (and Messiaen's muse) Yvonne Loriod. It again is a kind of "rondo" in which the opening theme appears several times, rhythmically modified, with notes stretched and diminished in duration. It is quite astonishing the sense of harmony that Messiaen generates from a single musical line; but time itself again is irrelevant!

In this program I decided to contrast Messiaen's mystical Catholicism with Johann Sebastian Bach's German Lutheranism in three of the chorale settings from his *Clavierübung* (*Keyboard Exercise*), Part III of 1739. This collection of organ pieces, some freely composed, some based on

chorales, with large-scale works for a church organ and small-scale ones for a domestic instrument. The pieces include the Prelude and Fugue in E-flat Major (the so-called "St. Anne" fugue), plus twenty-one chorale preludes, and four "duets" (short works in two voices). The chorale preludes are taken from the tunes associated with the Lutheran worship service; the *Clavierübung III* is sometimes known as the "Lutheran Organ Mass." The three preludes presented today are the confession: *Kyrie eleison—Christe eleison—Kyrie eleison* at the beginning of the Mass. They display Bach's mastery of counterpoint at his most intricate. The chorale tune is presented in the soprano voice in the first Kyrie; in the tenor voice of the Christe; and the closing Kyrie has four contrapuntal voices in the hands above the tune in very long note values in the pedal.



Ralph Vaughan Williams

Ralph Vaughan Williams composed his *Three Preludes Founded on Welsh Hymn Tunes* in 1920. They are his only significant works for solo organ, although he composed many choral works with organ accompaniment. The tunes are sung to texts found in most Protestant hymnals. The first and third preludes are bold; the second quiet and lyric.

Hugo Distler's organ partita on the Lutheran chorale tune "Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme" (generally translated as "Sleepers Wake, a Voice is Calling") was composed in 1934-35, while Distler was the organist of the Jakobikirche in Lübeck, Germany. After the Nazis came to power in 1933, Distler joined the National Socialist party hoping that Protestant church music would be given prominence in the Nazi regime, but he never composed any works of political interest to the Nazis, and soon was persecuted for his beliefs and his music. In 1938, it took the influence of a well-placed friend to avert Distler's music being denounced by the Nazis as "degenerate art." Becoming increasingly depressed from the death of friends, aerial attacks, job pressures, and the constant threat of conscription into the German army, he committed suicide in Berlin at the age of 34.



Hugo Distler

Distler's partita is in three movements (named after antique musical forms: toccata; bicinium (a two-voice piece); fugue). The rhythmic complexity rivals that of Messiaen's music; but—unlike Messiaen—the pulse is propulsive and vital; there is always a sense of forward movement. In the second "bicinium" movement, you hear the German equivalent of Messiaen's birdsongs, as Distler sound-paints the text of the second stanza of "Wachet auf": "Zion hears the watchman calling..."—the melody in long notes with a very highly ornamented counterpoint line above (or below) it. The final fugue begins traditionally, then becomes a toccata, and finally ends with brilliant fanfares announcing the coming of the Messiah. It is one of the tragedies of World War II that Distler did not survive; one can only guess at how his music would have evolved and influenced later musical generations.

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The floral arrangement on the reception table was given in honor of Timothy Robson by Arts in Ministry, a sub-group of the EACC Worship and Arts Ministry.