



THIBAUDET PLAYS TURANGALĪLA

WITH THE NASHVILLE SYMPHONY

CLASSICAL SERIES

FRIDAY & SATURDAY, MAY 17 & 18, AT 8 PM

NASHVILLE SYMPHONY

GIANCARLO GUERRERO, *conductor*

JEAN-YVES THIBAUDET, *piano*

CYNTHIA MILLAR, *ondes Martenot*

**Introduction to Messiaen's *Turangalila-Symphonie*
with musical demonstrations**

– INTERMISSION –

OLIVIER MESSIAEN

***Turangalila-Symphonie* for Piano,
Ondes Martenot and Orchestra**

Introduction: Modéré, un peu vif

Chant d'amour 1: Modéré, lourd

Turangalīla 1: Presque lent, rêveur

Chant d'amour 2: Bien modéré

Joie du sang des étoiles: Un peu vif, joyeux et passionné

Jardin du sommeil d'amour: Très modéré, très tendre

Turangalīla 2: Piano solo un peu vif: orchestre modéré

Développement de l'amour: Bien modéré

Turangalīla 3: Modéré

Final: Modéré, avec une grande joie

Jean-Yves Thibaudet, piano

Cynthia Millar, ondes Martenot

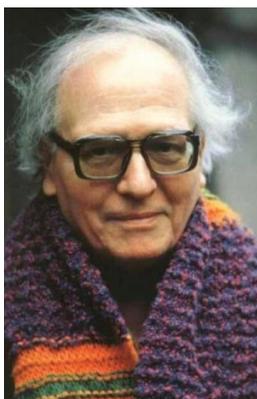
*This concert will last 2 hours and 20 minutes,
including a 20-minute intermission.*

OLIVIER MESSIAEN Turangalila-Symphonie

- French composer Messiaen occupies a singular role as a trailblazer for the avant-garde who was at the same time profoundly respectful of Western musical tradition. He created a wholly original body of work, of which *Turangalila-Symphonie* and *The Quartet for the End of Time* are his best-known compositions. The latter work was written while he was held in a German prisoner-of-war camp during World War II.
- Messiaen's influence has been profound, extending not only to his students Pierre Boulez and Karlheinz Stockhausen, who would go on to revolutionize modern music, but also to popular artists including Rufus Wainwright and Radiohead, whose music owes a particular debt to the composer.
- The composer's devout Catholicism was a defining feature of his creative output, which frequently explored spiritual themes and ventured into mystical territory. "The illumination of the theological truths of the Catholic faith is the first aspect of my work," Messiaen said, "the noblest and no doubt the most useful."
- He composed *Turangalila* in the years just after World War II on a commission from the Boston Symphony Orchestra. Leonard Bernstein conducted the premiere in 1949.
- Pianist Yvonne Loriod, who was a student of Messiaen's and would eventually become his second wife, played a key role in the creation of this piece. At the time, the composer was still married to his first wife, Claire Delbos, and was unable to fulfill his longing for Loriod. Music historians have observed that his preoccupation with the legend of Tristan and Isolde, two lovers trapped in an illicit romance, was a response to his own predicament.
- *Turangalila* belongs to a trilogy of compositions related to the legend that Messiaen wrote in the 1940s. Loriod performed as the piano soloist in the premiere and she served as his muse, inspiration and collaborator throughout his career.
- One especially notable feature of this piece is its inclusion of the ondes Martenot, an early electronic instrument that resembles a theremin but is controlled with a keyboard. The ondes Martenot is featured in several of Messiaen's works, as well as the Radiohead song "How to Disappear Completely," among others.
- Messiaen had a gift for synesthesia — the ability to perceive sounds as colors — and he also had a fascination with birdsong. Both of these qualities are a hallmark of his music and can be heard and experienced in *Turangalila*.



OLIVIER MESSIAEN



Born on December 10, 1908, in Avignon, France; died on April 27, 1992, in Paris

Composed: 1946-48

First performance:

December 2, 1949, with Leonard Bernstein conducting the Boston Symphony Orchestra

First Nashville Symphony performance:

October 22 & 23, 2004, with music director Kenneth Schermerhorn and piano soloist Mark Wait

Estimated length: 74 minutes

Turangalila-Symphonie

The *Turangalila-Symphonie*, Olivier Messiaen's masterpiece from the midpoint of the 20th century, is a multilayered, multicultural paean to love by one of the most original creative spirits of the tumultuous last century. The music of Messiaen can be by turns overwhelmingly complex and surprisingly accessible. It resists many of the assumptions used to assess Modernist composers. A trailblazer for the avant-garde yet profoundly respectful of Western musical tradition, Messiaen radiated an attitude of innocence and even naively childlike wonder toward the world, yet he busied himself with musical processes involving astonishing complexity. In the *Turangalila-Symphonie*, overwhelmingly direct and sweeping musical expression coexists with intricately mapped-out calculations.

After starting at the Paris Conservatoire at age 11 (just after World War I), Messiaen first developed an identity as a composer in Paris in the 1930s. He was captured by the Germans early in World War II and wrote his profoundly original *Quartet for the End of Time* while being held in a prisoner-of-war camp. After returning to Paris, he was appointed to a professorship at the Conservatoire, where he had a lasting influence by inspiring such figures as Pierre Boulez, one of his many distinguished students during a teaching career that lasted until 1978.

It was at the Conservatoire that Messiaen met Yvonne Loriod (1924-2010), who was initially his student and eventually became his second wife. A teacher, composer and pianist of extraordinary virtuosity, Loriod became her husband's principal interpreter of music for piano. Messiaen regarded this instrument as his favorite overall, much as bells were his favorite percussion instrument. Loriod

played a Muse-like role in other ways as well — as in the genesis of the *Turangalila-Symphonie*.

As a devout Catholic, Messiaen maintained a Platonic relationship with Loriod until after his first wife, Claire Delbos (a violinist and also a composer), passed away in 1959, following years of being institutionalized for mental illness. The *Turangalila-Symphonie* has been interpreted as channeling the composer's desire for Loriod during the years when she was off-limits because of his marriage to Delbos.

During this period of unfulfilled romance with Loriod, Messiaen became preoccupied with the legend of Tristan and Isolde, who become trapped in illicit love through a potion. His obsession derived not so much from the story's tragic love triangle, as from the *intensity* of the love between Tristan and Isolde. The *Turangalila-Symphonie* belongs to a trilogy of Tristan-related compositions that Messiaen wrote in the 1940s. These include the song cycle *Harawi* (1945) and the troubadour-inspired a cappella work *Cinq rechants* (1948). The *Turangalila-Symphonie* is the middle work of this unplanned trilogy and by far the most expansive of the three. The composer referred to his titanic, ten-movement score as "a song of love."

He wrote the *Turangalila-Symphonie* on a commission from the Boston Symphony Orchestra and its music director at the time, Serge Koussevitzky, who handed on the task of conducting the world premiere to his young protégé, Leonard Bernstein. Completed in 1948, the piece was unveiled in Boston in December 1949, with Loriod as the piano soloist and Ginette Martenot on the ondes Martenot, an early electronic instrument invented by and named for her brother, Maurice Martenot. The ondes

Martenot has been revived in recent years by the rock group Radiohead, who've acknowledged Messiaen's influence in their own work. Akin to that of the theremin, but controlled via a keyboard, its peculiar timbre is a signature of the *Turangalila-Symphonie's* soundscape.

While the other two scores in this “Tristan Trilogy” set texts to music, the *Turangalila-Symphonie* is entirely orchestral. The orchestra Messiaen calls for is enormous, featuring a dramatically expanded percussion section (calling for no fewer than “8 to 11 players!”), along with major solo roles for the piano and ondes Martenot. In the *Turangalila-Symphonie*, he draws on a global range of musical ideas and sources, prominent among which are the rhythmic structures the composer discovered in classical Hindustani music, the sonorities of Indonesian gamelan, bird song, and a personal harmonic language that is almost absurdly colorful and cut scandalously against the grain of Modernist sobriety.

COLOR & RHYTHM IN MESSIAEN'S MUSIC

One way into Messiaen's world is through the dimension of color. Along with Alexander Scriabin and Maurice Ravel, Messiaen shared a gift for synesthesia — for perceiving sounds as colors. For him, these colors were not merely decorative, but also inextricably bound up with musical expression. They always came in complex combinations, according to Messiaen, who shared elaborate descriptions of his chord clusters and special scales. One he likened to “blue-violet... cobalt blue, deep Prussian blue, highlighted by a bit of violet-purple, gold, red, ruby and stars of mauve, black and white.” It's almost as if Messiaen were conjuring the image of a cathedral not from its monumental architecture but from its stained-glass

windows. The resulting aura conveys a frequently brilliant, bejeweled, even ecstatic quality.

Another vital component of Messiaen's musical language is his treatment of rhythm. He once defined his identity as a composer as that of a “rhythmician.” Throughout his career, Messiaen brought rhythm — referring to pulse and duration alike — to the forefront, following Stravinsky's experiments with “primitivism” and polyrhythms in *Le Sacre du printemps*, but also advancing far beyond them. Messiaen even devised a type of rhythmic scale that parallels the pitched chromatic scale, with which he expanded the possibilities for Boulez and other composers to develop the hugely influential technique of serialism.

Some passages in the *Turangalila-Symphonie* present a hair-raising collage of simultaneity, challenging us to listen beyond the hubbub. Paul Griffiths, an authority on the composer, describes this as music not of one clock, but “of many clocks, running fast and slow, forwards and backwards.”

Messiaen also took cues from nature — as in his painstaking transcriptions of bird song — to shape a rhythmic language of dizzying complexity through his sensitivity to the natural world's free, asymmetrical patterns. He developed elaborate theories of rhythm in which certain rhythmic groups were envisioned as characters on a stage (with a protagonist, an antagonist and an observer). A favorite device was the use of “nonretrogradable rhythms” — rhythmic palindromes that sound exactly the same when played in reverse.

Like number-lovers who hunt for examples of the Fibonacci sequence in nature, Messiaen enjoyed collecting archetypal examples of palindrome patterns, from ancient sculptural motifs to the wings of butterflies. This attunement to natural patterns was vital for the composer — just like his theologically oriented number symbolism,



ONDES MARTENOT

The ondes Martenot has been revived in recent years by the rock group Radiohead, who've acknowledged Messiaen's influence in their own work. The instrument's peculiar timbre is a signature of the Turangalila-Symphonie's soundscape.

with its preference for prime numbers (which are indivisible, hence reminders of the divine).

“This moment which I live,” Messiaen once observed, “this time which I beat, before and after lies eternity: it's a nonretrogradable rhythm.”

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Messiaen called the *Turangalila-Symphonie* a “love song and hymn of joy, time, movement, rhythm, life and death.” The Sanskrit title is another manifestation of his fascination with classical Indian culture. It translates loosely to “The Game of Time” — “game” here being understood as the cosmic play of love and death (“lila”) and the cycle of creation and destruction that keeps the universe spinning through time (“turanga”).

Initially, Messiaen planned a conventional four-movement design for his symphony; this skeleton is now found in movements one, four, six and ten. The work grew into ten movements, with titles as follows: Introduction (movement one); “Chant d’amour” (“Love Song”) for movements two and four; “Joie du Sang des Étoiles” (“Joy of the Blood of the Stars”), the enraptured movement five, with its ecstatic dance impetus; “Jardin du Sommeil d’amour” (“Garden of Love’s Sleep”), movement six, the longest; “Développement d’amour” (“Development of Love”), movement eight; and “*Turangalila* 1, 2, and 3” for movements three, seven, and nine, respectively. These three dark movements allude to the classical Indian rhythmic practice of the *tāla*, a cycle of rhythmic

patterns, and make central use of the percussion section. Movement ten is simply titled “Final.”

The first movement is a grand introduction that presents two of the four major themes that cycle throughout the work. Messiaen labeled these first two themes “Statue” (heard on the low brass), which he likened to dreadful, ancient Mexican monuments, and “Flower” (presented by clarinets). The all-important “Love” theme is at the center of the “Garden” movement, which is graced with fragrant bird song transcriptions for piano and attains its fullest culmination in movement ten. Messiaen described his fourth theme as consisting of a series of four sustained chords.

A work like the *Turangalila-Symphonie* could have no conventional ending. “The melody hangs suspended, in a state of luminous expectation,” wrote Messiaen, “and this grand gesture toward an ending which does not exist (Glory and Joy are without end) beckons in the Coda.” The power of this music lies in its ability to liberate us, at least while it lasts, from ordinary, habitual perceptions of time — and to elicit a sense of ecstasy that comes with the severing of those boundaries.

In addition to solo piano and ondes Martenot, the Turangalila-Symphonie is scored for 2 flutes, piccolo, 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, 3 bassoons, 4 horns, 4 trumpets, cornet, 3 trombones, tuba, a minimum of 8 percussionists, celesta, Jeude timbres/keyboard glock and strings.

— Thomas May is the Nashville Symphony’s program annotator.

ABOUT THE SOLOISTS



JEAN-YVES THIBAUDET
piano

For more than three decades, Jean-Yves Thibaudet has performed worldwide, recorded more than 50 albums and built a reputation as one of today’s finest pianists. He plays a range of solo, chamber and orchestral repertoire

— from Beethoven, Liszt, Grieg and Saint-Saëns; to Khachaturian and Gershwin; to contemporary composers Qigang Chen and James MacMillan. From the very start of his career, he delighted in music beyond the standard repertoire, from jazz to opera, which he transcribed himself to play on the piano.

In 2017, the Colburn School extended Thibaudet’s Artist-in-Residency an additional

three years, announcing the Jean-Yves Thibaudet Scholarships to provide aid for Music Academy students, whom Thibaudet will select for the merit-based awards, regardless of their instrument choice. His recording catalogue of more than 50 albums has received two GRAMMY® nominations, the Preis der Deutschen Schallplattenkritik, the Diapason d'Or, the Choc du Monde de la Musique and the Edison Prize, as well as Gramophone and Echo awards. In 2017, he released Bernstein's *Age of Anxiety* with the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra and Marin Alsop, with whom he previously recorded *Gershwin*. In 2016, on the 150th anniversary of Erik Satie's birth, Decca released a box set of Satie's complete solo piano music performed by Thibaudet.

Thibaudet played Aaron Zigman's soundtrack for *Wakefield*, a drama by Robin Swicord, which was the first time that the composer had allowed a pianist other than himself to perform his film work. He was soloist in Dario Marianelli's award-winning scores for the films *Atonement* (which won an Oscar for Best Original Score) and *Pride and Prejudice*, and he recorded Alexandre Desplat's soundtrack for the 2012 film *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*.

Thibaudet was born in Lyon, France, where he began his piano studies at age 5 and made his first public appearance at age 7. At 12, he entered the Paris Conservatory to study with Aldo Ciccolini and Lucette Descaves, a friend and collaborator of Ravel. At 15, he won the Premier Prix du Conservatoire, followed three years later by the Young Concert Artists Auditions in New York City.

Among his numerous commendations is the Victoire d'Honneur, a lifetime career achievement award and the highest honor given by France's Victoires de la Musique. In 2010 the Hollywood Bowl inducted him into its Hall of Fame. Previously a Chevalier of the Ordre des Arts et des Lettres, Thibaudet was awarded the title Officier by the French Ministry of Culture in 2012.



CYNTHIA MILLAR

ondes Martenot

Described by *The Observer* as the “unchallenged sovereign of the ondes

Martenot,” Cynthia Millar has performed with the London Symphony Orchestra, The Cleveland Orchestra, Seattle Symphony, Royal Stockholm Philharmonic, Oslo Philharmonic, Singapore Symphony, Orchestre de Paris and BBC Symphony Orchestra at the BBC Proms. Her current season includes returns to the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France and NHK Symphony Orchestra.

In 2016, Millar premiered the ondes Martenot part specially written for her by Thomas Adès in his opera *The Exterminating Angel* at the Salzburg Festival and subsequently at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, the Metropolitan Opera and the Royal Danish Opera. The 2016/17 season also saw her take part in a ten-concert tour of the *Turangalila* Symphonie with the Simon Bolivar Symphony Orchestra and Gustavo Dudamel, beginning in Caracas and culminating in a sold-out concert at Carnegie Hall, New York.

Millar studied the ondes Martenot with John Morton in England and Jeanne Loriod in France. Since her first performance of the *Turangalila-Symphonie* at the 1986 BBC Proms with the National Youth Orchestra under Sir Mark Elder, she has played this piece around 200 times with some of the world's leading conductors, including Simon Rattle, Sakari Oramo, Esa-Pekka Salonen, Franz Welser-Möst, Susanna Mälkki, Andrew Davis and Mariss Jansons.

Millar has recorded *Turangalila* with the Bergen Symphony Orchestra for Juanjo Mena, and the *Trois petites liturgies* with the Seattle Symphony for Ludovic Morlot and the London Sinfonietta for Terry Edwards. She has played in well over 100 film and television scores and has written music for film, television and theater, including scores for Robert Wise, Arthur Penn, Martha Coolidge and Peter Yates.

