

# The 18th Annual Christmas Concert

**Festival Choir, Jeffrey Brody, Director**  
**Youth Choir, Andrea Hart, Director**

**Sunday, December 7, 2008, 4 pm**



This concert is part of the PACC Concert Series for the benefit of the  
PACC Music Program

## Organ Prelude:

*Desseins eternels*, from *La Nativité du Seigneur* Olivier Messiaen  
("God, in His love, has predestined us into the adoption of children by Jesus  
Christ unto Himself, to the praise and the glory of His grace.")  
In honor of the centennial of the composer's birth, December 10, 1908.

## Congregational Singing:

O Come all ye faithful	(All in Blue Hymnal)
The First Nowell	Hymn #132
What Child is this	Hymn #141
	Hymn #140

## Organ Solo:

*Noël (Josef et bien marie)* Claude Balbastre

## The Festival Choir

*Messe di Minuit* Marc-Antoine Charpentier  
*Kyrie*  
*Sanctus*  
*Agnus Dei*

## The Youth Choir

The Truth from Above	Trad. English
Jesus is Born!	K.C. Bowen
O Little Town of Bethlehem	Trad. English,
	Arr. Vaughan Williams
I Will Rejoice	G. P. Telemann

## Instrumental Duet:

Pastoral Symphony from "Messiah" G.F. Handel  
Andrea Hart, flute, Jeffrey Brody, piano



### The Youth Choir

Sonia Boonstra  
Aaron Colonnese  
Hannah Colonnese  
Jonathan Daniels  
Madeline Domenichella  
Gretchen Durning

Elaina Evans  
Timothy Evans  
Jessica Gates  
Reese Hogan  
Michael Powell  
Kayla Sherwood  
Emma Young

### The Festival Choir

#### Sopranos

Sol Kim Bentley  
Marilyn McCoy  
Judy McEwen  
Merrith Sabo-Jones  
Norma Sherwood

#### Tenors

Connie Dugan  
Jill E. Lewis  
Doug Record  
Christopher Aaron Smith  
Jeff Steinheider

#### Altos

Anita Malone Clarke  
Linda Cohn  
Julia Lee  
Barbara Wagner  
Martha Warren

#### Basses

Scott Brumit  
Nick Dokos  
Dick Erickson  
Mark Ewen  
Keith Truesdale

### Program Notes

**Claude Louis Balbastre** (1724-1799), French composer, organist and harpsichordist, was one of the most famous musicians of his time. He received his first music lessons from his father, and then became a pupil of Claude Rameau, the younger brother of Jean-Philippe Rameau, the most famous French musician at the time and also a native Dijon. Balbastre settled in Paris in 1750 and studied with Pierre Février, whom he succeeded as organist of the Saint Roch church. Jean-Philippe Rameau helped and protected Claude when the latter settled in the city, so Balbastre was quickly and efficiently introduced to the Parisian musical circles and high society, and made a brilliant career: he played at the *Concert Spirituel* until 1782, became organist of the Notre-Dame Cathedral and of the *Chapelle Royale*, harpsichordist to the French royal court (he taught Queen Marie-Antoinette) and organist for Louis-Stanislas-Xavier, Count of Provence (who later became Louis XVIII, King of France). His fame was so great that the Archbishop of Paris had to forbid him to play at Saint Roch during some of the services, because the churches were always crowded when Balbastre played. One of the genres of which he was particularly renowned for was the "Noel." The French organ Noël grew out of the tradition of several famous organists in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries who during the Christmas season, after the Latin high Mass was over, would improvise a set of variations upon the organ based on popular French Christmas carols. The tune might be heard clearly in the first variation, but each successive variation would be progressively more ornamented and elaborate. Some organists also wrote down their Noël variations or composed pieces in the same style as their improvisations.

**Marc-Antoine Charpentier** (1643-1704) was a French composer of the Baroque era. A versatile and prolific composer, he produced music of the highest quality and in several genres. His mastery in the composition of sacred vocal music was recognized and acknowledged by his contemporaries. His compositions include masses, operas, oratorios, and numerous smaller pieces that are difficult to categorize. Many of his smaller works for one or two voices and instruments resemble the Italian cantata of the time. The *Messe de Minuit pour Noël* (1690), one of his most important works, is based on the same Noël melody that Balbastre uses. This afternoon's program affords the listener the opportunity to hear two quite different takes on the same melody.

**Antonio Vivaldi** (1678-1741), one of the most celebrated composers and violin virtuosos of his age, was much admired and imitated by his contemporaries, Johann Sebastian Bach included. And yet, immediately after his death the man and his music were forgotten. This neglect was similar to that suffered by Bach himself, but with Vivaldi it was even more total; for while the name of Bach, a few of his works, especially the *Well-Tempered Clavier*, were never completely forgotten, Vivaldi's name, as Marc Pincherle reminds us, disappeared from the histories and biographical dictionaries even in his own century. It was the Bach revival, starting with Mendelssohn's famous

performance of the Saint Matthew Passion in 1829, that brought the rediscovery of Vivaldi, since among the Leipzig cantor's manuscripts were found a collection of Vivaldi's concertos that Bach had transcribed for organ or harpsichord solo. Not until the 20<sup>th</sup> century did a true revival of Vivaldi's music get under way, given a powerful stimulus by the development of the long-playing recording. It was at a Vivaldi festival in Siena, Italy, in 1939 that the *Gloria* received its first modern performance, together with a *Stabat Mater*, a solo motet and a *Credo*.

The music of the late **Olivier Messiaen** (1908-1992), the single most influential and unique French composer of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, is dominated by a seemingly incongruous mix of Gregorian chant, Hindu rhythm and bird-song. All these disparate elements are yoked together to express an extremely profound and intensely faithful view of basic Christian faith. Indeed, if the Lutheran J. S. Bach professed his continued faith in each and every of his many works, than surely in Olivier Messiaen we have his 20<sup>th</sup> century Catholic corollary. The performance of his music today, like many others world-wide serves to mark the centennial of the composer's birth. On a personal note, I had the pleasure of meeting Messiaen and his wife, the pianist Jeanne Loriod, after attending six enormously successful Boston Symphony Orchestra performances of his massive "Turangalila-Symphony" in 1975. My autographed copy of the full score of "Turangalila" is probably the single most prized score in my library and serves as a perpetual reminder of the experience of meeting and talking with, however briefly, the most important French composer of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

This afternoon's Prelude and Postlude are two of the nine movements of Messiaen's suite for organ, "La Nativité du Seigneur." The slow, almost static movement of the harmony and melody in *Desseins éternels* (eternal purposes) seems to portray the awe we feel at the presence of the divine majesty. *Dieu parmi nous* (God among us) is the triumphant concluding meditation. (I well remember my good friend, the late Dr. Berj Zamkochian, former BSO organist, telling me that when he played this work as the first American concert organist to tour the former USSR, this title had to be changed to "All together, comrades". The work is quite economically derived from but three motives heard at the outset: (1) a short series of descending chords played without pedal in the Hindu Sharngadeva rhythm [2-2-1-4-8] (2) a powerful trombone-like theme descending from the top of the pedal-board down to the low C and (3) a warmly lyrical melody simply harmonized. The movement proper begins with a rhapsodic and improvisatory section derived from the Hindu rhythm and opening chords. The second section is an extremely intricate elaboration of the warm and lyric 3<sup>rd</sup> theme. Careful analysis reveals that this section is essentially the same material stated three times in successively higher keys. The opening chords now return in a massive statement with the Hindu rhythm now in augmentation. The final section, a brilliant toccata, is dominated by massive repetitions of the opening trombone motive. It is a stunning *tour de force* for both the organist and the organ.

Jeffrey Brody

### **The Skinner Organ**

The E. M. Skinner Organ was built for St. Mark's School in Southboro in the 1920s and moved to PACC in 1961. Skinner was a gifted, innovative and often controversial builder whose work was of the highest quality. In recent years, the musical and historic qualities of these organs have engendered increasing esteem and appreciation from a growing number of organists.

Of this particular instrument, Peter Sykes, organist of the First Church in Cambridge, has written, "It's a grand, beautiful resource; value it, and take care of it. You will never regret it, I can assure you."

### **The Concert Series**

In 1991 the Music Committee of the Park Avenue Congregational Church undertook the task of restoring our historic Skinner organ. At that time, a price of \$60,000 was quoted for the restoration work. The Committee resolved to raise the necessary funds by holding a series of concerts. This was the start of the PACC Concert Series.

In addition to our annual Christmas concert, we have invited a number of soloists and groups, all professionals, to perform in the acoustically vibrant Sanctuary as well as more informally in the Parish Hall. Concerts have ranged from classical, to choral, to folk coffeehouses. Thus far, your contributions have paid for the restoration of the Choir, Swell and Great, the three keyboard divisions of the organ.

### **Become a Friend of the PACC Concert Series**

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