



Thierry ESCAICH
Organ Recital

2024.10.13 Sun. 14:30

Concert Hall

Duration is 85 minutes with a 20-minute intermission.



National Kaohsiung
CENTER FOR THE ARTS

WEI WUYING

衛武營 國家藝術文化中心
國家表演藝術中心 National Performing Arts Center

Program

J. S. BACH: Passacaglia and Fugue in c minor, BWV 582

L. VIERNE: "Naiades" from 24 Pièces de Fantaisie, Op. 55

City-themed Improvisation - Kaohsiung

B. BARTOK: Romanian Folk Dances, Sz. 68, BB. 76 (Arranged by Thierry ESCAICH)

I. Stick Dance. Allegro moderato

II. Sash Dance. Allegro

III. In One Spot. Andante

IV. Dance from Bucsum. Moderato

V. Romanian Polka. Allegro

VI. Fast Dance. Allegro vivace

O. MESSIAEN: "Alléluias sereins d'un âme que désire le ciel" from *L'Ascension*

City-themed Improvisation - New York

M. DURUFLÉ: Toccata

City-themed Improvisation - Paris

Program Notes

J. S. BACH: Passacaglia and Fugue in c minor, BWV 582

Written by CHEN Hsiang-yu

Passacaglia is a Spanish dance that was popular in the early 17th century. The composer Girolamo FRESCOBALDI (1583-1643) adapted it into the form of variations, with the theme arranged in the bass voice, referred to as an ostinato, and the upper voice presented in the form of variations. Passacaglia and Fugue in c minor was composed between 1706 and 1713.

There are twenty variations in the piece. The theme slowly unfolds from the bass, until it reaches the climax at the twelfth variation, followed by three gentle and deft variations. The music then develops to another pinnacle at the end of the piece. According to the research and analysis of organist Marie-Claire ALAIN, the Passacaglia is closely related to several chorales: in this piece, bar 8 to 12 is the chorale "Nun komm' der Heiden Heiland" (Now come, Saviour of the gentiles), bar 24 to 48 is "Von Gott will ich nicht lassen" (I shall not abandon God), bar 49 to 72 is "Vom Himmel kam der Engel Schar" (Angels from Heaven), bar 72 to 96 is "Herr Christ, der Ein'ge Gottes-Sohn" (Lord Christ, the only Son of God), bar 96 to 120 is "Christ lag in Todesbanden" (Christ lay in death's bonds), and bar 144 to 168 is "Erstanden ist der heil'ge Christ" (Arisen is the holy Lord Christ).

A fugue with two subjects follows the dance movement. It continues the previous dance's bass theme, adding another theme of quavers. The key shifts from c minor to E-flat Major, B-flat major, and finally to g minor. The music ends solemnly with the pedal playing the long bass C note.

L. VIERNE: "Naiades" from 24 Pièces de Fantaisie, Op. 55

Written by HSIEH Lin

Born in 1870, the French organist Louis VIERNE was nearly blind from birth due to congenital cataracts, yet he displayed extraordinary musical talent. At the age of two, he could play SCHUBERT's lullaby on the piano after hearing it. When he was eleven, he heard a performance by the great organist César FRANCK and described the experience as "I could not hold back my tears... but my instinct was violently shaken by this expressive music echoing through every pore." Subsequently, he studied under FRANCK and another prominent figure in French Romantic organ music, Charles-Marie WIDOR.

In 1900, VIERNE became the organist at Notre-Dame Cathedral in Paris, a position he held until his death. Throughout his life, he composed six organ symphonies and numerous other widely acclaimed organ works. Among them, "Naiades" is from his 24 Pièces de Fantaisie, composed between 1926 and 1927. This late masterpiece showcases VIERNE's profound understanding of the organ's expressive capabilities, using rich harmonic colors and rapidly flowing motifs to depict the graceful and lively Naiads of Greek mythology, shimmering in the rippling waves.

B. BARTOK: Romanian Folk Dances, Sz. 68, BB. 76 (Arranged by Thierry ESCAICH)

Written by HSIEH Lin

Hungarian composer Béla BARTÓK, renowned for his collection of Eastern European folk music, composed the "Romanian Folk Dances" in 1915. This work weaves together the folk tunes BARTÓK collected during his travels in Transylvania—then part of Hungary, now Romania—using free tempo changes and rich modes that go beyond traditional major and minor scales to showcase the diverse music of the region. The suite consists of six dances: Stick Dance, Sash Dance, In One Spot, Dance from Bucsum, Romanian Polka, and Fast Dance.

These melodies are primarily derived from the songs and instrumental pieces performed by peasants and Roma musicians, with the Stick Dance originating from a violin melody played by the Roma. In this recital, ESCAICH rearranges the suite, drawing on his extensive improvisation experience. Using the organ's versatile timbres and wide range, he brings the folk dances to life with rapid arpeggios and charged dotted rhythms, adding depth and energy to the pieces. The entire suite, performed in just five minutes, delivers a symphonic virtuoso experience with clear dynamic contrasts.

O. MESSIAEN: "Alléluias sereins d'un âme que désire le ciel" from *L'Ascension*

Written by HSIEH Lin

French composer Olivier MESSIAEN, recognized as one of the greatest composers of the 20th century, was also an accomplished organist. In the autumn of 1931, at the age of 23, MESSIAEN became the youngest church organist in France, serving at the Église de la Sainte-Trinité in Paris for an astounding 61 years until his death. Viewing himself as a servant and spokesperson of God, MESSIAEN believed in God's omnipresence and sought to understand the divine mysteries through his music.

In 1933, MESSIAEN composed *L'Ascension*, "Four Symphonic Meditations," and in the following year, he arranged three of the movements for solo organ. The second movement, true to its title, expresses a longing for heaven through meditative chant-like melodies. MESSIAEN's unique use of modes of limited transposition and harmonic language creates complex and ethereal harmonies, evoking a sense of timelessness. Organists performing this piece often choose softer stops, producing a heavenly timbre that highlights the music's transcendent spirituality.

M. DURUFLÉ: Toccata

Written by HSIEH Lin

Completed in 1933, French composer Maurice DURUFLÉ's Suite for Organ, Op. 5 is widely recognized as a landmark work in the history of organ music. The final movement, the Toccata, is undeniably one of the most challenging pieces for many organists. With its complex figures and harmonies, it fully tests the performer's dexterity on the manuals. Amidst the explosive rapid arpeggios, the performer must maintain steady control.

Throughout its approximately eight-minute duration, structured in ternary form, the piece showcases relentless energy and improvisation-like rhythmic variations, and demands significant stamina from both hands and feet. The challenge is further heightened when the piece modulates to a key with five sharps. Despite being regarded as a classic of organ virtuosity, DURUFLÉ himself, a perfectionist, was not fond of the work. He never recorded it, nor did he perform it publicly. After the suite was published, he even attempted multiple revisions and eventually completely rewrote the ending of the Toccata.

Synopsis

The organ has always mainly been a church instrument, and in response to the complex demands of a Sunday service, church organists have to be extremely flexible to adjust to ever-changing circumstances. BACH and HANDEL were the most exceptional improv organists of the Baroque period. In 19th-century, France produced its own improv organ school which its members could both compose and perform, and they created a new vocabulary for the organ. This musical heritage began with C. FRANCK (1822-1890) and continued with such names as L. VIERNE (1870-1937), M. DURUFLÉ (1902-1986), and today's ESCAICH (1965-).

After starting with BACH's work, since ESCAICH is a transmitter of the French organ school, he has selected pieces from his predecessor countrymen. VIERNE was a legend in organ history who lived a century ago. VIERNE's pupil DURUFLÉ was the greatest living French organist. After he death, ESCAICH succeeded him as organist at the St-Étienne-du-Mont in Paris. O. MESSIAEN, hailed as the greatest French composer of the 20th century, was also an organist of the highest repute. At Weiwuying, ESCAICH will show the audience the allure of folk music produced by the feet and hands of an organist. He has rearranged Hungarian composer B. BARTOK's Romanian Folk Dances, a suite of six short pieces: Stick Dance, Sash Dance, In One Spot, Dance from Bucsum, Romanian Polka, and Fast Dance.

Of course, everyone will be most looking forward to ESCAICH's three improvisation pieces to be played at different points in the program, each inspired by the organist's impressions of Paris, New York, and Kaohsiung.



Organ | Thierry ESCAICH

Composer, organist and improviser Thierry ESCAICH is a unique figure in contemporary music and one of the most important French composers of his generation. The three elements of ESCAICH's artistry are inseparable, allowing him to express himself as a performer, creator and collaborator in a wide range of settings. Drawing from the French line of composition of RAVEL, MESSIAEN, and DUTILLEUX, and imbued with references from contemporary, popular, and spiritual music, the distinctive sound-world of ESCAICH's music is anchored by an obsessive rhythmic drive and an overarching sense of musical architecture.

Thierry ESCAICH's works are performed by leading orchestras in Europe and North America, as well as by musicians such as Lisa BATIASHVILI and François LELEUX, Valery GERGIEV, Paavo JÄRVI, and so on. ESCAICH has been Composer-in-Residence with the Orchestre National de Lyon, Orchestre National de Lille and the Paris Chamber Orchestra and his music has been honoured by five 'Victoires de la Musique' awards (2003, 2006, 2011, 2017, and 2022).

Thierry ESCAICH's career as a composer is closely linked to his career as an organist—one of the ambassadors of the great French school of improvisation in the wake of Maurice DURUFLÉ, whom he succeeded as organist of Saint-Étienne-du-Mont in Paris. He appears in recitals internationally, combining repertoire pieces with his own compositions and improvisations. His passion for cinema has led him to perform 'cine-concerts', improvised accompaniments on both the organ and piano for silent films such as *Phantom of the Opera* and *Metropolis*.

