

Review of the concert in honor of Olivier Messiaen at the Bonn Cathedral

Beethoven Festival
Messiaen Festival Concert in the Bonn Cathedral

By Guido Krawinkel



A hurdy-gurdy, bells, cars, trains, twittering birds, voices, gongs and prayers the soundscapes with which the American composer and sound artist Leon Milo enriched the festival concert on the occasion of the 100th birthday of Olivier Messiaen in the Bonn Cathedral - were quasi leitmotifs that moved through the well-put together program. The piano and organ works of Messiaen and a some of his pupils were also on the program which was presented with great concentration by Milo, together with the Bonn pianist Susanne Kessel and the Muenster organist Markus Karas. The result was an hour-and-a-half-long evening concert which was in itself a work of art.

As introduction, bridge and atmospheric mood, Milo's soundscapes gave us more insight than any lengthy program notes could have. Sequences of closely dovetailed pieces contributed so much by their addition, that taken altogether, the evening was a total experience in which one could intuitively sense the connection.

Milo's Birdscape followed seamlessly after delicate garlands of sound from "Alleluias Sereins" from "L'Ascension" by Messiaen, previously played by Markus Karas with beautiful lightness, had ended. The latter appeared anew in sound and content as a perfectly logical continuation of "Regard de l'Etoile" from "Vingt Regards", which Susanne Kessel interpreted with a most intense buoyancy of sound. The audience listened to this approach to Messiaen in a concentrated manner and did not dare to disturb the sophisticated dramaturgy with coughing or applause. At the end though, the artists were rewarded by standing ovations.

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