

## Messiaen 2015: Between Heaven and the Clouds

Pianist Cordelia Williams commissions **Michael Symmons Roberts** to reinterpret the **nativity story** through a Messiaen masterpiece with **Lord Rowan Williams** and artist **Sophie Hacker**

Tuesday 31 March 2015 | King's Chapel Cambridge  
Tuesday 28 April 2015 | King's College London  
Monday 08 June 2015 | Westminster Abbey  
Wednesday 08 July 2015 | Cheltenham Festival  
Monday 12 October 2015 | King's Place



*"It's not hard to understand her success. Her playing has a warmth and finely judged flexibility that are immediately attractive..."*

- BBC Music Magazine

Young pianist **Cordelia Williams** presents *Messiaen 2015: Between Heaven and the Clouds*, a year-long series of events setting **Olivier Messiaen's** wartime masterpiece *Vingt Regards sur l'Enfant-Jésus* (Twenty Contemplations of the Infant Jesus) alongside words and art. Cordelia Williams has commissioned Costa award-winning British poet **Michael Symmons Roberts** to respond to Messiaen's musical interpretation of the nativity story with 20 poems alongside commissions from the former Archbishop of Canterbury **Lord Rowan Williams**, and paintings by British artist **Sophie Hacker**.

As Michael Symmons Roberts explains:

*"Messiaen began his 'Twenty Pictures of the Infant Jesus' in the summer of 1944 during the German occupation of Paris and completed it at the time of the allies' liberation of the city. There are unusual parallels with a child born to refugees under Roman occupation some two millennia ago and the era of oppression and terror in which Messiaen wrote this piece. By setting the poems in occupied Paris I was trying to unlock the Christmas story as a tale of deliverance. I first heard Messiaen's music in my twenties, and longed to go and hear him at St Trinité, where he performed every Sunday at the end of Mass but, much to my regret, I never managed to hear him before he died in 1992. I hope that my poems will find many connections with Messiaen's themes - of oppression and liberation - while standing as a poetic sequence in its own right."*

The year-long series of performances, exhibitions, lectures and open discussions includes a colloquium in the Jerusalem Chamber of **Westminster Abbey** on **8 June 2015**, followed by a special evensong and a public discussion with speakers including James MacMillan and Michael Symmons Roberts. Further events include a performance of Messiaen's *Visions de l'Amen* at **King's Chapel, Cambridge** on **31**

March, with a pre-concert address by Rowan Williams, a study day at King's College London on 28 April, and performances of *Vingt Regards* at Cheltenham Festival on 8 July, Winchester Cathedral on 7 October, King's Place on 12 October, and Wiltshire Music Centre in December 2015.

Olivier Messiaen, whose life and work were grounded in his profound Catholic faith, composed *Vingt Regards sur l'Enfant-Jésus* in 20 movements so Williams has commissioned Michael Symmons Roberts to write 20 tangential poems. Lord Rowan Williams has also been commissioned to write a poem inspired by Messiaen's life and the Christian themes explored in Messiaen's work for solo piano. Messiaen was a well-known synesthete and colour combinations were fundamental to his compositional process. Artist Sophie Hacker has created a suite of paintings in response to the ideas expressed in Messiaen's *Vingt Regards*.



As Cordelia Williams explains:

*"I found 'Vingt Regards' to be such a fascinating and satisfying work to study and perform that I wanted to explore it further... the breadth of Messiaen's inspiration and sound-world is really extraordinary. It's a musical interpretation of his world and his faith and he gives us so much to think about; 'Messiaen 2015' is a way of responding to that challenge."*



Watch a short trailer for *Messiaen 2015* with performance by Cordelia Williams and poetry read by Michael Symmons Roberts.

### Messiaen: *Vingt Regards sur l'Enfant-Jésus*

Written in 1944 in occupied Paris, *Vingt Regards sur l'Enfant-Jesus* explores various aspects of the Christian story, from the love of God the Father for His Son, via the contemplations of the Virgin, the Angels and the Cross, to the celebration of the Church. Messiaen wrote: ***"More than in all my previous works, I searched here for a language of mystical love, at once varied, powerful and tender, sometimes brutal, in a multicolored order."*** The work is one of the most iconic of the twentieth century and of the whole piano repertoire.

It was Williams' curiosity towards religions and faith that led her to envisage and organise *Messiaen 2015*. Following performances of the complete *Vingt Regards* in London, Lucerne and Cambridge during 2013, she decided to commission work by leading British artists to accompany and explore the work in a series of events in and around London. The series will be launched at a private event in Kensington on Thursday 04 December.



Watch a short film with Jeremy Begbie and Cordelia Williams about their performance of Messiaen's *Visions de l'Amen* for two pianos at King's Easter Festival 2012.

Former Piano Winner of **BBC Young Musician of the Year**, Cordelia Williams is quickly establishing her career as a sought-after young concert pianist. Her debut recording of Schubert's complete Impromptus for SOMM Recordings was released in 2013 to excellent reviews. Classic FM described her "*Unassuming mastery of the piano*". Williams makes her concerto debut with the **Royal Philharmonic Orchestra** in 2 performances of **Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 5, Emperor** at The Barbican on **29 December 2014** and **Symphony Hall, Birmingham** on **30 December 2014**, and records her second CD for SOMM in January 2015.

### Highlights of *Messiaen 2015* include...

DATE	VENUE	DESCRIPTION	CONTRIBUTORS
<b>Tuesday 31 March - Evening</b>	King's College, Cambridge	Messiaen: <i>Visions de l'Amen</i> for two pianos  Preceded by an address by Rowan Williams about the artistic response to the challenges of Modernity	Cordelia Williams Jeremy Begbie  Rowan Williams
<b>Tuesday 28 April - All day</b>	King's College London	Study Day on Messiaen and the <i>Vingt Regards</i>  Includes sessions on Messiaen's context and compositional style, sessions with poet and artist, exhibition, poetry reading and performance.	Cordelia Williams Michael Symmons Roberts Sophie Hacker Ben Quash Christopher Dingle
<b>Monday 8 June</b>	Westminster Abbey	2.30pm: Colloquium in Jerusalem Chamber  5pm: Evening in the Abbey  6.30pm: Public discussion event in the Abbey	Michael Symmons Roberts James Macmillan Ben Quash Rowan Williams Cordelia Williams
<b>Wednesday 8 July - 6.30pm</b>	Cheltenham Festival - Tewkesbury Abbey	Performance of <i>Vingt Regards</i> with poetry and art	Cordelia Williams Michael Symmons Roberts Sophie Hacker
<b>Wednesday 7 October</b>	Winchester Cathedral	Performance of <i>Vingt Regards</i> with poetry reading and an exhibition	Cordelia Williams Michael Symmons Roberts Sophie Hacker
<b>Monday 12 October</b>	King's Place, London	Performance of <i>Vingt Regards</i> with poetry reading and a projection of the paintings.	Cordelia Williams Sophie Hacker
<b>Saturday 5 December - 7.30pm</b>	Wiltshire Music Centre, Bradford-on-Avon	Performance <i>Vingt Regards</i> with poetry reading and art exhibition	Cordelia Williams Michael Symmons Roberts Sophie Hacker

## Recent Press Quotes:

*“Williams’ brilliantly fluid technique and unassuming mastery of the piano is to the fore on this recording which promises much for the future.”* - Classic FM Review

*“Don’t be lulled by Cordelia Williams’s sweetly cool reading of the first two of Schubert’s Impromptus D899 in this recording; there’s romantic fire lurking under the surface.”* - The Observer

*“Cordelia Williams brought both elasticity and poetry to Beethoven’s inward Piano Concerto No. 4, so searchingly demanding of a musicianship which Williams conveyed with conviction and inner strength.”* - Birmingham Post

*“It was given a terrific, rhapsodic performance, one fully alive to the piece stretching the boundaries of chamber music.”* - Classical Source

## Cordelia Williams

Cordelia Williams has been acclaimed as a pianist of “great power and delicate sensitivity”, drawing in audiences with her rich sound, natural eloquence and “spell-binding simplicity”. She has performed all over the world, including concertos with the English Chamber Orchestra, and recitals at Wigmore Hall, Royal Festival Hall and Beijing Concert Hall. In December 2014 she will make her debut with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra playing Beethoven’s Emperor Concerto at Barbican Hall, London and Symphony Hall Birmingham.



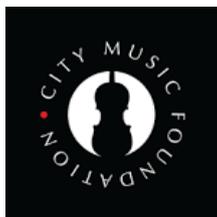
At the core of her musicality is a fascination with the human soul and the artistic expression of struggles and beliefs; alongside her performing career she gained a First in Theology from Clare College, Cambridge. She is recognised for the poetry, conviction and inner strength of her playing and the depth and maturity of her interpretations. Cordelia is drawn especially to the music of the late Classical and early Romantic periods: her debut CD, featuring Schubert’s complete Impromptus for SOMM Recordings, was released to critical acclaim in July 2013 and she will record music by Schumann in early 2015.

Cordelia has a great enthusiasm for presenting and introducing music; her series Cafe Muse brings classical music out of the concert hall and into the relaxed setting of bars and brasseries. She is also a passionate chamber musician, having appeared with the Endellion, Fitzwilliam and Maggini quartets among others. Since becoming Piano Winner of BBC Young Musician 2006, she has performed with orchestras including London Mozart Players and Royal Northern Sinfonia, and given recitals at the Barbican Hall and Purcell Room, as well as in France, Italy, Norway, Switzerland, Austria, Thailand, China, America, Mexico, Kenya and the Gulf States.

[www.cordeliawilliams.net](http://www.cordeliawilliams.net)

[www.messiaen2015.com](http://www.messiaen2015.com)

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For further information, please contact:



**Nicky Thomas Media Consultancy**  
Mobile: 00 44 7768 566530  
Email: [nicky@nickythomasmedia.com](mailto:nicky@nickythomasmedia.com)  
[www.nickythomasmedia.com](http://www.nickythomasmedia.com)