

Artist Management

## Christopher Taylor

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### Messiaen piano piece is stunning at St. Paul's

By Elaine Schmidt, Special to the Journal Sentinel - Dec. 8, 2012

Technical mastery, musical expression and a piece one rarely has an opportunity to hear came together on Friday evening in a stunning performance by pianist Christopher Taylor. Presented by the locally based PianoArts North American Piano Competition at Saint Paul's Episcopal Church, Taylor presented Olivier Messiaen's "Vingt Regards Sur L'Enfant Jesus (Twenty Contemplations on the Infant Jesus)" for solo piano.

The piece is a technical, musical and sonic tour de force for piano. It reaches to dynamic extremes, demands liquid running passages alongside thunderous chords and requires an enormous palette of sonic colors to be effective.

Taylor, who is a member of the piano faculty at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, brought all of the above to the performance, pulling nearly orchestral sounds from the piano as he wove 20 vivid vignettes with the music. He brought an impressionistic blurring of sound to some of the movements, found the jazzy core of others and even a bit of humor in some. He let the audience hear Messiaen's fascination with replicating bird songs in his music, without turning them into an affectation.

He moved with apparent ease from delicate, translucent sounds to marimbalike lines and

on to waves of crashing chords. He created sparkling, bright lines, dark, murky timbres and countless variations between the two extremes.

**But Taylor's performance was not a mechanical exploration of the instrument's sonic possibilities. This was a deeply expressive, profound explanation of the piece. Taylor's memorization of the 20 complex movements was a feat unto itself, given that the piece is written in a language of its own that lies somewhere outside the comfortable confines of constant key signatures and traditional rules of harmony.**

Like all program music, which is written to depict an image or narrative, the piece is highly evocative and meditative. Following Messiaen's titles for the 20 movements, such as "View of the Heights" or "View of the Star," his musical depictions became quite clear.

Listening without the titles for reference, movements were no less powerful or evocative, but were much more personal for the listener. There was great power in either approach to the performance. The concert's only flaw lay in the percussive radiator accompaniment to the early part of the performance.